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05 From Synthesis to Compromise: The Four Daughters of God in Early English Drama

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The Debate of the Four Daughters of God was an extremely popular episode in the

mystery plays of medieval France.[1] In English plays it appears only occasionally.[2] As is well

known, the motif goes back to Psalm 84:11–12 (*AV*: 85:10–11):

> misericordia et veritas obviaverunt sibi:
>
> iustitia et pax osculatae sunt.
>
> veritas de terra orta est,
>
> et iustitia de caelo prospexit.[3]

The debate form was made popular in Western Christianity by Bernard of Clairvaux

(1091–1153) and became known under the name "The Parliament of Heaven." That

Parliament shows a certain resemblance to a folk-tale motif which we might call the

"Judgment motif." Variants of it are gathered together in Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of*

Folk-Literature, Nos. J.1171 ("clever judicial decisions") and J.1161.2 ("clever pleading"). In

the wider orbit of this motif we find such well-known stories as the Judgment of Solomon (1

Kings 3:16–27), the judgment of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* and its many variants,[4]

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[1] See Peter Meredith and Lynette R. Muir, "The Trial in Heaven in the *Eerste Bliscap* and other European plays," *Dutch Crossing* 22 (1984): 84–92; Lynette R. Muir, *The Biblical Drama of Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 87–88 and passim.

[2] For dramatic and non-dramatic uses of the motif in England, see Patricia Helen McCune, *The Ideology of Mercy in English Literature and Law, 1200–1600,* Ph.D. diss. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1989), 178 (n. 19) and 182 (n. 110).

[3] *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*, ed. Bonifatio Fischer et al., rev. ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983).

[4] See John Russell Brown, ed., *The Merchant of Venice*, Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1955), xxvii–xxviii.

the converted death sentences in Chaucer's "Wife of Bath's Tale," and Gower's "Tale of Florint." What these motifs have in common is an ambivalent attitude toward the law: on the one hand we want to believe that right will always be might, on the other we realize that all too often it isn't. Even more seriously, we suspect that in the borderline situations of human existence the administration of the law will fail. *Summum ius, summa iniuria* captures this suspicion rather well. Our discomfort is allayed by a wise judge who pronounces a sentence which at first sounds horrifying or at least strange, but which in the end allows true justice to prevail. (In German we use the word *Recht* both for the law and for justice. This makes the ambivalence perhaps even clearer. After reunification Bärbel Bohley, a leading East German opposition figure, is quoted as saying, "Wir wollten Gerechtigkeit und bekamen den Rechtsstaat": "We wanted justice and we gained the rule of law," i.e., a host of very complicated legal formalities and procedures.)[5] To return to the motif: the enormity of the sentence gives it a certain fairy-tale quality. In the real world—but also in more realistic genres like the novel and even the saga—such sentences are hardly possible. Conversely, the cause at issue (*Streitgegenstand*) drives real possibilities to fantastic extremes.

This is the pattern which the Parliament of Heaven follows. Its journey through European literature has been traced so competently by Hope Traver, more recently by E. J. Mäder and P. H. McCune,[6] that a detailed recapitulation is unnecessary. For an understanding of the changes that the fable underwent in the early history of English drama it is sufficient to

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[5] *The Economist* (London), 23 Sept. 2010, http://www.economist.com.node/17090837, accessed 31 Jan. 2014.

[6] Hope Traver, *The Four Daughters of God* (Philadelphia: John C. Winston, 1907); Eduard Johann Mäder, *Der Streit der "Töchter Gottes": Zur Geschichte eines allegorischen Motivs*, Europäische Hochschulschriften, ser. 1, 41 (Frankfurt am Main and Bern: Peter Lang, 1971); and McCune, *Ideology*. See also Samuel Chew, *The Virtues Reconciled* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1947).

begin with Bernard, who created its most important version. Our main concern will be with those three English plays in which the fable was adapted: the late fifteenth-century mystery collection now usually called the N-Town Plays, the early fifteenth-century morality play *The Castle of Perseverance*, and the political morality *Respublica* (1553), "the last literary work in England to use the Four Daughters in anything like their traditional roles."[7] Our analysis will show that the distinctive features of the "Judgment motif"—juridical enormity and the conflict between two claims—will gradually disappear as we go through the genres of early drama.[8]

Bernard has set forth the story of the Parliament of Heaven above all in his *Sermo primus de annuntiatione dominica*.[9] He chooses the form of an allegorical story, a "fable" as

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[7] McCune, *Ideology*, 262.

