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“Manne, for thy loue wolde I not lette”: Eucharistic Portrayals of *Caritas* in Medieval and Early Modern English Literature and Drama 1350-1650

by

Rachel Tanski

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of English
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Nicole Guenther Discenza, Ph.D.
Jay Zysk, Ph.D.
Anne Latowsky, Ph.D.
Sara Munson Deats, Ph.D.

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DEDICATION

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ABSTRACT

The religious Reformation in England heralded significant changes in Christian theology, clerical and lay practices, and textual interpretation. These sweeping changes encompassed nearly all avenues of intellectual thought, and debates ranged from whether or not religious texts should be written in the traditional latin or the vernacular, thereby determining whether interpretive authority remained within the clergy or became available to laypersons, to arguments over very specific aspects of theological doctrine, such as the substantive nature of the Eucharist. These debates were not confined among Church officials; politicians, monarchs, commoners, and literary authors engaged in these discussions and had been doing so for some time. Before the Reformation officially took hold across Europe, authors in the Middle Ages began writing in the vernacular, debates over doctrine had already begun (Wycliffe, mystical writers, etc.), and theological discussions were already taking place within literary fiction. This dissertation will explore how one particular change in Christian theological doctrine, the nature of charity (*caritas)*, was expressed in literature across the Reformation divide, from the later Middle Ages into the Tudor period. As the theological definition of charity shifted from a traditional Catholic view of works to a reformed view of introspection, intent, and good will, representations of charity in literature shifted in a similar way.

While scholars such as James William Brodman and Eamon Duffy have provided extensive studies on charity and religious practices in medieval history and culture, emerging scholarship has begun to make connections between these fields and the literature of the time. In *Sanctifying Signs*, David Aers explores how literature of the later middle ages instructs and

reflects traditional and popular theology and piety, and James Simpson crosses the periodic bridge by connecting religious and cultural contexts to literature of the later middle ages and early modern period in *Reform and Cultural Revolution*. Other scholars, such as Sarah Beckwith and Eliza Burher, have also connected literature and drama of the later middle ages to their religious contexts. Similarly, in *Liturgy and Literature in the Making of Protestant England*, Timothy Rosendale explores how The Book of Common Prayer influenced political, national, religious, and literary discourse in early modern England. I will build on these studies by exploring how the concept of charity in particular evolved in late medieval and early modern literary texts. I will chart the development of the concept of charity from pre-Christian antiquity through the middle ages to the debates between traditional and reformed thinkers during the Reformation. Then, I will analyze the shift in this concept in exemplary literary texts: The York biblical plays, William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, Christopher Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*, and Shakespeare's plays. In each chapter, I will draw on supplementary texts and other major works of each period, in addition to these representative texts, to provide a fuller view of the concept of charity within literature.

CHAPTER I: DEFINITIONS OF CHARITY AND *CARITAS*

Introduction/Summary

The Protestant Reformation, both in England and mainland Europe, heralded significant changes in Christian theology, clerical and lay practices, and textual interpretation. These changes encompassed nearly all avenues of intellectual thought, and debates centered on such issues as whether religious texts should be written in Latin or the vernacular, whether interpretive authority remained within the clergy or became available to laypersons, and specific aspects of theological doctrine such as Christ's Real Presence in the Eucharist. These debates were not confined to Church officials: politicians, monarchs, commoners, and authors engaged in these discussions. What is more, they had been doing so for many centuries. While it is still commonplace to associate religious reformation with the Protestant Reformation, debates over doctrine and theology were taken up by religious scholars and literary writers long before Henry VIII's break with Rome and the articulation of Luther's Ninety-Five Theses. This dissertation will focus on the changing expressions of charity (*caritas*) in both theological and literary contexts spanning late medieval and early modern England. As the practice of charity shifted from the tradition of good works to a reformed emphasis on introspection, intent, and good will, representations of charity in literature continued to be rooted in the theological doctrine of *caritas* and were symbolized by depictions of Christ's body. Despite significant theological changes, late medieval depictions of charity linked to Christ's body continued to influence early modern representations, thus blurring historical and religious boundaries.

Before turning to medieval and early modern literary depictions of *caritas* in the upcoming chapters of this dissertation, it is important to establish the history of the concept from its pre-Christian origins through the medieval Catholic Church and, finally, its reiteration in post-Reformation England. In this chapter, I argue that the meaning of charity consistently retains some level of meaning linked with its original theological and linguistic roots in the Latin *caritas*. Despite changing theological definitions and practices, the word maintains its sense of community, and this is reflected in literature in the enduring symbolism of Christ's body.

Scholars have traced the linguistic origins of the word *charity* to the Latin *caritas* and its ethical considerations to other classical Greek and Roman sources. The theological term is often intertwined with its secular roots, which, from its earliest usage, connotes both value and a sense of community. James William Brodman traces the meaning of charity and its connections to the ancient term *caritas* throughout the western tradition in his introduction to *Charity and Religion in Medieval Europe* (2009): "In ancient usage, it denoted objects that were highly esteemed because of their cost and then, more generally, described a sense of benevolence; in the late Empire, *caritates* were persons who became objects of this affection."[1] Uses of Old and Middle English forms of the word charity were varied. As its entries in the *Oxford English Dictionary* show, some texts used the word to connotate a broad sense of hospitality or care, while others clearly imply more specific theological meanings and practices, such as love for God displayed in acts of devotion, as well as almsgiving. Additionally, Brodman explains how charity

[1] James William Brodman, *Charity and Religion in Medieval Europe*, (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 3. The purpose of this chapter is to trace the historical concepts of charity that strongly influenced theology in medieval and early modern England, so my sources focus mostly on Christian and western traditions. Studies of the overlaps of charity in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam in late antiquity and the Middle Ages can be found in Miriam Frenkel and Yaacov Lev, *Charity and Giving in Monotheistic Religions* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2009). For an expanded study of charity in Eastern/Asian religions, see Ruth A. Shapiro, Manisha Mirchandani, and Heesu Jang, eds., *Pragmatic Philanthropy: Asian Charity Explained* (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2018). For a more global perspective, see Pamala Wiepking and Femida Handy, eds., *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Philanthropy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

developed conceptually in the Middle Ages: "In a broad sense, charity comes to denote an affection that is nonphysical and directed primarily toward God. From this love of God flows a warmth toward other human beings: friends, strangers, and even enemies."[2] This connection between love for God and warmth towards other people manifests in charitable acts, but what actually constituted charity varied: "This caring for others can have many expressions: group solidarity and a spirit of brotherhood, personal friendship, or a sense of individual contentment."[3] Each manifestation of care towards others, then, is ultimately an act of love for God.

Among the many theological debates and changes that occurred during the Reformation, a more introspective view of charity coincided with an emphasis on inner faith. While *caritas*, as a theological term, still represented a form of love for God demonstrated by love for one's neighbor, beliefs about just *how* one demonstrated that neighborly love changed. For many reformers, material acts of charity, which could be given with selfish intentions, were either unimportant or not enough. Instead, charity was more faith-based: it required complete trust in God's will and participation in the community of the faithful, contributions which could be spiritual, rather than material, in nature. I will show in the last two chapters of this dissertation that popular early modern English literature, particularly drama, reflected this change. However, like their medieval predecessors, early modern authors presented more nuanced representations of charity than scholars have previously acknowledged, and often appropriated medieval literary devices for these ends. While Brodman and other scholars have examined the various practices and manifestations of charity in medieval and early modern European literature and culture, I build on their foundational studies by more specifically showing how representations of charity in late medieval and post-Reformation English literature and drama overlapped alongside, and

[2] Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, 3.
[3] Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, 3.

despite, shifting theological definitions. Shakespeare and Marlowe, significantly, utilize medieval staging practices and Eucharistic literary representations to present Reformation ideas about charity, piety, and salvation.

Terminology

The religious views that I discuss in this dissertation focus on Western European Christianity, primarily as it was practiced in medieval and early modern England. In the following chapters, I analyze the ways in which charity was depicted in Middle English and Early Modern English literature. Due to this focus, terms such as *theology*, *religion*, *piety*, *salvation*, and other related terminology refer specifically to Christian concepts unless I indicate otherwise. The next section of this chapter includes early definitions of *charity* from ancient Greek and Roman sources as important background information for the evolution of the concept in Western thought.

Terms such as *orthodoxy*, *tradition*, *popular religion*, and *piety* are fraught with complex and often implicit meanings. By *orthodoxy*, I mean doctrine and practices officially accepted by the Catholic Church or officials in the Church of England. When necessary, I will borrow from David Aers' expanded definition of *orthodoxy* to include the "complex modes in which the Church maintained such beliefs."[4] Likewise, I use *unorthodox* to describe practices and beliefs in England among the laity and among less dominant religious institutions that diverge from official Church rules. *Tradition*, a more general term, refers to the laity's most popular and entrenched beliefs and practices. Since this dissertation covers what are usually considered two distinct literary periods, I quote Eamon Duffy's sense of the word in his subtitle to *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580*, which covers a similar time period:

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[4] David Aers, *Sanctifying Signs: Making Christian Tradition in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 2004), ix.

traditional religion “is the religion of the conservative majority . . . and it ends at the point at which I believe majority adherence to the forms and belief-system of late medieval Catholicism was tipping or had tipped over into widespread acceptance of a contrasting and inimical Reformation world-view.”[5] Similarly, but perhaps more specifically, I use the term *popular religion* to describe “local, contextual, and everyday religious practices that are not in tension with institutionalized religion but can function outside the institution.”[6] *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology* uses this definition in its entry for Latino/a Theology, but it is widely applicable because it provides “the most authentic view for tapping into any community’s experience of the sacred.”[7] Popular religious rituals occurred throughout medieval England, particularly in the later Middle Ages. Feasts such as Corpus Christi provided the opportunity for local communities to engage in collective religious celebrations, and my next chapter focuses on biblical drama produced in the city of York and performed on the Corpus Christi feast day. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology* does not contain an individual entry for the word piety, but the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines piety as a sense of pity or duty and as devotion, especially to God.[8] Thus, I use the term *piety* throughout this dissertation in a general sense: as devotion to God and expressions of that devotion.

Classical (Pre-Christian) Philosophy

A view of charity that developed out of the concept of love for one’s neighbor predates Christianity. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle presents his view of how best to live, that is, what it means to live virtuously and also feel happy or fulfilled. *Caritas/carus* is of Latin origin,

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[5] Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992), xvi.
[6] Ian A. McFarland, David A. S. Fergusson, Karen Kilby, and Iain R. Torrance, eds. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP), 2011, doi:10.1017/CBO9780511781285.
[7] *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, 2011.
[8] "piety, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2022, www.oed.com/view/Entry/143641. Accessed 6 February 2023.

so the ancient Greek and Arabic manuscripts do not use a direct form of the word *caritas*, but Aristotle's discussion of virtues and practice do include concepts related to charity. In the section on generosity, Aristotle explains that "the generous person is praised, not in conditions of war, nor in those in which the temperate person is praised, nor in judicial verdicts, but in the giving and taking of wealth, and more especially in the giving."[9] Here, the virtue of generosity is specifically associated with one's financial interactions with others, and most importantly what one *gives* to others. We will see in later sections how this emphasis on giving continues to influence philosophers and theologians in the Middle Ages. Even as a pre-Christian perspective, Aristotle's explanation of generosity as a virtue, especially its emphasis on one's relationship to the larger community, coincides with later European concepts of charity tied to religious ideology. Aristotle further clarifies that "[b]y wealth we mean anything whose worth is measured by money."[10] This statement implies that monetary transactions, which in medieval England would include almsgiving, are the primary habits that characterize one's generosity, but the phrase "measured by" implies that other material forms of wealth can be given and taken in accordance with this virtue. The act of providing shelter, food, and other forms of material subsistence became an important aspect of medieval Christian piety. However, some consideration of one's attitude toward wealth is also important, since, as Aristotle says, "[u]ngenerosity is always ascribed to those who take wealth more seriously than is right."[11] Medieval thinkers who looked to Aristotle for philosophical insights might look to this statement when synthesizing a view of charity to focus on one's intentions. Although the above quotation addresses monetary wealth, it does seem to imply that the direction of one's focus is also

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[9] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2nd ed., trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1999), 4.1.1.
[10] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 4.1.2.
[11] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 4.1.3.

important, which may inform later Christian ideas of charity as more introspective. Aristotle explains that generosity "is a mean concerned with the giving and taking of wealth, [so] the generous person will both give and spend the right amounts for the right purposes, in small and large matters alike."[12] Since the Christian theological doctrine of *caritas* specifically refers to loving God through loving one's neighbor, the definition does not necessarily require tangible acts of charity - nor does Aristotle's quote refer to the literal spending and accumulation of wealth. One's *intentions* are what is most important here. Aristotle's view of generosity does not necessarily focus on the poor, but to what is "right." He places all virtues on spectrums between opposite extreme vices, and generosity falls between stinginess and wastefulness. Furthermore, Aristotle declares the generous person will "do this with pleasure," which implies that one's intention behind the virtue is important.[13] One who enjoys being generous is more virtuous than someone who begrudgingly or reluctantly spends their wealth. This focus on intention's role in one's relationship to society will become an important aspect of Christian theology, especially as it appears in late medieval and Tudor vernacular literature.

A more excellent form of generosity, according to Aristotle, is magnificence (*megaloprepeia*), the "expenditure that is fitting [*prepousa*] in its large scale [*megethos*]."[14] Since magnificence requires a great degree of generosity, "the magnificent person is generous, but generosity does not imply magnificence."[15] Such a definition excludes the poor from achieving this higher level of virtue. Aristotle's reasoning is as follows:

> That is why a poor person could not be magnificent; he lacks the means for large and fitting expenditures. If he tries to be magnificent, he is foolish; for he spends more than

[12] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 4.1.24.
[13] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 4.1.24.
[14] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 4.2.1. Brackets in original.
[15] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 4.2.3.

> what is worthy and right for him, whereas correct spending accords with virtue. Large spending befits those who have the means, acquired through their own efforts or their ancestors or connections, or are well born or reputable, and so on; for each of these conditions includes greatness and reputation for worth.[16]

According to Aristotle, the kind of expenditure associated with magnificence also applies to private expenses, such as a grandiose home, gifts for guests, and weddings, among other services that the wealthy perform on behalf of society. Thus, the poor simply cannot achieve this virtue, but they may still live a virtuous life by focusing on other, more attainable, virtues. This concept of generosity is, of course, not yet tied to Christian salvation theology, in which every Christian is presumably implicated.