[8] This contribution being concerned with English drama, it will not discuss in detail the *Liber Apologeticus de Omni Statu Humanae Naturae*, ed. Doris Enright-Clark Shoukri (London and New York: MHRA, 1974). This eclectically learned play was written in Latin prose by Thomas Chaundler between 1457 and 1461 when he was chancellor of the University of Oxford. Like Bernard, Chaundler begins his story with the creation of Man, but the Four Virtues (peace, truth, justice, and mercy) are not part of prelapsarian man's original equipment. The Parliament of Heaven does result in the Son of God becoming Man, but the Passion and Crucifixion play no part in man's salvation, as shown at the end of Act III (ibid., 138–39; see also Peter Happé, "Genre and Fifteenth-Century English Drama," *Medium Ævum* 82:66–80, esp. 76). At the end of the play Man is raised to heaven not by the Four Daughters of the biblical God, but by the Cardinal Virtues known already to the Classics (Iusticia, Temperancia, Prudencia, Fortitudo). Before that, Caritas has crowned him with the golden crown "quam repromisit Deus uigilantibus et diligentibus se quam usque nunc ego ipse tibi reseruaui iustum premium iuste certanti" ("which God promised to those who watch and who love Him, which until now I myself have reserved as a just reward for you for justly striving"). The passage is curiously reminiscent of the Chorus of Angels in the closing scene of Goethe's *Faust II*: "Wer immer strebend sich bemüht, / Den können wir erlösen! / Und hat an ihm die Liebe gar / Von oben teilgenommen, / Begegnet ihm die sel'ge Schar / Mit herzlichem Willkommen" ("Whoe'er aspires unweariedly / Is not beyond redeeming. / And if he feels the grace of Love / That from On High is given, / The Blessed Hosts, that wait above, / Shall welcome him to Heaven!" (J. W. von Goethe, *Faust*, trans. Bayard Taylor [reprint, New York: Modern Library, n.d.], 252)

[9] *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, ed. Jean Leclercq, C. H. Talbot, H. M. Rochais (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1957–63), 5:13–29.

he calls it himself, to present the Fall of Man and the Anselmian doctrine of satisfaction described in *Cur Deus Homo* (1098).[10] Adam is at first described as dressed in allegorical clothes which are called Peace and Truth, Justice, and Mercy. Through the Fall he loses them and realizes that he is naked. Peace and Mercy leave him and withdraw to Heaven. Justice and Truth stay with him and "pain" him. After Man has suffered long enough in their opinion, Peace and Mercy implore God not to let him suffer any further. God replies that prior to a decision he must order Justice and Truth back from earth to hear their verdict as well. In the dispute which follows, Truth insists that Man is condemned to die because God once said so: "in quocumque enim die comederis ex eo, morte morieris" ("for in what day soever thou shalt eat of it thou shalt die the death" [Gen 2:17]). God's own truth would be at risk if that judgment were repealed. In the same vein, Justice demands that the crime which Man has committed be punished. Mercy, on the other hand, pleads for a pardon. She is supported by Peace with the argument that without such a pardon there would be no peace between the Four Sisters. For Bernard, the theological significance of the debate is that all four virtues must be realized without curtailment and that they are virtues only if all four are fully realized together. To atone for Man's Fall, the second person of the Trinity is finally born as man and as the only just one he takes upon himself the death which Adam had brought upon humanity. Thus Justice and Mercy are equally satisfied. And since in the person of Christ Man will die, the punishment which was laid down in Genesis 2:17 is realized, and so Truth is given her due as well. The harmony which is thus created between the first three Virtues also guarantees

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[10] Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus Homo*, ed. and trans. Franciscus Salesius Schmitt, 3rd ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1970). On Anselm's influence on Bernard, see also Waltraud Timmermann, *Studien zur allegorischen Bildlichkeit in den Parabolae Bernhards von Clairvaux. Mit der Edition einer mittelniederdeutschen Übersetzung der Parabolae "Vom geistlichen Streit" und "Vom Streit der vier Töchter Gottes" nach der Handschrift Cod. Guelf. 704 Helmst.* (Frankfurt a.M. and Bern: Lang, 1982), 145.

perfect peace. The opposites thus achieve a genuine synthesis; they are, as Hegelians would

say, "lifted" (*aufgehoben*) to a higher unity.