Aristotle's discussions of friendship also contain ideas about community that would later become important to the Christian theology of *caritas*: "This sort of concord is found in decent people. For they are in concord with themselves and with each other, since they are practically of the same mind; for their wishes are stable. . . . They wish for what is just and advantageous, and also seek it in common."[17] This concept of mutual beneficence precedes a Christian version of the united Church. Aristotle later states that "having friends seems to be the greatest external good" and that

> [t]he excellent person is related to his friend in the same way as he is related to himself, since a friend is another himself. . . . just as his own being is choiceworthy for him, his friend's being is choiceworthy for him in the same or similar way. . . . He must, then, perceive his friend's being together [with his own], and he will do this when they live

[16] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 4.2.13-14.
[17] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 9.6.3

together and share conversation and thought.[18]

The sense of connection that Aristotle describes here implies a camaraderie that extends beyond mutual affection; he describes a transcendent unity of souls. Aristotle contrasts the "conversation and thought" that occurs within these friendships against animals who simply graze together. This shared activity is ennobling for those who engage in it.[19] This concept later aligns with a notion of caritative love that connects Christians to each other and to God.

In order to truly be considered virtuous, according to Aristotle, the above theories must be accompanied by voluntary action, and later Christian theologians would expand on this concept to include the values of choice and free will. Julius R. Weinberg explains that until the early part of the twelfth century, European Christians knew little of Aristotle's writings, and it was "not until the thirteenth century that reasonably satisfactory translations of most of Aristotle's works were available" to them.[20] Aristotle's influence, then, becomes prominent in medieval Christianity with the work of Aquinas and other late medieval theologians. His emphasis on voluntary action as a demonstration of true virtue becomes evident in the late medieval emphasis on works as the primary goal of charity. Similarly, Aristotle's prioritization of intent as the foundation of voluntary action influences Reformation thinkers who interpret the philosopher's work in support of a broader, more internalized form of charity.

Like Aristotle's, Seneca's philosophy influenced Christian teachings and inspired literary

[18] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 9.9.2 and 9.9.10
[19] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 9.12
[20] Julius R. Weinberg, *A Short History of Medieval Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1964), 10. The texts were translated into medieval Latin during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, so they would have been accessible to mid- to late medieval scholars, such as Aquinas, but not necessarily in their original language nor in ancient Latin. According to Helmut Gneuss and Michael Lapidge's *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A Bibliographical Handlist of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2014), Aristotle's *Categoriae*, *De interpretatione*, and arithmetic texts were available in early medieval England through Boethius's Latin translations. Aristotle's astronomy texts and illustrations were also available at that time. It was not until William of Moerbeke's translations from the original Greek in the thirteenth century that most of Aristotle's works, including *Nicomachean Ethics*, became known to medieval Catholic scholars. He would become highly influential on thinkers like Thomas Aquinas.

works from the early Church through the later Middle Ages and into the early modern period. Seneca's brand of Stoicism, according to Emily R. Wilson, emphasized the importance of choices and exercising the will, while, for Cicero, "the ideal of the Stoic wise person had no relationship with lived reality… the Stoic wise person is far too cut off from emotional engagement with the world around him."[21] Wilson further explains that, while asceticism was an important component of stoicism, some stoics also "placed a high value on action in the world."[22] Therefore, while Seneca clearly demonstrates in his writing that he values the inner, contemplative life, he also values intention, benevolence, and action. This distinction is important because Seneca's writing influenced early medieval Christian theology, including the development of the Seven Deadly Sins, and theology and literature of the later Middle Ages. While Seneca's influence on medieval ideology was not explicitly recognized compared to the way Aquinas addresses Aristotle in his work, Seneca's work was known to medieval scholars. Fragments of his work and his *Letters to Lucilius* were available, and references to Seneca appear in medieval theology and literature, such as the *Golden Legend* and the *Divine Comedy*.[23] Seneca's work continued to influence early modern theology, literature, and drama.[24] In Letter 41 to Lucilius, Seneca explains his view that the divine can be found within all good people: "[t]he god is with you - near you - inside you."[25] Seneca's life predates Christianity, but the idea of God residing within each individual further develops in Scripture and in medieval Christian

[21] Emily R. Wilson, *The Greatest Empire: A Life of Seneca*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2018), 11.
[22] Wilson, *The Greatest Empire*, 14-15.
[23] For Seneca's influence on medieval theology, see, for example: L. A. Panizza, "Seneca's 'fortuna' in fourteenth-century Italy and Anselm's ontological proof" *Reading Medieval Studies*, 7 (1981) 62-80, https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/84792/. and Chiara Torre, "Seneca and the Christian Tradition," in *The Cambridge Companion to Seneca*, ed. Shadi Bartsch and Alessandro Schiesaro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 266–76. doi:10.1017/CCO9781139542746.025.
[24] Wilson, *The Greatest Empire*, 218-19.
[25] Seneca, *Letters on Ethics (to Lucilius)*, trans. Margaret Graver and A. A. Long (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2015), 125.

theology and will become important in literary representations of the Christian community and the body of Christ. In Letter 87, Seneca explains that wealth does not make a man good and is not an intrinsic good. However, Seneca does not claim that wealth is inherently bad; rather, it is a neutral factor because it lacks agency. Wealth does not in and of itself produce good or bad outcomes. At the end of the letter, Seneca indicates that they will continue this discussion at a later time, but tells Lucilius, "let's ask ourselves whether it might not be better to mitigate poverty and take down the arrogance of wealth."[26] Seneca does not specify here whether he favors individual almsgiving, a cultural/ethical change, or state regulation, but this statement supports Wilson's point above that Seneca and stoics in general did advocate for real-world action, a component of charity that would become important in medieval Christian theology. Still Elizabeth Asmis, Shadi Bartsch, and Martha C. Nussbaum claim that "[b]ecause of their doctrine of value, the Stoics actually do not propose radical changes in the distribution of worldly goods, as one might suppose equal regard for the dignity of all human beings would require."[27] However, Graver singles out Seneca, his nephew Lucan, and other prominent Stoics as avoiding the Stoic detachment from politics and becoming activists. Therefore, Catholic advocates of charitable works and Protestant reformers could look towards Seneca to justify either virtue based on action or the inner life. Finally, Letter 106 emphasizes the corporeal nature of the good: "A good thing, inasmuch as it benefits, acts; what acts is a body."[28] Seneca continues the syllogism by stating that what activates the mind is a good and that, since the mind is a body, its good is also corporeal. He concludes that "Since a human being is corporeal, the good of a human being must be a body: undeniably, the things that nourish a human being and that

[26] Seneca, *Letters on Ethics,* 307.
[27] Elizabeth Asmis, Shadi Bartsch, and Martha C. Nussbaum, "Seneca and His World," *Letters on Ethics (to Lucilius)*, trans. Margaret Graver and A. A. Long, xv.
[28] Seneca, *Letters on Ethics*, 421.

maintain or restore his health are bodies; therefore, the human being's good is also a body."[29] While this distinction may be interpreted as a response to Plato's theory of Forms or similar philosophies, it is important that Seneca ties the concept of corporeality to what he considers good. The idea that what is good or virtuous takes corporeal form would further develop into a theology of charity focused on action, especially towards the poor.

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the ancient Latin term *caritas* evolved from describing costly objects to indicating general benevolence.[30] This double meaning persists in the modern Italian and Spanish *caro* and the French *cher*, which mean both dear/beloved or costly/expensive. All of these, including *caritas*, derive from the Latin *carus*, which means dear/expensive, and, as noted above, the recipients of this affection were known as *caritates*.[31] While this association does not necessarily refer to charity as a Christian doctrine, it does link to "loving one's neighbor." As medieval theologians and scholars copied and translated Greek works into the vernacular from the later Latin sources to which they had access, they likely encountered the term *caritas* more frequently than the various and more specific Greek words for love, desire, and friendship (i.e. *eros*, *agape*, *philia*, etc.). Thus, the Latin term likely became conflated with its use in texts of ancient Greek cultural origin. Eliza Buhrer explains that translations of the New Testament from Greek into Latin by the early church fathers, especially Jerome, replaced *agape* with *caritas*, thus associating *caritas* with the highest form of love. According to Buhrer, "This choice was undoubtedly inspired by Cicero's *Officiis* and *De Amicitia*, which were largely responsible for transmitting the Greek ideals of friendship to the

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[29] Seneca *Letters on Ethics*, 422. In their endnotes on page 532, Wilson and Long explain that, for Seneca, "a 'body' or corporeal thing was anything that could act or be acted upon."
[30] Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, 3.
[31] Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, 3.

Latin West."[32] In both works, Cicero uses the term *caritas* to describe deep love and affection, notably distinguishing the concept from the more basic terms *amor* and *affectio*, as will be discussed below.

In *De Officiis*, instances of the word *caritas* frequently are best translated as *affection* or *love*. In this treatise on the ethical and moral obligations of rulers, Cicero uses the word *caritas* throughout to demonstrate the affection brought about by the unity of the community: "The bonds of common blood hold men fast through good-will and affection" ("Sanguinis autem coniunctio et benivolentia devincit homines *et* caritate").[33] When Cicero's use of the term more closely translates as *love*, he similarly uses *caritas* to denote a special love between people within a community, specifically a society connected by a socio-political structure, such as ancient Rome. He urges leaders to strive "to banish fear and cleave to love" ("ut metus absit, caritas retineatur") when dealing with their subjects.[34] Cicero explains his reasoning behind this advice, saying

> And since it is manifest that the power of good-will is so great and that of fear is so weak, it remains for us to discuss by what means we can most readily win the affection, linked with honour and confidence, which we desire
>
> (Quod cum perspicuum sit, benivolentiae vim esse magnam, metus imbecillam, sequitur, ut disseramus, quibus rebus facillime possimus eam, quam volumus, adipisci cum honore et fide caritatem).[35]

Here again, translator Walter Miller interprets the word *caritas* as *affection*, denoting a special

[32] Eliza Burher. "From Caritas to Charity: How Loving God Became Giving Alms," *Poverty and Prosperity in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Cynthia Kosso and Anne Scott (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 116.
[33] M. Tullius Cicero, *De Officiis, with An English Translation*, trans. Walter Miller. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913), 1.54. The word *et* is italicized in Miller's facing-page translation to indicate that he has added it while transcribing the manuscript.
[34] Cicero, *De Officiis*, 2.24.
[35] Cicero, *De Officiis*, 2.29.

kind of love within a community and, more specifically, directed from the subjects towards their leaders. This understanding of the concept is consistent with a later Christian conception of *caritas* as love for God demonstrated through love for neighbor.

Cicero also uses the word *caritas* to describe deep affection in his treatise on friendship, *De Amicitia*. He defines friendship as especially powerful because of the special union it creates between only two or a few people:

> Moreover, how great the power of friendship is may most clearly be recognized from the fact that, in comparison with the infinite ties uniting the human race and fashioned by Nature herself, this thing called friendship has been so narrowed that the bonds of affection always unite two persons only, or, at most, a few
> (quanta autem vis amicitiae sit ex hoc intellegi maxime potest, quod ex infinita societate generis humani, quam conciliavit ipsa natura, ita contracta res est et adducta in angustum, ut omnis caritas aut inter duos aut inter paucos iungeretur).[36]

Friendship, according to Cicero in the above quotation, is much more than mere acquaintanceship; it is a deep and powerful bond and one of the noblest of human pursuits. To express such a lofty ideal, Cicero uses the word *caritas* instead of other synonyms for love and affection, such as *amor* or *affectio*, to define a specific, special relationship. Cicero further explains his notion of friendship: “For friendship is nothing else than an accord in all things, human and divine, conjoined with mutual goodwill and affection” (“est enim amicitia nihil aliud nisi omnium divinarum humanarumque rerum cum benevolentia et caritate consensio”).[37] As he states here, Cicero views friendship as not only human, but divine accord. While this statement

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[36] M. Tullius Cicero. *De Senectute De Amicitia De Divinatione, with An English Translation*, trans. William Armistead Falconer (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1923), 20.
[37] Cicero, *De Amicitia*, 20.

could simply mean agreement in religious beliefs, Cicero's use of the word *caritas* within this same sentence implies that he means a level of friendship that transcends earthly bonds and encompasses some form of spiritual bond. This sense of the word precedes the later Christian concept of *caritas* as love for God demonstrated through love for one's neighbor; both iterations achieve a divine love through human interactions.

Cicero conspicuously uses the word *caritas* in these excerpts from *De Officiis* and *De Amicitia*, rather than the more basic and colloquial term for affection, *affectio*, or the more direct term for love, *amor*. *Caritas*, like other Latin and Greek words for a specific kind of love, became distinct from *amor* in describing an elevated, spiritual kind of love. Lewis and Short's *A Latin Dictionary* gives a shortened definition of *amor* as "love, affection, strong friendly feeling," and an additional definition of "a strong, passionate longing for something, desire, lust."[38] The *Dictionary* also notes that the term may be used as a proper noun to personify the god of love. In their more detailed parsing of the word's distinct meanings, Lewis and Short differentiate *amor* from *caritas*:

> ămor (old form ămŏs, like honos, labos, colos, etc., Plaut. Curc. 1, 2, 2; v. Neue, Formenl. I. p. 170), ōris, m. [amo], love (to friends, parents, etc.; and also in a low sense; hence in gen., like amo, while caritas, like diligere, is esteem, regard, etc.; hence amor is used also of brutes, but caritas only of men.[39]

While both words may be translated as love or affection, *caritas* is a more appropriate term for higher forms of love between human beings. Similarly, Lewis and Short distinguish their entry for *caritas* from the related word *amor*: "regard, esteem, affection, love (cf. amor, I.; in good

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[38] "Amor." Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879. Logeion. https://logeion.uchicago.edu/

[39] "Amor." Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*.

prose; syn.: benevolentia, favor, studium)."[40] Here, *amor* is brought into the definition of *caritas* as a relevant, but distinct, word. After providing a textual example, *amor* is again brought into the definition of *caritas* to illustrate the nuances of the concept: "hence, opp. amor, as esteem to personal affection."[41] Lewis and Short here distinguish *caritas* and *amor* as a matter of degree, with *caritas* defining a greater bond. In the *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, the entry for *amor* translates the term as love and notes that it can mean both sexual and spiritual love.[42] However, the entry for *caritas* lists love, Christian love, and charity as possible definitions, showing that by the Middle Ages, the term had come to mean a specific kind of love for God demonstrated by love for neighbor and expressed through charity.[43]

Due to Cicero's distinction of *caritas* as an "inclination of the soul towards the highest good, rather than the desire for personal gain," as well as Augustine's definition of *caritas* as the "special sort of love that bonds man to God," *caritas* came to be associated in the Middle Ages with many of the attributes that had formerly been associated with *agape*, the highest form of love.[44] Thus, the definition of *caritas* began to shift towards a Christian theological concept that combined humanity's love for God with love expressed by generosity towards the public good. This concept would eventually evolve into the practice of giving alms to those most worthy of the blessing, variously the religious voluntary poor and the destitute involuntary poor. It would further evolve during the Protestant Reformation to demonstrate love for God and humanity in the term *caritas*'s broader sense of benevolence by deemphasizing works and focusing on good intentions.