        This fable found its way into English drama and, I believe, all European drama as well

through the *Meditationes de vita Christi* which the Middle Ages ascribed to Bonaventura.[11]

The great influence of this text can be inferred from its many vernacular translations, and

among English versions the most popular one was *Þe Mirroure of þe Blissyd Lyffe of Our*

Lorde Jesu Chryst by Nicholas Love (c.1410).[12] While Bernard's "fable" was an aid to pious

understanding in the context of a sermon, Pseudo-Bonaventura turned it into the first chapter

of a meditative biography and thus loosened the soteriological framework that was so

important to Bernard since the allegory of the Fall of Man is absent from the *Meditationes*.

Sin and the need of salvation are not explicitly thematized by the Franciscan writer, they are

presupposed. His text is written for people to whom their own sinfulness and need of

salvation is self-evident. The reader of the *Meditationes*—a female reader, for the *Proemium*

is addressed to a "dilecta filia"[13]—is already filled with the desire for salvation. Insistent,

unremitting meditation on the life and passion of Christ, it is hoped, will help obtain that very

goal. This invests the text with an ambiguity that had not been present in Bernard's text, for

Bernard preached on a subject which he did not choose but which was imposed on him by the

order of the liturgical year. Fall and Salvation are objective facts to him that are valid for the

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[11] Cardinal St. Bonaventura, *Opera Omnia*, ed. A. C. Peltier (Paris, 1864–71), vol. 12. For an English translation, see *Meditations of the Life of Christ*, trans. Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).

[12] Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Full Critical Edition, Based on Cambridge University Library Additional MSS 6578 and 6686*, ed. Michael G. Sargent (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2005).

[13] Bonaventura, *Opera Omnia*, 12:511. This specification is characteristically absent from Love, whose translation was made at a Carthusian monastery, Mount Grace in Yorkshire, and for an inclusive audience.

entire human race. Whether individual man or woman can do anything for his or her own personal salvation is a question that he does not ask.[14]

Bernard introduces the Four Virtues already in connection with the Fall. The two who stay with God in heaven, Peace and Mercy, are thus available to approach God with their prayer for humanity's Salvation. The Franciscan preacher who omits the Fall from the *Meditationes* is forced to determine the historical moment, the point in time, at which the plan of Salvation begins. He turns this necessity to admirable use by introducing an Anselmian idea that is missing from Bernard's sermon: he makes the angels speak "after humankind had lain in misery for more than 5000 years" (chap. 1).[15] They point out that Man was created to live with them in heaven. This suggests the re-introduction of the Anselmian idea that the order of heaven will remain incomplete if Man does not fill the gap that has been opened up by the fall of Lucifer and the other disobedient angels.[16] Only after this prayer has been advanced by the angels do Misericordia and Pax begin to speak. As in Bernard's sermon, Veritas and Justitia are now summoned and oppose the act of mercy which is favored by the other two. The rest of the pseudo-Bonaventuran Parliament follows Bernard.

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[14] The majority of Bernard's *Parabolae* suggest that individual salvation did exist for him as a problem; see Timmermann, *Studien*, esp. 48ff. It is remarkable that two Latin manuscripts and one Middle Low German manuscript should supplement Parabola II with an abridged version of the Parliament, which Timmermann designates as "Parabola IX" (ibid., 138ff and passim). The complementary character of both subjects seems to have been felt by Bernard's "secretaries." (On his "secretaries," see ibid., 41, with further references.) Of course, the combination of two allegories does not solve the problem of how the two redemptions are to be related.

[15] Bonaventura, *Opera Omnia*, 12:511; cf. Love, *Mirror of the Blessed Life*, ed. Sargent, 15.

[16] *Cur Deus Homo*, book 1, chap. 16.

N-Town. Like the *Meditationes*, the N-Town play lets the Incarnation appear as in

answer to a prayer. The prayer is spoken, at the beginning of play 11, by a Janus-faced figure

called Contemplacio who previously has functioned as a Prologue but who now takes part in

the play's action.[17] Contemplacio, summarizing prayers from Isaiah and Jeremiah, thus

establishes a continuity with the Old Testament which goes beyond the Prophets plays of

other cycles. What is more important, Contemplacio sets the theme for the following debate

of the Four Daughters: although Man has deserved unending punishment for his crime, such

punishment would destroy God's "grete mercye" (5).[18] Contemplacio's prayer is supported by

the Virtutes, who correspond to the angels of the *Meditationes*. Like the latter, they pray God

to fill again those places in heaven which were left vacant after the Fall of the Angels. The

Virtutes, however, go further than the angels of the *Meditationes* in that they emphasize that

Man was seduced by the Devil and that he repents, while the Devil "in his obstynacye doth

dwelle" (44). God the Father does not at first respond to these arguments, but rather he merely

declares, using a quotation from Psalm 11:6, which is given in both Latin and English, that

now he will rise because of the "wretchydnes of þe nedy / and þe porys lamentacyon"

("lamentations of the poor" [49–50]). He can therefore be said to be reacting exclusively to

cries for mercy, and thus he avoids even the semblance of being forced or compelled, be it

even by logical arguments. The question of principle which dominates the ensuing debate of

the Four Daughters is thus neatly separated from God's decision, which is determined

exclusively by compassionate considerations. He is decided already, he cannot be "moved" by

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[17] This inconsistency is attributed to late revision. Possibly the entire Parliament is a late addition. On the arguments, see Peter Meredith, ed., *The Mary Play from the N.town Manuscript* (London: Longman, 1987), 3, 5.

[18] Quotations from the N-Town manuscript are from Stephen Spector, ed., *The N-Town Play: Cotton Vespasian D.8*, EETS, s.s. 11–12 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

the debate which follows: "Now xal I ryse þat am almighty; / Tyme is come of reconsyliacyon" (51–52).

In the Debate, Veritas is the first speaker. This is in keeping with the tradition and seems natural when God has already decided in favor of mercy, against which Veritas is now about to argue. In the *Meditationes*, on the other hand, God does not react to the angels' prayer, and the debate of the Four Daughters can thus begin by Mercy's support of that prayer. The N-Town play underlines the theologically important fact that the first three Daughters are "infinite" (65, 83, 100). In this respect the play follows the *Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost*.[19] However, by adding two arguments from Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo* the play sharpens the awareness that the conflict is insoluble on the level of human reason: Justice observes that the infinite God must insist on infinite punishment (93) and that Man, who cannot give satisfaction for his trespass, can never be saved (103–04). Veritas reminds God that he would be contradicting himself if he pardoned Adam (64). The logical dilemma that is thus created can of course be removed by a reference to the peace of God, "which surpasseth all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). Such a reference permits the Four Daughters to reach agreement and unanimously to plead with God for the Salvation of Man. The author of the *Charter* was content with this solution, but the N-Town dramatist took the dispute to the second person of the Trinity.[20] The Son then defines and solves the problem:

> I thynke þe thoughtys of pes and nowth of wykkydnes.
> This I deme, to ses ȝoure contraversy.
> If Adam had not deyd, peryschyd had Ryghtwysnes,

[19] For editions see Carl Horstmann, ed., *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole*, 2 vols. (London: Sonnenschein, 1895), 1:337–62; Clara Elizabeth Fanning, ed., *The Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost: A Critical Edition*, Ph. D. diss. (New York: Fordham University, 1975). See also the notes in Meredith, ed., *The Mary Play*, 108ff.

[20] Remarkably, this is called "Rex Salomo" by Bernard, *Opera*, 5:25.

And also Trewth had be lost þerby;

Trewth and Ryght wolde chastyse foly.

ȝiff another deth come not, Mercy xulde perysch,

Þan Pes were exyled fynyaly.

So tweyn dethis must be, ȝow fowre to cherysch.

But he þat xal deye, ȝe must knawe

þat in hym may ben non iniquyté,

þat helle may holde hym be no lawe,

But þat he may pas at hese lyberté.

Qwere swyche on his prevyde and se,

And hese deth for mannys deth xal be redempcyon.