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[40] "Caritas." Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*.
[41] "Caritas." Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*.
[42] "Amor." R.E. Latham, D.R. Howlett, and R.K. Ashdowne, ed. *The Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1975–2013), 17 vols. https://logeion.uchicago.edu/
[43] "Caritas." *DMLBS*.
[44] Burher, "From Caritas to Charity," 116.

Biblical Sources

Since early Christianity drew on Jewish traditions, it is useful to discuss Jewish conceptions of charity before Christianity developed as a separate religion. Although only a few instances of the word "charity" exist in the translated text of the Oxford *Jewish Study Bible*, many uses of the word "poor" appear alongside instructions for benevolence towards vulnerable people. When one examines the Hebrew Bible, several trends emerge regarding the concept of charity: religious ritual or obligation, attitudes towards the Other, and financial regulations. Charity, especially in the form of almsgiving, was incorporated into the stated rituals of many ceremonies. For example, The Shabbat Shekalim (the Sabbath of Shekels) is one of four annual special Sabbaths during which an additional portion of the Torah is read. In this ceremony, Jewish men are required to donate towards the upkeep of their Tabernacle, but temple officials may also distribute the contributions to the poor. A note on fasting and justice at the end of the Book of Isaiah states that charity towards the poor is an essential part of the religion (editorial commentary on Isaiah 58:1-7).[45] This note is provided as an explanation of lines in which the Judeans are characterized as practicing false piety and do not, therefore, genuinely convey these ideals. Furthermore, Kings 8:64 describes Solomon's exemplary offering to God, and its accompanying editorial note indicates the required offerings are so inexpensive that even the poor can afford to and are expected to participate in this ritual and other important ceremonies.[46] Thus, even the poor can meet their religious obligations to achieve sanctity. While not explicitly a charitable act, this consideration for the ability of the poor to perform their religious obligations

[45] *The Jewish Study Bible*, ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, 2nd ed., (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014). All Old Testament passages and commentary are taken from the book's online edition.
[46] Berlin and Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible*, 890.

demonstrates both a charitable concern for their material reality and their inclusion in the religious community.

Charity is embedded less formally within Jewish religious practice in customs that encourage believers to consider the needs of the poor. For example, in Leviticus 19:10, God tells Moses, “You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger.” According to God’s command in this line, the faithful are to avoid fully harvesting their crops because they should be leaving some food for the needy. God reiterates this point a few verses later: “And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I the Lord am your God.”[47] In the commentary provided by the editors, these commands regarding the harvest indicate that “The command to care for the needy is fulfilled by inaction. *I the Lord am your God* transforms social legislation into a sacred act.”[48] The editors point out that this form of charity consists of a lack of action but is still a deliberate performance of charity. This commandment is so important that it is repeated almost exactly from a previous chapter of Leviticus: “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I the Lord am your God.”[49] Thus, Jews are prevented by God from doing anything that would harm the poor.

Moreover, lines in the Hebrew Bible that mention the poor focus on their oppression. The Book of Isaiah describes the prophet’s vision of God’s plan for the world, an ideal future for the

[47] Leviticus 23:22.
[48] Editor’s note to Leviticus 19:9-10.
[49] Lev. 9:9-10.

faithful. In this prophecy, the poor are treated justly and avenged by God against those who oppressed them. People who treated the needy well are also rewarded for their kindness. In the Book of Ezekiel, the prophet explains that anyone who "has wronged the poor and the needy . . . has lent at advance interest, or exacted accrued interest. . . . If he has committed any of these abominations, he shall die."[50] These financial crimes against the poor are listed among other serious sins, such as adultery and robbery, in this section of the text. The following lines contrast the sinner with a more righteous person: "he [who] has given his bread to the hungry and clothed the naked; he has refrained from oppressing the poor; he has not exacted advance or accrued interest."[51] With oppression being a major theme in the story of the Israelites, the phrase "he has refrained from oppressing the poor" can be interpreted as praise for virtuous behavior rather than a simply objective description. The focus of these lines on the material conditions of the poor precedes the Corporal Works of Mercy outlined by Christ in the Gospel of Matthew, which later become essential to Christian acts of charity.

As the lines from Ezekiel above show, one of the most prevalent ways that generosity towards the poor is embedded in Jewish tradition and religious obligation is in their attitudes regarding financial lending. In Chapter 15 of Deuteronomy, Moses explains to the Israelites that giving to the needy is a duty and that one should give to both kinsmen and non-relatives. He says that there is no excuse for not giving because there will always be someone in need. In Deuteronomy 23:20, Moses also explains that Israelites may not exact interest on loans to their fellow countrymen. The accompanying editor's note indicates that lending was a system primarily to help the poor.[52] This commentary on lending occurs throughout the Old Testament.

[50] Ezekiel 18:12-13.
[51] Ezek. 18:16-17.
[52] Berlin and Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible*, 537.

Proverbs 28:8 states, “He who increases his wealth by loans at discount or interest / Amasses it for one who is generous to the poor.” The editor’s note to this line explains that if a person (specifically, an Israelite) is desperately in need, loans should be given interest-free “as an act of charity.” Exodus 22:24-26 similarly commands that not only should lenders not exact financial interest, they should not accept possessions, particularly clothing, as collateral:

> If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, do not act toward them as a creditor; exact no interest from them. If you take your neighbor's garment in pledge, you must return it to him before the sun sets; it is his only clothing, the sole covering for his skin. In what else shall he sleep? Therefore, if he cries out to Me, I will pay heed, for I am compassionate.

Thus, the concern for the poor includes not just their financial situation, but their material needs as well. This focus on material well-being evolves within Christianity (but not exclusively in that religion) to promote almsgiving and providing sustenance for the poor.

Similar to providing equity for the poor, the Jewish Bible also instructs believers to aid other vulnerable members of society, such as widows, orphans, and foreigners. In 1 Kings: 41-43 and 2 Chronicles 6:32-33, which contain the same prayer, Solomon says:

> Or if a foreigner who is not of Your people Israel comes from a distant land for the sake of your name -- for they shall hear about Your great name and Your mighty hand and Your outstretched arm -- when he comes to pray toward this House, oh, hear in Your heavenly abode and grant all that the foreigner asks You for. Thus all the peoples of the earth will know Your name and revere You, as does Your people Israel; and they will recognize that Your name is attached to this House that I have built.

Here, Solomon instructs his people to treat foreigners well, but, as with later Christian attitudes

towards charity, this kindness also benefits the actor, since such actions glorify God and the faithful. Foreigners are not only treated charitably but viewed charitably, in that some of them earn the friendship and respect of Jews. This nuanced treatment is also expressed later in both the late medieval Catholic view of charity as centered on works and the reformed Protestant view of charity as centered on intent, as well as the nuances within each tradition. Commandments regarding the treatment of strangers in Leviticus focus on the importance of community: "When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I the Lord am your God."[53] This conflation of the self with the Other as an exercise in empathy coincides with the later concept in medieval Christianity and religious literature as all believers comprising one body of Christ. The same concept is repeated in Exodus: "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."[54] Similarly, God also commands the Israelites to care for widows, orphans, and other marginalized members of society, saying, "You shall not ill-treat any widow or orphan. If you do mistreat them, I will heed their outcry as soon as they cry out to Me, and My anger shall blaze forth and I will put you to the sword, and your own wives shall become widows and your children orphans."[55] The editor's note for these lines states that "resident aliens, the poor, widows, and orphans are often mentioned together because, lacking social or family protection, they are vulnerable to exploitation."[56] Finally, commentary on Exodus 22.24 explains that the Hebrew conjunction *'im* is translated here and elsewhere in the Torah as *when*, rather than the more literal *if*, to reflect the conviction that "in Judaism charity is not a matter of 'if,' but

[53] Lev. 19:33-34.
[54] Lev. 22:20.
[55] Exodus 22:21-23.
[56] Berlin and Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible*, 245.

'when.'"[57] With the many forms of charity available to faithful Jews, its practice is obviously an integral part of the religion.

While not fully linked to the concept of charity as Christians would perceive it during the Protestant Reformation, the Hebrew Bible also emphasizes the community of the faithful and the responsibility of each member in maintaining its sanctity. An editorial note on Leviticus 19:17-18 explains, "The words *reprove your kinsmen* were seen as obligating competent persons to chastise their fellow Israelites for failings in their religious and ethical duties and returning them to the path of righteousness."[58] According to this commandment, the faithful are compelled to correct sinners because the community is a cohesive entity. This foundational concept of one united community of faith is reflected in the idea of the One body of Christ symbolized by the Eucharist in Christian tradition. The commentary further explains the specific language used in Chapter 19 of Leviticus: "Most notably, love your fellow as yourself was generalized in Jewish and Christian tradition to serve as a brief encapsulation of the Torah's ethics and as a blanket command covering all ethical duties not specifically mentioned."[59] The concept of love for one's neighbor, therefore, provides a summation of religious duty and is the foundation for Jewish and Christian morality. The editors further note that "[i]n the Priestly worldview, ethical behavior is a religious act only when performed as an act of obedience to God."[60] In order to be truly salvific, then, charitable acts, which fall under the larger category of ethics, must be completed with the intention of pleasing God. In medieval Christian ethics, almsgiving and other forms of charity demonstrated love for God because they demonstrated love for the community of faith, so obedience to God was necessarily linked to *caritas*. Obedience to God is even more strongly

[57] Berlin and Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible*, 2769.
[58] Berlin and Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible*, 342.
[59] Berlin and Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible*, 342.
[60] "The Priestly worldview" refers to the common name for a possible source of portions of the Torah.

linked in the post-Reformation view of charity as an internalized connection to fellow Christians. The concept of one community of faith is further emphasized by the line "You shall not hate your kinsfolk in your heart."[61] In Jewish tradition, "kinsfolk" could refer to any Israelite. Similarly, both pre- and post-Reformation Christianity emphasizes love for God as demonstrated through love for fellow Christians.

As Christianity became the dominant religion in Western Europe, early theologians built upon classical ideas of charity/*caritas* and on Jewish traditions from the Hebrew Bible to reflect Christ's teachings. While changing political, social, and legal hegemonies certainly contribute to shifts in societal values and laws, some scholars have recently insisted that scriptural and religious justification for active charity plays a larger role than previously acknowledged. In *Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition* (2013), theologian Gary A. Anderson focuses on charity in Christian scriptural tradition and particularly the emphasis placed on the poor and almsgiving. He explains "the origins of almsgiving as a highly privileged religious act within the nascent religions of Judaism and Christianity" and argues that the biblical reasoning and early theological interpretations for almsgiving were more altruistic than previously recognized.[62] A Christian view of charity centered on works certainly finds justification in the New Testament. The Gospels, in particular, present numerous instances of Christ preaching the importance of active charity. Justification for the doctrine of *caritas* exists in Christ's teachings that love for God is demonstrated through love for one's neighbor.

The Gospel of Mark, for example, contains several teaching moments when Jesus likens love for God to love for one's neighbor. When Jesus is in a temple in Jerusalem with his disciples, some chief priests, scribes, and elders question him: "One of the scribes came near and

[61] Leviticus 19:17.
[62] Gary A. Anderson, *Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2014), 2.

heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' Jesus answered, 'The first is "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.'"[63] Jesus explicitly states that the most important commandments are to love God and to love your neighbor, thereby linking them as God does earlier in the Hebrew Bible.

Jesus further connects humanity and the divine in the Gospel of Matthew. He tells his followers what the Day of Judgment will entail and says,

> Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."[64]

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[63] Mark 11:2 and 12:28-31. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, ed. Michael D. Coogan et. al. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001). Bible passages in these paragraphs are from *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* to represent academic translations. Upcoming paragraphs use the Latin Vulgate and Geneva Bible to more specifically delineate Catholic and Protestant ideology. The change is noted in the first footnote for each version.

[64] Matthew 25:34-40

This passage not only labels the “least of these,” that is, the poor and vulnerable, as Christ’s “family,” it also directly connects their treatment to his. Here, Jesus conflates the experiences of those occupying the lowest margins of society — those who are food-insecure, seriously ill, and imprisoned — with hardships inflicted upon himself. It is worth noting that the needs described in this passage are all material necessities. Theologians of the later Middle Ages would often cite these particular verses to encourage almsgiving that supported the corporeal needs of the recipients.[65] As almsgiving and other material charity became dominant modes of piety, Jesus’s Parable of the Sheep and The Goats/Parable of the Judgment provided scriptural justification for conflating the body of Christ with his larger following. This concept would take on Eucharistic, and therefore sacramental, meaning to make charity especially important to Christian salvation. This imperative also linked the practical application of charity with the theological doctrine of *caritas*, since the passage from Matthew links works of mercy with Jesus’s identification with the poor.

Biblical arguments in favor of active charity extend beyond the Gospels. The Letter of James in the New Testament explains to early Christians the importance of good works in demonstrating one’s faith and receiving salvation: “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,’ and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.”[66] Here, James associates “works” with “bodily needs,” implying that active charity is the greatest demonstration of one’s faith. He goes on to say, “Show me your faith apart

[65] For debates over who was truly worthy of almsgiving during the Middle Ages, see: Michael D. Bailey, “Religious Poverty, Mendicancy, and Reform in the Late Middle Ages,” *Church History* 72, no. 3 (September 2003): 479.
[66] James 2:14-17.

from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith."[67] James then discusses the story of Abraham and Isaac and stresses that Abraham's binding of Isaac and the preparations for sacrificing his son demonstrate the importance of action as a display of faith. He tells his readers, "You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was brought to completion by the works. . . . You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. . . . For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead."[68] According to this reasoning, it was not enough for Abraham to agree to sacrifice his son; he must perform the ritual (or at least begin to perform it) in order to prove his faith and please God. This example expands upon James's earlier command to his readers:

> But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.[69]

The mirror analogy implies that those who hear God's commandments and do not act on them are isolated from fellow believers. They interact only with their own reflections, which they immediately forget, and do not constitute a real part of the Church because they do not interact with fellow Christians. They are not in communion with the faithful and therefore not in true communion with God. Those who hear the Word of God must act upon it. James further explains that "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world."[70] Like the authors of the

[67] James 2:18.
[68] James 2:22, 24, 26.
[69] James 1:22-25.
[70] James 1:27.

Hebrew Bible, James specifically mentions two of the most vulnerable groups in Roman and ancient Jewish/early Christian society, orphans and widows, perhaps to emphasize the importance of caring for the community's material needs. The general terms "orphans" and "widows," however, imply that one should give indiscriminately to those in the most dire situations. According to this perspective, someone's worthiness to receive charity was more dependent on their level of need than on any other factor.

Early modern reformers also could look to the same or similar biblical passages to justify a kind of charity that was directed inward towards one sense of communion with God. Pheme Perkins explains the differences between James's teachings about faith and charity to early Jewish-Christian congregations and Paul's teachings on the same topics in his letters. She explains that James "appears to oppose the thinking of Paul on the issue of the relation between faith and works, and the means by which the believer attains 'justification' or the state of right relationship with God."[71] For James, then, just as faith without works is dead, works without faith are also dead. The acts themselves are not salvific if they are not propelled by love for God and fellow humans. Thus, early Protestant reformers could interpret these lines as emphasizing intent over action as they revised Christian theology and practice. According to Perkins, "James sees works as the acts that spring from the love of the believer for God (2.14), whereas for Paul works are the external observations of ritual, like circumcision, regarded in isolation from any connection to one's relationship to God."[72] As these distinctions indicate, one could seek biblical justification for a view of *caritas* associated more with a personal relationship with God or with certain demonstrated actions, specifically material forms of charity. Perkins also explains that "Paul composes the famous 'hymn to love' as part of his argument for solidarity of the

[71] Pheme Perkins, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 386.
[72] Perkins, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 386.

community as the ‘body of Christ.’”[73] Indeed, in 1 Corinthians Chapter 12, Paul explains that members of the Church constitute one body and that “members may have the same care for one another.”[74] Throughout this letter, Paul emphasizes the importance of community through community with God, a virtue that reformers could interpret as justification for the primacy of faith over works.

The Letter to the Hebrews is another New Testament epistle traditionally attributed to Paul, but it is now generally understood by biblical scholars to emulate his style while the author remains unknown. Perkins explains that the “early church leaders, Origen, Clement, and Tertullian… recognized the differences in style and theology between Hebrews and Paul’s letters.”[75] They disputed its authorship, and scholars still do not have conclusive evidence, despite some plausible theories. What is important is that someone built upon Paul’s theology, purposefully imitating his style and some of his language, but more explicitly stating the value of faith in receiving salvation. The author says of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross: “For by a single offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.”[76] In this line, salvation is portrayed as a more passive gift from God. The author further states, “And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”[77] Here, the author still asserts the importance of a community of faith, but the concern is directed towards spiritual health rather than people’s material needs. This definition will become important to theologians who emphasize the demonstration of community through mutual faith

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[73] Perkins, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 268.
[74] 1 Corinthians 12:25.
[75] Perkins, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 369.
[76] Hebrews 10:14.
[77] Hebrews 10:24-25.

and consideration. While this concept of charity was present throughout Christian history, it did not become the dominant perspective until the Protestant Reformation.

Medieval Christians had access to Latin translations of the Old Testament, so they would have knowledge of their content through a secondary version and not the original Hebrew. The Book of Psalms was available to literate laypeople, generally the nobility, in the Latin Psalter; collections of Psalms were also available to them in Books of Hours.[78] The full Old Testament was available to clerics and other scholars in the Vulgate/Latin Bible. The Psalms provide many examples of Israelites' obligation to the poor, which, in the Vulgate Latin translation, may have been interpreted as obligations for Christians as well: "He hath distributed, he hath given to the poor: his justice remaineth for ever and ever: his horn shall be exalted in glory." ("Distrubuit, dedit pauperibus; / iustitia, eius manit in saeculum saeculi, / cornu eius exaltabitur in gloria.")[79] The use of the verb "distribute" (distrubuit) implies a literal giving of material items, thereby exalting those who donate materially to the poor. Another line from Psalms reads, "Blessed is he that understandeth concerning the needy and the poor: the Lord will deliver him in the evil day." ("Beatus, qui intellegit de egeno; / in die mala liberabit eum Dominus.")[80] Specifically, the medieval Latin word *egeno* translates as "needy" or a "pauper," which heavily implies a material need.[81] The line indicates praise for those who provide material charity for the poor. Similarly, a line from Proverbs reads, "He that stoppeth his ear against the cry of the poor, shall also cry himself, and shall not be heard." ("Qui obturat aurem suam ad clamorem pauperis, / et ipse

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[78] Eamon Duffy, *Marking the Hours: English People and Their Prayers 1240-1570* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2006).
[79] Psalms 111:9. The Latin Vulgate contains one less Psalm than some Protestant and academic Bibles. Psalm 111:9 sometimes corresponds to 112:9 in other Bibles. Psalms cited from the Vulgate may therefore be one chapter number off from other versions of the Bible. When discussing the Vulgate, all Latin text is from Nova Vulgata from the Intratext digital library, and all English text is from the Douay-Rheims translation of the Vulgate available at Project Gutenberg.
[80] Psalms 40:2.
[81] *DMLBS*, ed. R.E. Latham, D.R. Howlett, and R.K. Ashdowne.

clamabit, et non exaudietur."[82] This line emphasizes the absolute necessity of almsgiving for Christians. While the line does not discuss salvation, specifically, the metaphor of not being heard implies that Christians who fail in their charitable duty will be disregarded. Moreover, "He that giveth to the poor shall not want: he that despiseth his entreaty, shall suffer indigence." ("Qui dat pauperi, non indigebit; / qui autem occultat oculos, abundabit maledictis.")[83] Here, the implication for those who do not help the poor moves beyond disconnection from God to actual punishment, again, emphasizing the imperative of almsgiving. The Book of Proverbs most explicitly commands almsgiving when it discusses the generosity of those who give food, the most basic necessity, to the poor: "He that is inclined to mercy, shall be blessed: for of his bread he hath given to the poor" ("Qui bono oculo est, benedicetur, / de panibus enim suis dedit pauperi").[84] Medieval theologians could, therefore, look to the most widely read Old Testament passages in their time for evidence of the importance of good works.

Conversely, unorthodox theologians and, later, reformists could also point to Old Testament passages to justify a more faith-based, introspective approach to love of neighbor. Martin Luther, for example, read the Psalms as relying "solely on God's word and promise for salvation… [he] drew parallels between the Old Testament faithful and contemporary men of faith; each, he discovered, possessed as much as he believed."[85] Further guiding this reliance on faith, The Book of Proverbs provides lines that emphasize a sense of charity towards one's neighbor through more abstract actions: "Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all the children of destruction."[86] This proverb focuses on socio-political advocacy for the vulnerable,

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[82] Proverbs 21:13.
[83] Proverbs 28:27.
[84] Proverbs 22:9.
[85] Steven Ozment. *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1980), 243.
[86] Proverbs 31:8. Bible passages in this paragraph are from the Geneva Bible, which would have been the most common version available to an English audience during the early Reformation.

rather than on material sustenance. The following line reads, "Open thy mouth: judge righteously, and judge the afflicted, and the poor."[87] Similar to line 8, this line focuses on intention rather than material support, even though it explicitly names the poor as worthy of consideration. Therefore, Luther and other reformists could also find justification in the Old Testament for a Protestant view of charity. Instead of uniting with God and the community of faith through good works, Luther and many of his contemporaries believed that "to be conformed with God meant to agree with his judgment that all men are sinful and still believe his promise to save them nonetheless."[88] Charity, then, became less focused on tangible acts such as almsgiving and more on piety expressed by all members of the community.

Although the Bible has a long history of interpretation and translation, both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament emphasize the importance of charity, ethics, and community throughout their books. Depending on one's ideology, lines can be found in support of tangible acts of charity or a more interior form of charity centered on one's identification with the Christian community. The following sections discuss dominant religious trends from early Christianity through the Protestant Reformation, but there were, of course, a wide range of beliefs and unorthodox movements.

Patristic Era and Early Middle Ages

In the first half of the Middle Ages, the rise of monasticism, which centered around prayer and devotion, promoted voluntary poverty within a religious house as the most righteous and faithful way to serve God.[89] Asceticism, it was thought, kept clerics unstained from an

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[87] Proverbs 31:9.

[88] Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 243.

[89] As I demonstrate throughout this chapter, religious debates ensued throughout the Middle Ages regarding the distinctions between voluntary and involuntary poverty as well as the value of labor vs. mendicancy for laypersons and those of lower social status. For example, Michael D. Bailey states that, according to reform debates about lay religious piety among Dominican theologians in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, "if the needs of the entire community could more easily be met through mendicancy than manual labor, that is, if begging left more time

inherently sinful earthly life and provided the best expression of one's love for God. Lay people could also model this behavior to attain a less sacred level of devotion. As James William Brodman and Mark Atherton have recently shown, exceptions to the ascetic ideal for clerics in the early Middle Ages included episcopal care for the poor, the ill, and especially travelers and pilgrims. Lay figures, especially aristocrats wealthy enough to do so, also demonstrated pious charity by donating to religious houses, establishing early hospitals (which in their early conceptions could specifically serve the sick, but might also shelter travelers and pilgrims), and sometimes taking in or personally providing for the poor.[90] Such practices indicate that materially-focused charity was an important aspect of medieval Christianity alongside the contemplative life. Additionally, the continued emphasis on tangible charity ties the concept to its original Latin usage that denotes value.

As quoted in the introductory section of this chapter, in early Christian usage, "charity comes to denote an affection that is nonphysical and directed primarily toward God."[91] In this sense, charity signifies one's love for God. St. Augustine of Hippo defined *caritas* as "reserved for the special sort of love that bonds man to God."[92] In Book I of *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine concludes that proper interpretation of Scripture leads Christians to love God and neighbor. He further states that to not come to this conclusion is to misinterpret Scripture. For Augustine, love of God and love of neighbor are inseparable concepts and are the ultimate duty of every obedient Christian. Augustine also writes that "[t]he things of which we have charge do not belong to us but to the poor."[93] For Augustine, then, the natural conclusion of love for one's

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for spiritual pursuits, then the community should support itself from alms. If, however, begging actually took more time away from spiritual matters than working would, the community should live from labor" (481).

[90] Brodman, *Charity and Religion in Medieval Europe*; Atherton, *The Making of England: A New History of the Anglo-Saxon World*.

[91] Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, 3.

[92] Burher,"From Caritas to Charity," 119.

[93] St. Augustine qtd. in Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, 46.

neighbor, and therefore love for God, is to actively care for the poor.

As Augustine's writing demonstrates, God's love became conflated with neighborly love as the poor became increasingly associated with the image of the suffering Christ while the Roman Empire transitioned into Christianity. As Christianity was institutionalized during the late Roman Empire, charity specifically directed towards the poor became episcopal work: "Classical notions of giving ('euergesia' - to do good) had been seen in earlier generations as a form of mere civic virtue, practiced only by the very wealthy who doled out patronage to clients selected without regard to their actual need."[94] This imperative ultimately spread to the larger community as Christian bishops emphasized the needs of the poor and the duty of the faithful to provide them with material relief. Peter Brown explains that it became the duty of the Roman Emperor to become a "lover of the poor," and grave inscriptions for affluent Romans included descriptions such as "elemosinarius," which Brown translates as "a person 'devoted to the giving of alms.'"[95] Brown further explains that civic duty reserved for the elites evolved into a Christianized love for the poor as the empire embraced the new religion and poverty became a more visible problem in city streets with urban expansion. Thus, the conflation of civic responsibility and care for the poor had both religious and practical origins, since acts of charity directly mitigated local nuisances of visible poverty.

This shifting obligation coincides with the linguistic shift in Latin, already discussed above, from *caritas* as beloved or expensive objects to a broader sense of "benevolence," and, eventually, the term *caritates* to describe those to whom this benevolence is directed. Moreover,

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[94] Brodman, 12 quoting Peter Brown. The term *euergetism* was coined by the French historian Andre Boulanger, but was based on the ancient Greek for "doing good deeds" and describes the charitable public donations required of wealthy citizens to be considered *generous* to society according to Aristotle's definition of that virtue.

[95] Peter Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 1.

this notion of charity expands upon Aristotle's previous definition of *generosity* (a word used in the excerpt above) to specify the correct way, at least for bishops and other clergy, to spend their resources and collective wealth and for all members of the Christian community to embody this virtue through material giving. Thus, while Aristotle describes *generosity* as the proper spending of wealth, especially by prominent members of society, early Catholic religious doctrine particularized this virtue within a Christian context.

While Roman Christianity helped establish the new religion among the empire, the decline of Roman political authority in Europe solidified the institution of Catholicism as a centralizing force. The "collapse of the Roman imperial infrastructure" meant that the Church stepped in to care for society's most vulnerable members.[96] The reduction of an expansive empire to smaller kingdoms also helped solidify the Christian notion of charity because the plight of the poor, once localized and visible in Roman urban centers, was now the responsibility of smaller, more intimate communities. The development of Christian charity during the early Middle Ages focused on religious obligation, practical necessity, and caritative love for God and neighbor.

Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* illustrates the accepted notions of piety and caritative practices in England in the early medieval period. The second half of Book I discusses Augustine of Canterbury's mission to evangelize Britain under Pope Gregory the Great in 597. In Chapter 26, Augustine's monastic lifestyle plays a role in converting the early medieval King Æthelberht of Kent:

> As soon as they entered the dwelling-place assigned them they began to imitate the course of life practiced in the primitive church; applying themselves to frequent prayer,

[96] Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, 46.

> watching and fasting; preaching the word of life to as many as they could; despising all worldly things, as not belonging to them; receiving only their necessary food from those they taught; living themselves in all respects conformably to what they prescribed to others, and being always disposed to suffer any adversity, and even to die for that truth which they preached.[97]

According to Bede, these practices inspire the local people, including the king himself, to convert to Christianity. They were so moved in "admiring the simplicity of their innocent life, and the sweetness of their heavenly doctrine" that the people of Kent, including the king, desired to emulate that ascetic and holy lifestyle.[98] Additionally, the pope's letter to the king sent with the arrival of Augustine instructs the king that "Bishop Augustine, who is instructed in the monastical rule, full of the knowledge of the holy Scripture, and, by the help of God, endued with good works" will help lead the people to heaven.[99] Although Æthelberht's conversion inspired many of his people to convert as well, he did not forcefully convert the remaining pagans, since, according to Bede, he believed "that the service of Christ ought to be voluntary, not by compulsion."[100] After Æthelberht's baptism, "he gave his preachers a settled residence in his metropolis of Canterbury, with such possessions of different kinds as were necessary for their subsistence."[101] Thus, Æthelberht begins the tradition of royal material support for religious institutions, a tradition subsequent kings, including Alfred, would follow. Furthermore, Book III Chapter XVIII tells of Sigebert, King of East Anglia who abdicated the throne to join a monastery and "applied himself rather to gain a heavenly throne." King Sigebert, according to

[97] Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*, trans. L.C. Jane (London: J. M. Dent, 1903) 1.26. Available in public domain from Fordham University's Internet Medieval Sourcebook, https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/bede-book1.asp.
[98] Bede, *EH*, 1.26.
[99] Bede, *EH*, 1.32.
[100] Bede, *EH*, 1.26.
[101] Bede, *EH*, 1.26.