All hefne and erth seke now ȝe;

Plesyth it ȝow þis conclusion. (137–52)

The opening words of this speech make it clear that redemption itself is not in question. God's decision of about ninety lines earlier has not changed. The rest of the speech is concerned with how, not whether, Man should be saved. The judgment suggests that the Four Virtues are not after all in conflict with each other: God does not become less just for being merciful. Still, these two qualities can be made to harmonize only under very narrowly specified conditions: someone must be found who is free from sin so that hell will have no power over him (145–48). This condition had already been stated by Anselm in his *Cur Deus Homo* (2:10) and similarly by Bernard and Pseudo-Bonaventura. Like its precursors, the play at first shows the search to be in vain: no one at once sinless and willing to sacrifice himself can be found. In another respect, however, the N-Town play is closer to Anselm than were Bernard or Pseudo-Bonaventura: the Son emphasizes that the one to make this sacrifice must be "both God and Man" (177; cf. *Cur Deus Homo* 2:6). This thought, which emphasizes God's justice rather than his mercy, is absent from Bernard and the *Meditationes*. The fact

that it occurs in the play and fits organically into the argument signifies that the playwright was not mechanically following a source but established his theological emphases quite independently.

The reasons for the necessity of the Son's sacrifice are advanced with dramaturgical skill: The Father says, addressing the Son:

> In ʒoure wysdam, son, man was mad thore,
> And in wysdam was his temptacyon;
> Þerfor, sone, sapyens, ʒe must ordeyn herefore,
> And se how of man may be salvacyon. (173–76)

The turning to the Son does not occur abruptly but receives careful preparation in the dialogue between the four Sisters: after Veritas and Misericordia have respectfully addressed their father, Justitia turns directly to her sister Misericordia, and accuses Man of having desired to be "As wyse as is God" (97). Shortly afterwards, Pax proposes that "oure Lorde" may judge "in his hyʒ wysdam" (123–24). In Misericordia's answer, "Wysdam" has already been transformed into a person (134), which of course can only mean *the Son of God*. This identification, which was suggested already by Bernard,[21] has no parallel in the Latin *Meditationes*, but it does return in Nicholas Love's English *Mirroure of þe Blissyd Lyfe of Oure Lorde Jesu Chryst*.[22] The identification of the Son and Wisdom makes the Son the appropriate Redeemer because Man fell in aspiring to divine wisdom (173–74).

Our dramatist shows his independence and skill in a minute change: in Bernard it was "unus de Cherubim" who suggested that the dispute be decided by the Son (chap. 1, p. 25); in the Latin version of the *Meditationes* the one who suggests remains anonymous, owing to the

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[21] See above, n.20.

[22] Love, *Mirror of the Blessed Life*, ed. Sargent, 18.

passive construction: "Fuit ergo haec quaestio missa ad Filium"; in Love's translation it is the Father himself who refers the decision to the Son.[23]   In the N-Town play the transfer from Father to Son grows as it were organically out of the dialogue and is thereby made dramatically plausible. Thus the impression is avoided that the Father wants to delegate his responsibility to the Son—a point that is as dramatically apt as it is theologically appropriate. The sum of our detailed analysis shows the Contemplacio playwright to be an independent thinker and a skilful dramatist.

The Castle of Perseverance. In the consensus of most scholars the Contemplacio group in N-Town is a later addition written for a scaffold stage and inserted into a playbook (British Library, Cotton MS. Vespasian D.8) along with other segments to make up a Creation to Doom compilation. In a similar way, the debate of the Four Daughters of God was later interpolated into the moral play *The Castle of Perseverance*. The "Proclamation" of *The Castle* leaves the episode unmentioned, as had the banns of the N-Town play. Instead it is announced that the central character, Humanum Genus or Mankind, will be saved by an intervention of the Blessed Virgin Mary.[24] The dispute of the N-Town play was concerned with the Incarnation and the death of Christ and thus with the salvation of the entire human race—i.e., fully in the Bernardian tradition. In *The Castle of Perseverance* the central figure is, in spite of his name, a single person, an average Christian. This becomes apparent in the biographical ground plan of the play which describes the story of a man's life from birth and

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[23] Bonaventura, *Opera Omnia*, 12:512; Love, *Mirror of the Blessed Life*, 17.

[24] Jacob Bennett, "The 'Castle of Perseverance': Redactions, Place, and Date," *Mediaeval Studies* 24 (1962): 141–52, esp. 145–46. See also Mark Eccles, ed., *The Macro Plays*, EETS, 262 (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), xvii; quotations in my text are from this edition.

baptism through adulthood, temptation, repentance, reception of the sacraments, renewed temptation in old age, and finally death.