Bede, had previously established religious institutions as centers of learning and retired to a monastery that he had founded. Bede lists his works at the end of Book V of *EH*, and it includes "interpretations and explanations" of Old Testament and New Testament books, showing that scripture heavily influenced medieval theologians' views of charity and other doctrines.

Following the precedent set by Christian Rome, religious institutions in early medieval Christian Europe "place a special obligation upon the clergy to provide hospitality, condemn acts that defraud the poor of their just due, and assert for bishops a supervisory role over all hospitals, except perhaps those of royal foundation."[102] Early Church councils, including the 815 and 816 Councils of Aachen, the 853 Council of Rome, and the 858 Council of Quierzy, emphasized this special obligation of episcopal charity.[103] For example, canon 9 of the 816 Council of Aachen states, "A layman who receives one or two paupers fulfills his obligation of hospitality; a bishop who does not take in all of them is inhuman."[104] Such important ecclesiastical matters and doctrinal conclusions did reach Christians in England: Pope Gregory I (590-604), who sent the first widely successful mission to convert the early medieval kingdoms in England, "believed that a prelate who did not practice charity was unworthy of the title of bishop, [and] included this requirement in his commission to Augustine of Canterbury."[105] Gregory's requirement and Church council documents show that charity became not only an episcopal duty, but an essential requirement that *compelled* the highest levels of the clergy (at least in theory) toward charity. English kings also traveled to the continent to visit Frankish kingdoms and Rome, as Asser attests in his *Life of King Alfred*, so they were influenced by official and widespread religious

[102] Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, 48.
[103] Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, 48 and 49.
[104] qtd. in Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, 49.
[105] Brodman, *Charity and Religion* 48. In his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Bede discusses many additional instances of correspondence and travel, showing that ecclesiastical doctrine would have been well communicated to English leaders and clergy.

beliefs and practices.[106]

King Alfred, ruler of the kingdom of Wessex in England from 871-99, also greatly influenced early English Christianity. An Old English translation of Pope Gregory's *Liber Regulae Pastoralis* (*Pastoral Care*), traditionally attributed to Alfred, provides guidance to ecclesiastical leaders, and Alfred's policies and public image suggest that he adhered to this guidance even as a secular ruler.[107] The *Pastoral Care* emphasizes the important spiritual and intellectual characteristics of effective leaders, especially in demonstrating wisdom and caring for their subjects. The work discusses the examples provided by Solomon, David, and other Old Testament kings. Gregory and Alfred also cite the instructions of Peter, Paul, Christ, and other New Testament figures. Thus, this text attributed to Alfred presents the idea that charity was as much the obligation of kings as it was the clergy. In Chapter 44 the Old English *Pastoral Care*, the translator writes that those who give to the poor must do so according to need and must do so humbly, since it is God's love propelling them towards good works.[108] Chapter 45 explains that those who hoard wealth are stealing "common property" that should be distributed to those in need. Further, those who refuse to give alms are guilty of robbing those who need such generosity to survive. Simon Keynes' account of Alfred's generous almsgiving to the Church and directly to the poor attest to Alfred's genuine adherence to these beliefs and "sugges[t] a desire on his part to set an example of personal piety."[109] Furthermore, in his Preface to Gregory's *Pastoral Care*, Alfred describes his intended expansion of education among the

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[106] Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, trans. Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, Alfred The Great: *Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources* (New York: Penguin, 1983).
[107] Keynes and Lapidge, *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, 14.
[108] King Alfred, *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, trans. and ed. Henry Sweet (London: Published for the Early English Text Society by N. Trübner & Co., 1871), 321-323.
[109] Simon Keynes, "Alfred the Great and the Kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons," *A Companion to Alfred the Great*, ed. Nicole Guenther Discenza and Paul E. Szarmach (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2015), 32; and Keynes and Lapidge, eds. *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources* (New York: Penguin, 1983), 36.

Angelcynne (English people). He specifies that his reforms apply to young men with enough wealth/opportunity ("spēda") and capability to study texts until they are old enough for other work.[110] Alfred's Preface is addressed to bishops throughout his kingdom who will receive copies of his translation of *Pastoral Care*, so it is likely that Alfred planned to have the Church educate the young men in his realm. Those men who were destined for a religious life probably continued their education within ecclesiastical institutions, and those who left still would have a significant foundation in education and abstemious piety.

King Alfred's charity extended to material support as well. He founded at least two religious houses at Athelney and Shaftesbury and provided financial support to many others that had already been established. In their introduction to a collection of works by Alfred and his contemporaries, Keynes and Lapidge attribute this generosity to Alfred's "desire . . . to set an example of personal piety" and express "his family's faith."[111] Keynes and Lapidge note that Alfred did not impose any regulations on monastic orders, and they attribute this liberality to a sense of generosity and leadership, but it may also indicate a desire to appear benevolent. Additionally, due to the expense of defending the kingdom from Viking attacks, Keynes and Lapidge claim that Alfred "did not have the material resources to spare for a more lavish display of munificence towards the Church" that he otherwise would have shown.[112] Yet, as Abels describes, Alfred did seize lands from the Church and imposed payments on parishes to support local civic projects and for military defense and negotiation.[113] These actions may seemingly contradict Alfred's piety and emphasis on tithing, but Abels explains that Alfred was managing

[110] King Alfred, *Preface*, trans. Sweet, 6-7.
[111] Keynes and Lapidge, *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, 36.
[112] Keynes and Lapidge, *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, 37.
[113] Richard Abels, *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship, and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (Milton Park, UK: Routledge, 1998), 245.

his kingdom's economy, and, with a divine right to rule, he viewed the clergy as his servants and subjects.[114] Therefore, while Alfred's seizure of Church property, imposed fees, and withheld material support contradict his previous commitment to almsgiving, he still fashions his image as a ruler who is concerned for the wellbeing of his people, regardless of his true intentions. Additionally, Alfred's educational program, dissemination of translations, and other "material support for the Church" provided the means for religious art to flourish. In addition to Alfred's support of English churches, Keynes and Lapidge note "several recorded occasions in late 880s when he sent his alms and those of the West Saxons to Rome."[115] In his will, Alfred also gives some of his wealth to the Church. After distributing his personal estates to family members, Alfred bequeaths money to several of his bishops, "mass-priests" ("mæssepreostum"), "poor servants of God" ("earmum Godes þeowum"), the "poor" ("earmum þearfum"), and the church in which he will rest.[116] At a moment when Alfred was likely considering the state of his soul, he makes sure to distribute part of his wealth to the Church and to the poor. His association of the Church and the poor implies that Alfred equates charity towards the poor with salvific almsgiving. Thus, while monasticism and scholarship were perhaps the most revered forms of piety in early medieval England, almsgiving was already important during Alfred's reign and would continue to be so into the later Middle Ages. In the final paragraph of his will, after Alfred has accounted for his personal wealth and estates, he leaves directions for the care of "the dependents among those whom I have supported" ("cyrlife þara þe ic foregeald"), granting "that they be entitled to their freedom and their free choice" ("þæt hy syn heora freolses wyrðe hyra cyres") to choose another lord without coercion or bribery. Alfred forbids his heirs from

[114] Abels, *Alfred the Great*, 243.
[115] Keynes and Lapidge, *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, 14.
[116] Keynes and Lapidge, *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, 177. Checked against British Library Add MS 82931.

"oppressing" ("*geswence*") these people.[117] In this way, Alfred also offers charity in a non-materialist sense. He instead provides for the general liberty and well-being of his people.

The first half of King Alfred's will discusses plans for fulfilling his father's will in regards to changes in property ownership between him and his kinsmen since Æthelwulf's death. King Æthelwulf's will is described in Asser's *Life of King Alfred*: "And so, for the benefit of his soul (which from the first flower of his youth he was keen to care for in all respects), he enjoined on his successors after him, right up the final Day of Judgment, that for every ten hides [measurement of land] throughout all his hereditary land one poor man (whether native or foreigner) should be sustained with food, drink, and clothing."[118] Keynes and Lapidge explain that "suggests that the king granted this portion of his own land either directly to religious foundations, or to laymen who could thereby enjoy the land free from the customary obligations… and who could at the same time be enabled to convey the land themselves to the Church."[119] Æthelwulf's tithing practices are confirmed in formal charters copied in later centuries, at least one of which can be authenticated as deriving from an original. Upon his death, according to Asser, the king also stipulates that "three hundred mancuses" be sent to Rome and used in honor of St. Peter and St. Paul, to light the lamps in their churches with oil, and for the Pope. Here, we see a form of almsgiving, but it is given in support of those who live a mendicant and ascetic lifestyle. It seems that by this period, the ideal form of charity did require almsgiving from lay people, but it was directed towards those who truly live the ideal religious life within ecclesiastical institutions.

According to Keynes and Lapidge, circulation of Asser's *Life of King Alfred* in medieval

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[117] Keynes and Lapidge, *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, 178. Checked against British Library Add MS 82931.
[118] Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, trans. Keynes and Lapidge.
[119] Keynes and Lapidge, *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, 233.

England was likely sparse: "Although the work was written for a Welsh audience, there is no evidence that it ever circulated in Wales. What limited circulation the work did enjoy was entirely in England; but even in England it does not seem to have been known to more than a handful of medieval authors."[120] It was not until the eleventh and twelfth centuries that authors and historians began to cite Asser's work. This means that Asser's contemporaries (except for perhaps a close few) would not have been familiar with his biography of Alfred, but the values professed by it describe a personality and culture already in place.

As religious communities, scriptural studies, and Christianity itself spread throughout Europe, demonstrating God's love through material subsistence for the poor became an essential practice. Early Spanish monastic leaders "demanded that a third of all monastic goods be reserved for the succor of the poor."[121] This ecclesiastical obligation toward the poor shifted to a broader obligation for all Christians, especially with the rise of religious pilgrimage. While "episcopal and monastic initiatives predominated before 1000, charity and hospitaller foundations were never solely the work of the clergy."[122] Specifically, as pilgrimage increased throughout Christian Europe, the laity were compelled to offer hospitality to travelers: "the Capitulary of Aquisgranense of 802 commanded everyone, clergy and laity, to offer water and shelter to all pilgrims and travelers. Bishop Jonas of Orleans (d. 843 or 844), in his treatise on the proper life for lay people, stressed the obligation of hospitality and other works of mercy that all Christians shared."[123] Brodman specifically refers to truly charitable practices as "caritative practice," linking charity to Christian theology.[124] However, whether charitable giving was a true

[120] Keynes and Lapidge, *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, 57.
[121] Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, 49.
[122] Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, 55.
[123] Jacques Le Maho qtd. in Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, 50.
[124] Keynes and Lapidge, *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, 50.

demonstration of *caritas* or served other purposes is ongoing within scholarly debate. While Brodman asserts that charitable giving in the Middle Ages was largely driven by altruistic religious concerns, even as the theology behind those concerns evolved, many other scholars still claim that these concerns were largely political, financial, or for personal gain. Others still provide a more nuanced view of generous motivations combined with self-interest.[125]

During the Norman rule in England, Anselm of Canterbury's *Cur Deus Homo?* (commonly translated as *Why God Became a Man*, instead of the literal translation of *Why Did God Become a Man?*) establishes Christ's crucifixion as a form of atonement for humanity's sins, and what I argue is an early form of communal charity. Earlier theologians such as St. Augustine of Hippo had previously argued that Christ's crucifixion paid a ransom to Satan for humanity's original sin, but Anselm's satisfaction theory of atonement posits that the crucifixion provided a *substitution* that alleviated humanity's sins.[126] According to Anselm, Christ's suffering and death provided a balanced exchange for humanity's salvation, rather than payment for a debt. His excessive obedience to God satisfied the injustice created by humanity's disobedience. This shift in doctrine emphasizes the importance of true unity with God, a concept that I argue shapes teachings on charity, removes Satan from the equation, and emphasizes the importance of the community of the faithful. One of Anselm's stated reasons for explaining the Incarnation is to guide the faithful to a deeper understanding of theology,

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[125] Allen J. Frantzen, for example, discusses Alfred and other nobles' charitable donations to the Church as mutually beneficial for their salvation and the kingdom's political and social stability in *King Alfred* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986). See also Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Adam J. Davis, "The Social and Religious Meanings of Charity in Medieval Europe" *History Compass* 12, no. 12 (December 2014): 935-50, https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12207; and Kate Crassons, *The Claims of Poverty: Literature, Culture, and Ideology in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010).
[126] See Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*?, Brandon R. Peterson's "Would a Forgiving God Demand Satisfaction? An Examination of Mercy and Atonement," *Angelicum* vol. 93. no. 4, 2016, and "Atonement" in the *Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*.

> They do not seek such an explanation in order to achieve faith through reason, but rather so that they can delight in the understanding and contemplation of things they already believe, and so that they may be "always ready," to the best of their ability, "to give an answer to all who demand" from them "the reason of the hope that is in" us.[127]

Here, Anselm exercises a form of *caritas* by ensuring that others may gain an introspective relationship with God through contemplation, helping to unify the community of faith. Anselm's theory itself also demonstrates what I argue is a form of *caritas* in its explanation of the atonement. Since humans severed their relationship with God through sin, only a human can repair that relationship. Still, God's omnipotence sets the terms for salvation, so the savior must be both human and divine in nature to truly unite Christians with God once again. By focusing on the unity of the community of faith with God, Anselm's theology demonstrates the importance of *caritas* to salvation. Anselm himself was torn between monasticism and a more active religious life, but he eventually chose monastic life.[128] However, Anselm's corpus of theological works suggests that he did value communication and involvement with the larger Christian community.

Finally, the shifting notions of *charity* in the early medieval period are also evident in the development of the word *charity* in the English language. The *Oxford English Dictionary* records the earliest use of the English *charity* ("carited") in 1154 in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* entry for the year 1137: "On al þis yuele time heold Martin abbot his abbotrice—& fand þe munekes & te gestes al þat heom behoued & heold micel carited in þe hus." (During this evil time Abbot Martin held his abbacy and found the monks and the guests all that behooved them and held

[127] Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus Homo*? trans. Thomas Williams, *Anselm: Basic Writings* (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 2007).
[128] Thomas Williams, *Anselm: Basic Writings* (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 2007).

much charity/caritas in the house.)[129] The *Chronicle* illustrates a particular meaning of "charity" "as manifested in action: "*spec.* alms-giving. Applied also to the public provision for the relief of the poor, which has largely taken the place of the almsgiving of individuals."[130] Here, charity is directly associated with helping the poor, a concept that is also frequently evoked in late medieval literature. The *OED* also lists "hospitality" as a possible translation for "carited," a further connection between "charity" and the act of caring for others, a connotation repeated in the *OED*'s textual exempla from 1200-1500. Even though official ecclesiastic teachings remained focused on the importance of an ascetic life of voluntary poverty, linguistic analysis shows that this definition of charity associated with *caritas* was already partially associated with works and almsgiving, and contemporary literature, as I will show in my discussions of *Piers Plowman*, the York biblical plays, and some earlier and contemporary works, was reflecting this change.

Later Middle Ages: c. 1250 - c. 1500

The *Middle English Dictionary* more closely defines "charity" in terms of love for God as demonstrated by love for neighbor. It lists four definitions for "charite":

> 1a. (a) The supreme virtue of Love or Charity according to Christian doctrine, comprising affection, devotion, benevolence, kindness, mercy, gratitude as between God and man or man and man; ~ of, to, toward god; ~ of, to man; (b) ben in ~, have this virtue; ben out of ~, lack this virtue; (c) Charity personified; dame ~, ladi ~.
>
> 1b. (a) The love of God for man; (b) divine grace; in ~, out of ~.
>
> 2. (a) Benevolence, beneficence, charity; holden, sheuen ~, extend hospitality; (b) an act of benevolence or charity, benefaction; ded, werk of ~, an act of kindness or charity, alms-

[129] The translation is my own.
[130] "carited," 4b, *Oxford English Dictionary* online.

giving; also, an act of devotion; fulfillen ~, do a generous thing, given ~, give alms; setten ~, exercise charity; (c) a charitable gift, alms; also, ~ of the house, funds received by a religious house from its benefactors.

3. (a) Loving kindness, affection, fondness, devotion; ~ of brotherhede, brotherly love; haven in ~, be fond of; (b) graciousness, mercy.

4. for charite, par ~, etc., as an act of kindness, for the sake of charity, etc.; often simply as an intensive; -- common in entreaties and requests.[131]

Each of these definitions addresses some aspect of a late medieval theology of *caritas*. The second and fourth definitions explicitly include deeds and acts, while the first and third definitions focus more on intention but are not fully divorced from behavior. Words like "affection," "kindness," and "mercy" still imply treatment of others and reflect a late medieval religious culture focused on works. However, these definitions show more nuance between intention and behavior than is often discussed in studies of medieval charity. Rather than a distinct separation between active charity in the Middle Ages—whether expressed as genuine almsgiving or associated with the less altruistic practice of indulgences—and the more introspective faith practiced after the Protestant Reformation, the essential component of charity is one's relationship to others. The English word is therefore never fully separated from the theological concept, despite changes to both over time.

Despite variations in orthodoxy and debates among scholars and clerics, the theology of the later Middle Ages was thoroughly articulated and eventually greatly influenced by St. Thomas Aquinas. According to Brodman:

[131] *Middle English Dictionary*. "charite." ed. Robert E. Lewis, et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952-2001). Online edition in *Middle English Compendium*. ed. Frances McSparran, et al.. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2000-2018). http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/.

> Theories of an active charity, apparent in patristic sources, revived in the twelfth century and provided the ideological underpinning for a new medieval European understanding of social charity. The writings of Innocent III and Thomas Aquinas, for example, are particularly important for establishing an obligation as well as a right. The former is imposed upon all Christians who, within certain parameters, are bound to share their material wealth with the needy. The latter involves the ennoblement of the needy, who become not only fit objects for charity but who also acquire a positive right to assistance.[132]

Thomas Aquinas describes three types of virtues: The intellectual virtues are "perfect reason in regard to acquiring theoretical knowledge" (wisdom, science, and understanding) "or in regard to making or doing" (art and prudence); the moral virtues, which, "in the present treatise, are discussed primarily in terms of the four cardinal virtues: justice, fortitude, temperance, prudence, the latter being included again because of its intrinsic relation to appetite, wherein it has a moral dimension"; and the theological virtues, faith, hope, and love.[133] According to translator John A. Oesterle, "Contrary to the moral and intellectual virtues, which are acquired by our own efforts though not without divine assistance, the theological virtues are wholly infused in us by God."[134] As a theological virtue, charity is tied more directly to one's relationship with God than the first two kinds of virtues. Oesterle states,

> To be morally good, it is not enough merely to refrain from evil and injurious acts, and so perhaps only reluctantly follow out what we know we should do. The morally *virtuous* person is one whose appetite has the order of reason realized in it; his very appetite, in

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[132] Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, 5

[133] John A. Oesterle, trans. *Treatise on the Virtues by St. Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966).

[134] Oesterle, trans. *Treatise on the Virtues*, xvi.

> other words, operates with perfection, and the infallible sign that a person has reached this state of human excellence is that he *enjoys* acting virtuously. The virtuous person, accordingly, is not grim; on the contrary, he experiences genuine pleasure in choosing morally good actions.[135]

As I will discuss in Chapter Four, the intention associated with charity becomes more prominent in early modern literature, but Oesterle's reading of Aquinas suggests that these boundaries are not completely distinct. For Aquinas, reason and the pleasure of choosing to act morally play important roles in shaping one's actions and, when they are directed properly, enhance the sanctity of one's actions. Indeed, Aquinas's discussions of works, quoted below, associate deeds with intentions and closeness to God. Late medieval Catholic theology was heavily shaped by Aquinas, and his emphasis on the intention behind virtuous acts suggests that it was more important in the late medieval period than some scholarship has previously acknowledged. As I will show in Chapters Two and Three, the dialogue of some of the York biblical plays and the episodes and dialogue associated with the characters Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest in *Piers Plowman* offer multifaceted insights into popular and lay understandings of charity that emphasize both works and intention.

Works, however, remain essential to charity for Aquinas. Throughout his discussion of the virtues, Aquinas emphasizes the importance of works: "human virtue, which is an operative habit, is a good habit and productive of good works [operations]" ("virtus humana, quae est habitus operativus, est bonus habitus, et boni operativus").[136] Thus, any acquired virtue, such as charity, produces actions. Aquinas further explains, "Now the end of virtue, since it is an

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[135] Oesterle, trans. *Treatise on the Virtues*, xiv.
[136] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, The Aquinas Institute, https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~ST.I, 1-2.55.3, Accessed 3 April 2023; trans. Oesterle, *Treatise on the Virtues*, 54.

operative habit, is operation" ("Finis autem virtutis, cum sit habitus operativus, est ipsa operatio").[137] This statement implies that virtue, as a particular kind of habit, compels an individual to act. Aquinas goes on to state that virtue may direct someone towards evil or good acts, but action always seems to be the result of an acquired virtue. Therefore, according to Aquinas, a Christian has not truly acquired the theological virtue of charity without performing charitable deeds.

Aquinas derives his theology from biblical sources, citing the New Testament often: "The other kind [of human happiness] is a happiness surpassing man's nature, which man can arrive at only by the power of God, by a certain participation in divinity, and so it is written that by Christ we are made 'partakers of the divine nature' (II Peter I:4)" ("Alia autem est beatitudo naturam hominis excedens, ad quam homo sola divina virtute pervenire potest, secundum quandam divinitatis participationem; secundum quod dicitur II Petr. I, quod per Christum facti sumus consortes divinae naturae").[138] Aquinas explains the reasoning behind Christ's words and their implications for Christians:

> Now because happiness of this kind is beyond the capacity of human nature, man's natural principles, by which he proceeds to act well in proportion to his capacity, are not sufficient for ordering man to this happiness. Hence certain additional principles must be given by God to man by which he can thus be ordered to supernatural happiness, just as by natural principles he is ordered to a connatural end, though not without divine help. These additional principles are called theological virtues: first, because they have God as their object, inasmuch as by them we are rightly ordered to God; secondly, because they are infused in us by God alone; and finally, because these virtues are made known to us

[137] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1-2.55.4; trans. Oesterle, *Treatise on the Virtues*, 55.
[138] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1-2.62.1; trans. Oesterle, *Treatise on the Virtues*, 118-19.

only by divine revelation in Sacred Scripture.

(Et quia huiusmodi beatitudo proportionem humanae naturae excedit, principia naturalia hominis, ex quibus procedit ad bene agendum secundum suam proportionem, non sufficiunt ad ordinandum hominem in beatitudinem praedictam. Unde oportet quod superaddantur homini divinitus aliqua principia, per quae ita ordinetur ad beatitudinem supernaturalem, sicut per principia naturalia ordinatur ad finem connaturalem, non tamen absque adiutorio divino. Et huiusmodi principia virtutes dicuntur theologicae, tum quia habent Deum pro obiecto, inquantum per eas recte ordinamur in Deum; tum quia a solo Deo nobis infunduntur; tum quia sola divina revelatione, in sacra Scriptura, huiusmodi virtutes traduntur.)[139]

Here, in his introduction to his discussion of the virtues, Aquinas first emphasizes that the theological virtues are given to humanity by God and are thus the highest forms of virtue. He further explains that, "These virtues are called divine, not as though by them God is virtuous, but rather because by them God makes us virtuous and directs us to Him" ("dicendum quod istae virtutes non dicuntur divinae, sicut quibus Deus sit virtuosus, sed sicut quibus nos efficimur virtuosi a Deo, et in ordine ad Deum").[140] Within this same section, Aquinas states that "charity is love" ("caritas sit amor") and differentiates between "love generally [or love *commonly expressed*]" ("amore communiter dicto") and "love of charity" ("de amore caritatis").[141] Aquinas uses this distinction to clarify that charity is a distinct virtue, not to be confused with the other virtues. However, since each virtue requires an act of love, each virtue requires a certain level of charity. With this categorization, Aquinas highlights the essential nature of charity to Christian

[139] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1-2.62.1; trans. Oesterle, *Treatise on the Virtues*, 119.
[140] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1-2.62.1; trans. Oesterle, *Treatise on the Virtues*, 119.
[141] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1-2.62.2; trans. Oesterle, *Treatise on the Virtues*, 120.

virtue: "when taken as the love of charity, we are not then given to understand by this that any other virtue essentially is charity, but that all other virtues in some way depend on charity" ("Si autem intelligatur de amore caritatis, non datur per hoc intelligi quod quaelibet alia virtus essentialiter sit caritas, sed quod omnes aliae virtutes aliqualiter a caritate dependeant").[142]

At about the same time that Aquinas was composing the *Summa Theologica* and writing his *Treatise on the Virtues*, the practice of charity was shifting to a more material form and became more inclusive of the laity. While an ascetic lifestyle remained ideal for some clergy in the later Middle Ages, active piety demonstrated through charitable works became equally, if not more, important for the salvation of the laity and even for some categories of clerics. In late medieval towns and cities, for example, urbanization and a growing cash/exchange economy gave rise to a more visible, involuntary poverty among the lower working classes that required material assistance from those more fortunate. With the rich and poor mingling more closely in cities, "this period of social and demographic gestation gave rise to classes who came to be considered poor in the modern sense, that is, lacking the material support enjoyed by their peers through dint of circumstance, not choice."[143] Because of these economic shifts, some scholars have attributed the increasing value placed on active charity, that is, good works and almsgiving, in the later Middle Ages to economic, political, and social concerns rather than to religious practices and theological interpretations. Medieval hospitals were originally "a place of shelter rather than a locus of care," first meant to house pilgrims and travelers.[144] However, because they were tied to religious pilgrimage and obligations to the needy in local communities, hospitals became places to practice Christian charity. These practices included sacramental rites, such as

[142] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1-2.62.2; trans. Oesterle, *Treatise on the Virtues*, 120.
[143] Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, 47.
[144] Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, 45.

the Anointing of the Sick, as well as acts of charity performed by laypeople, such as bedside care. The rise of hospitals thus marks "a dividing point between an era wherein the clerical foundation of charitable institutions predominated and a later era characterized by the dominance of lay initiatives."[145] However, ecclesiastical and lay piety often coexisted. For example, studies of the development of charitable foundations in France show that, in some regions, lay charitable establishments developed much earlier than in others, while in other regions clerics continuously managed charitable institutions, and in other regions still, management passed from laypeople to the clergy, inverting the typical pattern of dominance.[146] In this way, "Hospitals became sacred because their function, such as preparing an individual for a good death, had a sacral character and this invited the oversight and regulation of the Church."[147] Brodman's description implies that hospitals, due to their inherent role in medieval society, were always associated with religious doctrine and practices. They became perhaps the only places outside of a church where rites and sacraments, or at least functions related to them, were performed on a somewhat regular basis. These kinds of ultimately charitable places with quasi-sacramental functions increased in number throughout medieval Europe while depictions of charity in literature also began to focus on helping God's people, especially the poor.

Similarly, in *Sanctifying Signs: Making Christian Tradition in Late Medieval England* (2004), David Aers describes the poor as "that group of people medieval Catholics viewed as one of God's main contributions to the salvation of the rich."[148] He explains that the "poverty of the poor is given to elicit charity from others, to catalyze sanctification in those who possess the

[145] Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, 68.
[146] Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, 68.
[147] Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, 54.
[148] Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, 111.

dangerous goods of the world."[149] This view of charity is linked to the idea that God is present during the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist. The late medieval Catholic Church emphasized the doctrine of transubstantiation during the Eucharist, insisting that the host and wine literally became Christ's body and blood. The act of raising the host during Mass and partaking in the Eucharist (even if only visually) unites the faithful to the body of Christ through the Church. Thus, Christ's Eucharistic body becomes the symbol of the entire Church, the entire community of the faithful. This doctrine extended to the other sacraments to reinforce Christ's presence and participation in the ritual, and to some theological principles to reinforce His presence among Christians. Aers discusses the Eucharist's role as the "sacrament of Church's unity," it "*signifies and causes* this unity, the communion [communio, "blody brethren"] through which believers are joined to Christ."[150] Indeed, Aers begins his first chapter with an epigraph from theologian Jean-Luc Marion's *God Without Being* on the nature of the Eucharist: "The consecrated bread and wine become the ultimate aspect in which charity delivers itself body and soul… love accomplishes the gift entirely… In short, the eucharistic present is deduced from the commitment of charity."[151] Aers refers to this understanding of the Eucharist as the "Real Presence" of Christ, and he explains that the Eucharist is the goal of all the other sacraments and definitive of charity/the community. Thus, when medieval Christians performed acts of caritative charity, they invoked the Real Presence of Christ. Aers explains that the Eucharist is therefore the goal of all the other sacraments and definitive of charity towards the community. To emphasize their foundational importance to Christianity, then, literary depictions of charitable acts in the later Middle Ages often included representations of Christ's body. As Chapters 2 and

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[149] Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, 111.
[150] Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, 40-41. Emphasis in original.
[151] Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, 178, qtd. in Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, 1.