Since the action of *The Castle* takes place after Christ's life on earth, the outcome of the Parliament of Heaven in its original meaning is decided before it even begins. In view of the biographical ground plan of the play, however, one would like to assume that it is not the salvation of humankind which is here at stake but rather the salvation of the individual. But in considering the dialogue of the Parliament, this is by no means clear. While Justitia argues for the individual guilt of Humanum Genus, the counterarguments advanced by Misericordia and Pax are concerned with humanity as the species for which Christ has died.

> Whanne þe Jevys proferyd Criste eysyl and gall
> On þe Good Fryday.
> God grauntyd þat remission,
> Mercy, and absolicion,
> Þorwe vertu of hys passion,
> To no man schuld be seyd nay. (3136–41)

Similarly, Pax does not discuss the deeds of Humanum Genus but his nature: "He is on kyn [*akin, one kind*] tyl vs thre [i.e., Veritas, Justitia, and Pax]" (3207). Pax repeats even the Anselmian argument that without Man the hierarchy of heaven would remain incomplete (3496–3502).

Misericordia and Pax fail to consider in their arguments that Salvation through Christ's death already had taken place before Humanum Genus committed his sins. If every single man were to be automatically saved by Christ's death, that could easily be understood as a guarantee of salvation for all sinners. This danger is pointed out by Justitia, who advances new arguments appropriate to the new situation and even buttresses them by quotations from the Bible. She admits that "mercy pasyt mannys mysdede" (3152), but this mercy must be

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seriously prayed for "wyth love and drede" (3154). To grant mercy to every deadly sinner would be "No skyl" (3157, *unreasonable*). "Vnusquisque suum honus portabit" (3163a; cf. Gal. 6:5), and "Non omnis qui dicit 'Domine, Domine' intrabit regnum celorum" (3167a; cf. Matt. 7:21). Her arguments against undiscriminating mercy are hard to refute:

> For schuld no man do no good
> All þe dayes of hys lyve
> But hope of mercy be þe rode
> Schulde make boþe werre and stryve
> And torne to gret grewaunse. (3168–72)

The words show clearly that Justitia is concerned with the salvation or condemnation of the individual, which need not be affected by the salvation of mankind:

> And eueryman þat wyl fulfyll
> þe dedly synnys and folw mysdede,
> To graunte hem mercy me þynkyth it no skyl. . . . (3155–57)

> Trowe ȝe þat whanne a man schal deye,
> Þanne þow þat he mercy craue,
> Þat anon he schal haue mercye? (3164–66)

> Whoso in hope dothe any dedly synne
> To hys lyvys ende, and wyl not blynne,
> Rytfully þanne schal he wynne
> Crystis gret vengaunse. (3173–76)

Eueryman, *a man*, *no man*, *whoso*: all these expressions vary one and the same basic argument: if everybody were to take this attitude! But this argument makes sense only if the case under debate is regarded as an individual case, i.e., exactly as Misericordia and Pax do not understand it. This talking at cross-purposes seems incomprehensible to the modern reader

(although to my knowledge it has not yet been noted in the literature). The reasons which

made it acceptable to a medieval audience can only be an object of our speculation:

1. Perhaps the distinction between species and individual (i.e., between

Nominalist and Realist positions) was a matter for theological specialists

which did not concern the average believer.[25] The history of the Church shows

that the relationship between individual [26]and general judgment confused even

more trained minds than that of our dramatist.

2. Perhaps one wanted to make clear that divine mercy and human behavior

stand in no recognizable relation.[27]

3. The author was probably not concerned with the casuistry of salvation

which has to identify types of behavior leading to damnation or salvation,

respectively. His main concern was probably to demonstrate the magnitude of

God's mercy.

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[25] Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei,* 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 168, quotes Luther, who calls nominalists or Ockhamists "die aller neuesten secten," apparently describing little-known subtleties.

[26] In 1334 even a ruling pope, John XXII, had to recant views which he had promulgated on this subject only three years earlier: he had believed that until the Last Judgment no one would have part in the *visio beatifica*. This view, which had caused concern among the faithful, was condemned by his successor Benedict XII in the constitution *De sorte hominis post mortem* (1336). See *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 8:31, s.v. "Judgment, Divine (in Theology)"; *Enchiridion Symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, ed. Heinrich Denzinger, 36th ed., newly ed. Adolf Schönmetzer (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 1976), chaps 1000–02.