3 will show, *Piers Plowman* and the York biblical plays provide seminal examples of such literary and dramatic representations of Eucharistic charity. Additionally, V. A. Kolve explains that

> In the Middle Ages, sacraments existed which could bring man to heaven -- that was confidently believed -- but their efficacy for any man depended in part upon his understanding something of their meaning, which is to say, their authorization by Christ, their necessity, and their future consequence. God had made man a rational creature that he might 'know' Him and share in that way the bliss of heaven.[152]

This emphasis on faith in sacramental ritual would become the dominant theology during the Protestant Reformation.

Even dissenting groups, such as the Lollards, emphasized the necessity of tending to the poor. Following the writings and leadership of John Wylciffe, Lollards encouraged Christians to imitate Christ by living among the poor, preaching, and evangelizing. Often clashing with the authority of the clergy, the Lollards strictly interpreted scriptural passages encouraging voluntary poverty. According to Anne M. Scott, Langland and Lollards

> encouraged people to sympathize more with the poor as human beings, to support them, and where possible, to walk along with them and share their conditions. They urged those with means to be more active in the community, distributing charity and alms to the poor and helping the needy and working poor in both body and spirit.[153]

Wycliffites emphasized material charity and an ascetic lifestyle as the ultimate communion with the poor and demonstration of *caritas*. Furthermore, "Some Lollard writers also represented the

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[152] V. A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1966), 3.
[153] Anne M. Scott, *Experiences of Poverty in Late Medieval and Early Modern England and France* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 231.

dignity and spiritual example of the poor and voluntary poor as a model for all members of society, a text to be lived out, performed."[154] In this way, all Christians were united in solidarity with the most vulnerable and, therefore, with Christ.

Theologians and clerics of the later Middle Ages emphasized scriptural passages that promote the charitable distribution of wealth and material goods. Despite the practical economic, political, and social reasons for helping the poor and vulnerable, differing beliefs about the appropriateness of charity towards the lay poor, especially almsgiving, coincide with contemporary interpretations of doctrine and faith. Still, a more secluded life characterized by abstinence, prayer, and a rejection of earthly goods remained a significant component of piety, particularly for women. Late medieval English authors such as the anchoress Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe exemplify and write about the value and purpose of such a life. However, literature of the period, as I will show in upcoming chapters, demonstrates that material charity which reflected God's love remained the dominant trend.

Reformation

In *Moral Identity in Early Modern English Literature* (2004), Paul Cefalu explains that the Lutheran concept of *caritas* "signifies an affective bond between man and God that is initiated by the communicant's acquisitive love and desire for self-fulfillment."[155] This definition, like its medieval predecessors, derives from the writings of Augustine of Hippo: "For Augustine, acquisitive love directs its path away from material goods and upwards to God."[156] This form of love is distinguished from *agape*, which does not require man to reciprocate God's love. While medieval theologians generally interpreted Augustine's rejection of material goods

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[154] Anne M. Scott, *Experiences of Poverty*, 231.
[155] Paul Cefalu, *Moral Identity in Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), 134.
[156] Paul Cefalu, *Moral Identity in Early Modern English Literature*, 134

as an encouragement towards almsgiving, many Protestant theologians viewed it as a complete rejection of all earthly concerns. For reformers, then, love for one's neighbor need not be displayed in outward acts of charity as medieval piety required. Instead, the faithful were meant to reject material goods by focusing on inner faith, even if this meant that the poor must accept their circumstances. Other reformers, particularly John Calvin, seemed to reject the value of indiscriminate charity in favor of charity that maintained social stability and rewarded only the worthy. As Thomas Max Safley states, "Calvinism, after all, made of work and wealth signs of divine favor."[157] For Calvin, wealth demonstrated one's predestined grace, so Christians were not obligated to use it to give alms as a means of salvation. Safley also describes economist Max Weber's view of Calvinist teachings on charity: "it was the Calvinists who finally destroyed traditional forms of charity by eliminating indiscriminate alms-giving, imprisoning able-bodied beggars, and organizing work-relief."[158] In commenting on the success of the Reformation, Martin Luther stated that "the word did everything," a religious view that contrasts with the earlier focus on sacramental theology and deeds.[159] In "The Reformation of Penance," Debora Shuger describes the early Reformation focus on inner faith as salvific, as opposed to works. With greater access to Scripture written in the vernacular, one's individual relationship with God became a more important component of *caritas* than outward works of charity. However, according to Shuger, "acts are not separable from persons but rather, like sacraments, are the outward and visible signs of an inner reality."[160] While good deeds are not wholly discounted in

[157] Thomas Max Safley, "Introduction," The Reformation of Charity: The Secular and the Religious in Early Modern Poor Relief, ed. Thomas Max Safley (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 05 Dec. 2003) doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047400097, 9.
[158] Thomas Max Safley, "Introduction," 9.
[159] Martin Luther, "Second Invocavit Sermon" from Martin J. Lohrmann, "Luther's Invocavit Sermons (Lent 1522)." *Lutheran Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (2021): 444-454. doi:10.1353/lut.2021.0090.
[160] Debora Shuger, "The Reformation of Penance," Huntington Library Quarterly 71, no. 4. December 2008: 564, https://doi.org/10.1525/hlq.2008.71.4.557.

Reformation theology, then, they are not salvific themselves but represent a person's inner faith.

While unorthodox religious views had of course been present in Europe and, more specifically, in England throughout the Middle Ages, the founding of the Church of England marked an official change in religious doctrine. King Henry VIII's break with the Roman Catholic Church in the 1530s led to the establishment of the monarch as the head of the Church of England and contributed to a unified nation-state. As members of the national church, English people were primarily subjects of the monarchy and Anglican Christianity, rather than part of a larger network of Christendom. This more localized identity, even in the age of exploration, coincides with a doctrine of charity that is focused less on physical acts than on one's place in the community. Indeed, Timothy Rosendale explains that Thomas Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer*, the companion to the Anglican liturgy, contains "indications of what England's internal social order should be" in its content and structure: individuals of faith uphold the collective good under the authority of the monarch.[161] John Foxe illustrates this concept of English unity using the metaphor of a ship in his *Actes and Monuments*: "God hath so placed us Englishmen here in one commonwealth, also in one church, as in one ship together."[162] He asks that God "still these winds and surging seas of discordant contention among us; that we, professing one Christ, may, in one unity of doctrine, gather ourselves into one ark of the true church together…"[163] Similarly, Richard Hooker states in his *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* that "our estate is according to the patterne of Godes own ancient elect people, which people was not parte of them the *Commonwealth*, and part of them the *Church* of *God*, but the self same people whole

[161] Timothy Rosendale, *Liturgy and Literature in the Making of Protestant England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), 50.
[162] John Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* 1576 ed. (Sheffield: The Digital Humanities Institute, 2011) http//www.dhi.ac.uk/foxe.
[163] Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*, 1.24.

and entier were both under one cheif Governour, on whose supreme authority they did depend…"[164] Here, Hooker compares the unity of the English people under the Church of England to God's original Chosen people. In its rite of Confirmation, The Book of Common Prayer "is quite explicit in what it requires socially of all good Christians."[165] In a series of questions and replies, the person receiving the sacrament explains what the Ten Commandments instruct: "My duetie towardes my neighbour is, to love hym as myselfe."[166] The complete response goes on to list abstract obligations that focus on one's place in society instead of tangible works, such as"[t]o honour and obey the kyng and his ministers" and "[t]o submitte myselfe to all my governours, teachers, spiritual pastours, and maisters." As these lines suggest, love for God and neighbor are still an essential part of Protestantism, but they are demonstrated through a sense of fellowship and propriety rather than almsgiving. Treatment of others is emphasized in attitude and behavior, as the promises "[t]o hurte no bodie by woorde or dede" and "[t]o beare no malice nor hatred in my heart" indicate. Here, charity is a more internalized affinity with the Christian community.

The early Church of England's emphasis on introspective faith as more salvific than acts of charity reflects the sense of individualism created by greater access to Scripture and the opportunity for individual interpretation allowed by the vernacular. For example, Martin Luther "resisted more firmly than any other [Protestant theologian] the temptation to find either evidence of salvation where good works were present or indications of damnation where they were not… he spoke only of faith and unbelief in direct proximity with salvation and

[164] Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* with an introduction by Christopher Morris (London: J. M. Dent, 1907) 8.1.2
[165] Rosendale, *Liturgy and Literature in the Making of Protestant England*, 55.
[166] qtd. in Rosendale, *Liturgy and Literature in the Making of Protestant England*, 55.

damnation."[167] While the English church maintained ultimate interpretive authority, individual access to Scripture created a more introspective practice of faith in individual members. Accordingly, reformist theologians stressed their perspective that sacramental rites, especially the celebration of the Eucharist, reflected signs and memorials instead of actual divine substance. Still, these hermeneutics were often written in language that reflected traditional Eucharistic ideology; that is, communion with God and the community of the faithful was signified by references to Christ's body. Both John Jewel and William Tyndale expressed these ideas in their writings, with Tyndale illustrating Christ's promise in "the covenant of his body" and "promises made in Christ's blood."[168] Following this reasoning, I argue that, while depictions of charity in early modern literature and drama reflected reformed doctrines, authors and playwrights continued to utilize Eucharistic metaphors popularized during the medieval period.

Chapter Summaries

In the next chapter, I will introduce my argument that the representation of *caritas* in late medieval literature reflects an understanding of works as salvific by demonstrating the connection of charity to both labor and Christ's body in the York biblical plays. Recent criticism of the plays has built on Sarah Beckwith's, V. A. Kolve's, and James Simpson's studies of the drama's ritualistic and instructional purposes to explore their social implications, particularly for the guilds that produced the pageants. I will expand on this concept by charting how the sacramental and communal figurations of Christ's body throughout the cycle reflect the medieval theological concept of *caritas*, man's love for God expressed through love for one's neighbor. In particular, I will illustrate the connections between vocational labor, Christ's tortured body, and communal charity in *The Crucifixion* pageant; representations of the Corporal Works of Mercy, a

[167] Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 243.
[168] William Tyndale, *Doctrinal Treatises*, qtd. in Rosendale *Liturgy and Literature*, 104.

practical form of charity centered on works, in *The Nativity*, *Herod and the Magi*, and *The Death of Christ* pageants; and connections between Christ's body, the larger Christian community, and charitable acts in *The Last Judgment* pageant. Through these examinations, I will argue that late medieval cycle drama promoted an active form of charity centered on works of mercy towards the poor and represented these ideas through depictions of Christ's body.

I further my argument about the representation of *caritas* in medieval literature by turning to *Piers Plowman*. Building on David Aers' S*anctifying Signs*, as well as the work of Emily Steiner, Lynn Staley, and others, I will analyze how many of the poem's episodes use the existence of the poor to draw the audience's attention to the necessity of charity. As in the York biblical plays, embodied depictions of *caritas* throughout *Piers Plowman* encourage a form of active charity consistent with medieval orthodoxy and sacramental theology. I trace the ways that embodiments of *caritas* reflect sacramental rituals and encourage reader and audience participation in communal salvation, although the poem is not wholly instructional nor does it serve as a replacement for official Church sacraments. It instead associates word and body, connecting humans to God and compelling them to act according to Christ's teachings. I will focus on depictions of Christ's body and the instructions of the characters Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest to show how embodied representations of community and charity compel audience members to enact *caritas*.

As Christian theology shifted during the Reformation, a personal affinity with God and neighbor became more important than tangible deeds. In Chapter 4, I will analyze three plays by Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, *Richard III*, and *Henry VIII (*or *All is True)*, to examine how Shakespeare represents this reformed concept on the stage. I will build upon scholarship that discusses the influence of medieval morality and mystery plays on Shakespeare as I argue that he

continues the tradition of staging charity but according to a reformed doctrine. Additionally, I will examine the ways in which Shakespeare uses religious iconography to connect caritative love with the metaphorical body of Christ as reflected in the community of the faithful.

In *Doctor Faustus*, Christopher Marlowe appropriates the sacramental representation of Christ's body from the medieval biblical plays to illustrate a reformed doctrine of *caritas* and salvation modeled on interiority. By selfishly pursuing only his own desires (and selling his soul to the Devil to do so), Doctor Faustus has alienated himself from God and therefore the community of faith. While most religious criticism of *Doctor Faustus* focuses on Calvinist ideas of predestination and redemption, my reading in Chapter 5 will explore the socio-religious view of charity promoted by the play and its implied ethical and moral imperatives. I will also explore representations of Christ's body as continuances of the medieval tradition. Although dramatizing Christ on stage would have been illegal during much of Marlowe's career, the play includes possible depictions of Christ's body: Dr. Faustus's blood congeals, which initially prevents him from signing the contract, and he watches blood streaming "in the firmament" during his final crisis. I argue that these representations signify Dr. Faustus's separation from God and the larger Christian community. While this tradition of Christ's representation derives from the earlier medieval tradition, the focus on the play is not on Dr. Faustus's lack of good deeds, but on his self-imposed isolation from God and fellow Christians. While this chapter will address relevant arguments regarding Marlowe's religious views, my claim is about his dramaturgy, rather than his personal beliefs.

Conclusion

The extent to which laypeople understood and practiced charitable obligations as defined by various authorities throughout the centuries is demonstrated in the way popular literature and

drama expressed such doctrines. Under the guise of entertainment, instruction, and vulgar accessibility lies practical implications. As David Aers explains, “late-fourteenth-century Christians could not know with certainty the theological and ecclesial outcomes of their difficulties, conflicts, fears, and hopes. Their conversations called into question what should count as orthodoxy and heresy.”[169] Those conversations, evident and ongoing in the literature of the period, also help current scholars understand what counted as orthodox and heresy. Furthermore, “in the tradition which formed them, certain texts and authors from the past were read with a conviction of their relevance to any current conversation or conflict”[170] Conflicting interpretations of common classical and Biblical sources provide insight into accepted doctrine. In this chapter, I have traced the development of the term *caritas* and its connections to divine love from ancient Greek and Roman thinkers through the Protestant Reformation in England. I have shown how different Biblical interpretations and translations compelled believers to exhibit this love by performing charitable works during the medieval period and by focusing more closely on fellowship and introspective grace after the Reformation. Despite these differences, the salvation provided by true *caritas*, love for God displayed through one’s love for neighbor, appeared prominently in English literature throughout the late medieval period and the early modern period in depictions of Christ’s body. In the following chapter, I will show how *caritas* was expressed in medieval drama in the York biblical plays, which dramatized important civic issues and Christian salvation in graphic depictions of Christ’s corporeality.

[169] David Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, viii.
[170] David Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, x.