[27] For Ockham "man's moral abilities are largely irrelevant . . . in the extrinsic denomination of the divine acceptation" (McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 116).

4. Humanum Genus does not get away unpunished, for he has already suffered

in purgatory:

> For werldly veynglory
> He hathe ben ful sory,
> Punchyd [*punished*] in purgatory
> For all þe synnys seuene. (3336–39)[28]

5. Justitia's concern (which the modern reader shares) is dispelled by the

reference to Doomsday with which God the Father closes the play. The

audience is warned that no one can escape this judgment, which is still to

come (3611–48).[29]

6. No man, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, can be certain of God's mercy.[30]

This is demonstrated by Humanum Genus's fearful death in lines 2969–3007:

he dies crying for "Goddys mercy."

Whatever the theological context of the Parliament, it is clear that its subject has changed

here. The debate is no longer "lifted" in a dialectical synthesis, but is decided arbitrarily. The

Four Virtues are no longer of equal rank. Bernard's statement that only together can they be

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[28] The casualness of the reference to purgatory is explained by Bennett with remnants of an older version which are still present in the Parliament. In that older version it was the Blessed Virgin Mary who intervened on Mankind's behalf. In the "Proclamation" (125–26) the stay in purgatory becomes much clearer ("The 'Castle of Perseverance'," 145–46).

[29] The distinction between *iudicium particulare* immediately after death and *iudicium generale* at the Last Judgment after the Resurrection of the Dead is also made in *De sorte hominis post mortem*. It is not impossible, although not demonstrable either, that the reference to double judgment in *The Castle* is connected with this theological controversy.

[30] McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 160, citing *Summa Theologia*, Ia IIae, q. 112, a. 5.

regarded as virtues is no longer valid. God himself shows how they are to be ranked: "I

menge wyth my most myth [*greater might*] / Alle pes, sum treuthe, and sum ryth, / And most

of my mercy" (3571–73). But with such a ranking we lose the most important distinctive

feature of the Judgment motif: the solution of the conflict by an apparent enormity.

 Respublica. The *Castle of Perseverance* shows a theological inconsistency: while its

basic structure is more suited to show the salvation of the individual, it has to accommodate a

motif created to illustrate the salvation of Mankind. In *Respublica* the refashioning of the

original motif is perfectly consistent. But to that end, even its second distinctive feature has to

be sacrificed. The play, which has been ascribed to Nicholas Udall,[31] is a political-

denominational propaganda piece that celebrates, under the schema of a morality play, the

Roman Catholic restoration under Mary Tudor. Respublica, the English commonwealth, falls

under the influence of the "Vice" Avarice and his "gallants" Insolence, Oppression, and

Adulation, who seek to find favor under the aliases of Policie, Authoritie, Reformation, and

Honestie. *Respublica* as a drama thus stands in the tradition of such secularized moralities as

Nature and *Magnyfycence* in which the seducers also assume aliases. The fall of the central

character is brought about by deceit, but not by a conscious decision in favor of the forces of

evil, as was still the case in *The Castle of Perseverance*. Respublica's failure is therefore of an

intellectual rather than a moral nature. The play *Respublica* represents the intellectual failure

in a particularly pure form since the central character does not lead a life in sin even in the

phase of her delusion. She is merely reduced to misery. The play thus shows a structural

similarity with another denominational-polemical morality, *Kynge Johan*, where the

eponymic hero is equally free from sin. In both plays the intellectual character of the fall is

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[31] W. W. Greg, ed., *Respublica*, EETS, e.s. 94 (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), viii–xviii; quotations from *Respublica* in my text are from this edition.

emphasized by the fact that at the end it is not the eponymic hero that is to be judged, but those who have influenced him or her.

      Respublica differs from other moralities in that "Judgment" and "Salvation" coincide. The judgment is prepared by Misericordia feeling pity for the misled "heroine." This pity also shows God's justice: Respublica comments on Misericordia's appearance and first words with the exclamation: "O lorde nowe doe I see that thowe art ever iuste" (1224). A contrast between mercy and justice is discovered neither by Respublica nor by other characters who might perhaps be more objective. As the next step on the path to salvation Veritas opens Respublica's eyes to the true character of the villains. The distance from the Christian origins of the motif becomes fully apparent when it is no longer God himself who sits in judgment, but the classical goddess Nemesis, whom Veritas has called into office.

      According to Nemesis, none of the four principles is to be followed wholly, each one only to some extent. Synthesis is thus explicitly replaced by compromise: "Ladies we have harde all your descrete aduises / and eche one shall have some parte of youre devises . . ." (1872–73). But even this maxim is hardly needed; for it has become apparent in the previous dialogue that relations between the Four are not dominated by conflict, but by a division of labor. The four principles are not realized together, but in sequence. After Veritas has uncovered the true state of affairs, mercy is bestowed on the only villain that is capable of making amends, Adulation. The other three receive their just punishment. With this, the reign of Pax is also established: "where althing is well emended I doo encreace" (1871).

      The sequential relationship between the Four Virtues is expressed already in the Prologue:

> veritee the daughter of sage old Father Tyme
> Shewith all as yt ys bee ytt vertue or Cryme.
> than dooeth Iustice all suche as Common Weale oppresse

>Tempered with mercye endevoure to suppresse.
>
>with whome anone is lynked tranquillitee and peace
>
>to Common weales Ioye and perpetuall encreace. (33–38)

The four principles are "temporal" in an even more pregnant sense. Veritas is called "filia temporis," which was the motto under which Mary Tudor began her reign.[32] The author apparently wanted to pay homage to the new queen by turning her motto into a leitmotif of his play. The soteriological origins of the motif are practically forgotten; just how forgotten can be gauged from the fact that the relevant quotations from the psalms are predominantly spoken by the villains. They have clearly lost their function; they no longer symbolize the reconciliation of opposites as they had for Bernard and his medieval successors. The salvation that the psalm is traditionally taken as promising has been thoroughly secularized. Accordingly, the four sisters are no longer called "daughters of God" but "fowre Ladies."[33] Temporalization and division of labor have also removed the other distinctive feature of the "judgment motif": the debate.

The process of secularization which is observed here went even further in the Elizabethan and Stuart periods. The four allegorical virtues, but especially Justice, Peace, and Truth, appear in a large number of English texts written for the stage (most of them royal entertainments and civic pageants) from the end of the sixteenth century to the middle of the seventeenth century without, however, betraying their biblical origin—and without a

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[32] Fritz Saxl, "Veritas Filia Temporis," in *Philosophy and History: Essays presented to Ernst Cassirer*, ed. Raymond Klibansky and H. J. Paton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), 207.

[33] See Greg, ed., *Respublica*, 1, for a list of dramatic personae.

dispute.[34] The four principles, each of which must be observed with unlimited faithfulness, have been turned into worldly goods which in prosperous times are richly dispensed, though they certainly never made any claim to absolute validity. For this reason they never cause dialectical tension. Peace, Justice, and Good Order (*Eirene*, *Dike*, and *Eunomia*) now appear usually as the Three Hours, the three Horae of classical antiquity, where social and natural order are not in conflict. The specifically Christian value of mercy finds but seldom a place in this context.[35]

The concepts used by literary and historical scholars are sometimes most fruitful when they are applied to phenomena that cannot be subsumed under them without a remainder. They help us recognize differences which before remained invisible under the appearance of superficial similarity. The attempt to regard the Parliament of Heaven as a specimen of the "judgment motif" has shown us how the loss of distinctive features entails a loss of conceptual rigor and anthropological depth. The fable that was conceived as a narrative embodiment of the human condition and of divine mercy thus ends as the representation of a royal triumph.

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[34] See Thomas L. Berger and William C. Bradford, Jr., *An Index of Characters in English Printed Drama to the Restoration* (Englewood, Colorado: Microcard Editions, 1975).

[35] See ibid., passim; Justice appears in thirty-four of the plays examined by Berger and Bradford, Peace in twenty-six, Truth in nineteen, and Grace or Mercy in only thirteen. For the reduced frequency of the Virtues in later plays, see also McCune, *Ideology*, 252, who however does not quote Berger and Bradford's *Index*.

Mystery Play: A Study in Dramatic Speech and Form *(1992) and, most recently,* Words for

Feelings: Studies in the History of the English Emotion Lexicon *(2014).*