CHAPTER II: “NOW WORK WE WELL”: DEPICTIONS OF *CARITAS* IN THE YORK BIBLICAL PLAYS

The York biblical plays, performed throughout the city of York in celebration of the Feast of Corpus Christi, provide a rich example of the representation of *caritas* in late medieval literature. Illustrating a medieval Christian view of history from Creation to the Final Judgment, the York plays, and their counterparts in other cities, featured wide civic participation and viewership.[171] As V.A. Kolve explains, “the cycles addressed themselves above all to the unlettered and the un-Latined.”[172] Recent criticism of the cycle plays has built on studies by V. A. Kolve, Sarah Beckwith, and James Simpson of the drama’s ritualistic and instructional purposes to explore their social implications, particularly for the guilds that produced the pageants. I argue that literature, and the York biblical plays in particular, take a step further in using sacramental language to convey the importance of charity to a late medieval audience. I will build upon these studies by demonstrating how the sacramental and communal figurations of Christ’s body throughout the cycle reflect the medieval theological concept of *caritas*. While not completely “sacramental theater,” to use Beckwith’s term, the plays do evoke such imagery and ideology to promote lay devotion. In particular, I will address the connections between vocational labor, Christ’s tortured body, and communal charity in the *Crucifixio Christi* pageant; representations of the Corporal Works of Mercy, a practical form of charity centered on works, in *The Nativity*, *Herod and the Magi*, and *The Death of Christ* pageants; and connections

[171] The audience “was as diverse as the later audience at the Globe,” V. A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), 7.
[172] Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, 3.

between Christ's body, the larger Christian community, and charitable acts in *The Last Judgment* pageant. Through these examinations, I argue that late medieval cycle drama promoted an active form of charity centered on works of mercy towards the poor and represented these ideas through depictions of Christ's corporeal body. In these plays, liturgical language and depictions of Christ's body that evoke the Eucharist compel audience members to consider their roles in the community and whether they properly fulfill their obligations to the poor and to the larger community through their own labor. This both supports and complicates the medieval association of *caritas* with almsgiving because it expands the concept to include everyday vocational duties. Furthermore, the instructional and mimetic nature of the plays encourages lay audiences to contemplate the subject matter and gain a better understanding of Christian theology. This emphasis on enhancing faith also promotes a more interior form of *caritas*, one in which the individual recognizes their part in the Christian world presented in the action of the plays. This aspect of the cycle's purpose aligns with what has traditionally been attributed to post-reformation theology. Nevertheless, at key moments when Christ appears in the pageants, special attention is drawn to his body using Eucharistic language that evokes the community of the Church and emphasizes labor and suffering to symbolize the needs of the community to promote charity.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the use of religious drama to instruct laypeople and the theologically orthodox and popular meanings of *caritas* during the later Middle Ages in England. I then explain why the York plays provide the best insight for this study before focusing on individual plays. I discuss significant depictions of Christ's corporeality and references to his body as food to establish the imagery of the Eucharist throughout the cycle. Next, I focus individually on the *Crucifixio Christi* pageant and examine how the play reflects

the doctrine of *caritas* as centered on works and community through dialogue that emphasizes Christ's bodily suffering at moments when the soldiers are performing collaborative labor and considering their service to the community. I then turn to the *Last Judgment* play to show how Christ conflates his own presence with that of his followers in Eucharistic terms and the emphasis he places on helping the needy, demonstrating the absolute necessity of active charity for Christian salvation.

History of Religious Drama as Lay Instruction

The earliest recorded performance of the York cycle is dated to 1376, by which point the plays were likely an established tradition. Biblical cycles were being performed throughout England and possibly continental Europe during this period.[173] Surviving manuscripts contain four extant "Creation to Last Judgment" sequences: the York Cycle, Chester Cycle, Towneley manuscript, and N-Town manuscript, although records exist of some additional cycles' performances and lists of pageants. The York cycle, as far as records show, is the most extensive, with 48 plays. The British Library dates the manuscript to 1463-1477.[174] Because of its completeness and contemporaneous manuscript date, the York cycle is the focus of this chapter and perhaps the best representative among the extant cycles of a medieval layperson's

[173] Kolve lists known biblical play cycles performed in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Kendal, Preston, York, Beverly, Wakefield, Chester, Lincoln, Louth, Norwich, Ipswich, Worcester, and Coventry. He also notes a series of plays representing Creation to Doomsday performed by clerics in Cividale, Italy, but he does not go as far as to connect them to the English cycles. More recently, scholars have narrowed down the list of accepted cycles in addition to those with extant manuscripts to Norwich, Newcastle, and Beverly. Nicole R. Rice and Margaret Aziza Pappano briefly describe what has been recorded about these cycles in their introduction to *The Civic Cycles: Artisan Drama and Identity in Premodern England* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015) and acknowledge a total of six English cycles: York, Chester, Coventry, Norwich, Newcastle, and Beverly.

[174] https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-york-plays. See also Richard Beadle's introduction to *The York Plays: A Critical Edition of the York Corpus Christi Play as recorded in British Library Additional MS 35290*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), xii: "A combination of internal and external evidence indicates that compilation of the manuscript must have begun at some time between 1463 and 1477. In addition, a significant body of circumstantial information points to the latter part of this period, and specifically to 1476-7 as the likeliest date for its inception, since it is evident that at this time the city corporation and its officials were paying special attention to the reorganization of the Corpus Christi celebrations generally, and to various aspects of the arrangements for the Corpus Christi Play in particular."

experience of civic biblical drama and indicative of popular religious beliefs. The York pageants, according to Rice and Pappano, attracted wide audiences and civic participation throughout England and perhaps mainland Europe, so they best reflect popular conceptions of charity in the literary arts.[175] Furthermore, Heather Hill-Vásquez discusses how ideology and expectations for audience response changed throughout the lifetimes of the cycles, especially across the Reformation.[176] She examines the Chester manuscript, which dates from the sixteenth century but is traditionally considered a medieval text, to show how Protestant ideas may have influenced the text. She emphasizes that the York manuscript, dated to the second half of the fifteenth century, is the only full text that exists from the medieval period. This makes York the best text of the extant cycles for studying late medieval theology. Indeed, in York, "the urban route, with its multiple stations and specific landmarks, embedded the biblical narrative in local culture, allowing artisans to sanctify their work and to represent themselves and craftwork as central to their city's devotional life."[177] The civic structure of the mystery cycle, then, makes it a poignant representation of popular theology expressed in literature.

The Feast of Corpus Christi was officially established in 1311, and Kolve quotes a chronicler who states that by the year 1318 "the feast of Corpus Christi began to be generally celebrated through the whole English church."[178] Corpus Christi, the Body of Christ, was an important focus of medieval Catholic devotion and was celebrated in the sacrament of the

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[175] Rice and Pappano, *The Civic Cycles*.
[176] Heather Hill-Vásquez, *Sacred Players: The Politics of Response in the Middle English Religious Drama*, (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007).
[177] Hill-Vásquez, *Sacred Players,* 20.
[178] Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, 37. As Miri Rubin discusses in *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 177-182, the date of 1311 is the beginning of Pope Clement V's council of Vienne, which renewed interest in an earlier papal bull, *Transiturus*, dated 1264 but not widely distributed. Ideas about the Corpus Christi feast from that letter and other topics from the council were published in the *Clementines* document on canon law in 1317. Scholars differ regarding which date they consider the official beginning of the celebration of Corpus Christi.

Eucharist during Mass, in which bread and wine turn into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Medieval Catholics believed that the food and drink transformed materially into Christ, a belief still held by the Catholic Church today. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 reinforced this doctrine of transubstantiation as essential to Roman Catholic faith, codified the treatment and storage of the Host, and promoted reforms for dealing with education, heresy, and lay instruction. Canon 1 opens with a description of the most important aspects of the faith: the mystery of a tripartite God of "consubstantial and coequal" persons in the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as well as the divine and human nature of Jesus Christ. It then describes how the Church's unity and the celebration of the Eucharist reflect these mysteries. The doctrine of transubstantiation is enacted when the priest consecrates the Host during Mass, and the document provides an official description of the sacrament:

> There is one Universal Church of the faithful, outside of which there is absolutely no salvation. In which there is the same priest and sacrifice, Jesus Christ, whose body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the forms of bread and wine; the bread being changed *(transsubstantiatio)* by divine power into the body, and the wine into the blood, so that to realize the mystery of unity we may receive of Him what He has received of us.[179]

Transubstantiation is positioned as essential to the Catholic faith with its inclusion in Canon 1 alongside the most fundamental statements of Catholic doctrine.[180] The language of the Fourth

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[179] H. J. Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary*, (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1937), 238.

[180] Language in the current catechism shows that transubstantiation is still essential to the sacrament of the Eucharist because "At the heart of the Eucharistic celebration are the bread and wine that, by the words of Christ and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, become Christ's Body and Blood." John Paul II, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., (Washington DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2011), sec. 1333, accessed July 3, 2023, https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/flipbooks/catechism/. The doctrine of transubstantiation is so essential to the Catholic faith that it has remained a core tenet for much of the Church's history.

Lateran Council also stresses the communal nature of the Eucharist as unique among the sacraments. The above quotation depicts the transubstantiated bread and wine as a realization of the "mystery of unity" Catholics experience with God and the "one Universal Church of the faithful." Similarly, the catechism explains that the sacrament of the Eucharist is called "Holy Communion, because by this sacrament we unite ourselves to Christ, who makes us sharers in his Body and Blood to form a single body" and that "The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it."[181] The unity expressed in the Eucharist makes it an effective symbol for depicting the community of faith in both official feast days, such as Corpus Christi, and lay religious drama.

The York biblical plays developed amid this emphasis on the sacrament of the Eucharist and conveying its meaning to laypeople. The biblical cycle plays fulfilled a unique artistic approach "to celebrate in its fullest significance what the Middle Ages took to be the supreme gift of God, His body for man's sin."[182] Religious drama already included liturgical drama performed in connection with the Mass or liturgical calendar. Kolve classifies liturgical drama as plays performed inside or outside of a Church in vernacular or Latin, singularly or as a "series of episodes" (distinguishing them from cycles), that commemorates "the anniversary day on which it is performed."[183] Religious drama also included morality plays, such as *Everyman*, and miracle plays of the sacrament, such as *The Croxton Play of the Sacrament*. The important commonality in all of these plays is their instructional purposes:

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[181] John Paul II, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., (Washington DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2011), sec. 1331 and 1324, accessed July 3, 2023, https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/flipbooks/catechism/.
[182] Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, 50.
[183] Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, 35.

> Men were taught that by feeling - by the experience of pity, grief, and love for Mary and Christ in their human roles - they could best come to an understanding of the Godhead, to a true awareness of the price of their salvation, and to an adequate sorrow for their own sin. They were invited above all to contemplate the human tragedy of the Passion, and through the contemplation to share in its transcendental victory…. The dramatist thus seeks to lead the spectators, detail by detail, into a more deeply felt response.[184]

Similar to the effects of the Mass or even a mystical experience, the plays provide a unique experience that allows the spectator to truly empathize with Christ's suffering, enabling an almost transcendental moment reminiscent of partaking in a sacrament. Recent scholarship builds on Kolve's study to discuss the different ways in which the York biblical plays instruct lay audiences and provide them with an opportunity to join in spiritual interpretation and discourse. For example, Sarah Beckwith similarly discusses the relationship between sacrament and theater as modes of interpretation and participation in the York plays in her book *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays*.[185] Ruth Nisse argues that the York biblical plays provide an opportunity for lay discourse surrounding topics of spiritual interpretation, including controversial female visions and Wycliffite ideas, to negotiate and challenge scriptural and ecclesiastical authority.[186] While scholars differ in the level of religious

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[184] Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, 4-5.

[185] Sarah Beckwith, *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).

[186] Ruth Nisse, *Defining Acts: Drama and the Politics of Interpretation in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995). See also Jill Stevenson, *Performance, Cognitive Theory, and Devotional Culture: Sensual Piety in Late Medieval York* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), in which Stevenson claims that the physicality of a dramatic performance enhances the religious devotion it may evoke. Focusing on the perspective of the labor guilds that performed them, Kate Crassons, in *The Claims of Poverty: Literature, Culture, and Ideology in Late Medieval England*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), argues that the York plays promote charity through visible poverty, and Rice and Pappano explore the ways that artisans crafted their status and identities through the plays in *The Civic Cycles*. Additionally, Pamela King's *The York Mystery Cycle and the Worship of the City* (Martlesham, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 2006) offers a greater discussion of civic honor, religious devotion, and the Church's influence in the late medieval city of York.

instruction they attribute to the plays, they nonetheless all stress the importance they had for the people of York. Building on these readings of the plays in upcoming sections of this chapter, I show how Christ's body is specifically staged in a way that evokes Eucharistic themes in the York biblical plays to present a message of *caritas* to a lay audience.

In describing the proper response to the plays, Kolve focuses on the use of Latin term *ludus*, which means *play* or *game*, in the titles of religious plays and in Latin records of them to illustrate the ways in which biblical drama created meaning. According to Kolve, medieval dramatists addressed the challenge of staging sacred events and figures by disguising them as pleasurable diversions. In doing so, these dramatists could express significant theological truths to a lay audience: "from a conception of drama as play and game - as something therefore not 'in ernest' - a drama involving sacred personages and miraculous events could be born."[187] Kolve focuses on the "play" and "game" definitions of the classical Latin term to describe how staging the York biblical plays as a form of entertainment allowed the citizens of York to safely explore their religious meanings (reducing the potential for heresy). Lewis and Short's *A Latin Dictionary* also includes in entry B.1 for *ludus*: "Ludi, ***public games, plays, spectacles, shows, exhibitions***, which were given in honor of the gods, etc."[188] With the classical Latin term associated with a type of play performed in honor of the Roman gods, using this same term in the medieval Latin names of the biblical plays evokes this older meaning. This implicit dual purpose of public entertainment or instruction combined with religious piety coincides with the purpose of *caritas* as involving both God and one's neighbor(s). Rather than speculating on the medieval

[187] Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, 17, quoting *The Assembly of Gods*, whom Kolve and other scholars have attributed to John Lydgate, but whose authorship current scholars dispute.
[188] "Ludus," Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879. *Logeion*. https://logeion.uchicago.edu/. Bold text in original.

understanding of this earlier definition, I argue that the natural progression of this term in writing and language may have evoked similar connotations.

Furthermore, the Middle English word *plei(e)*, used in vernacular records of the texts and their titles, holds several broad definitions and specific meanings which indicate a particular function for biblical drama. The first, most common meaning given in the *Middle English Dictionary* is "plei(e (n.) 1a. (a) Merriment, disport; joy, pleasure. . . ."[189] Additional definitions include playing in reference to games, jest, gambling, sex, and athletics. One entry is dedicated to the use of the word in reference to theatrical and musical performance and specifically mentions the "mystery cycle" pageants:

> 6. (a) A theatrical play or performance; also a spectacle; **gret ~**, ?a mystery cycle; **in ~**, in form of a play; **~ moneie**, ?money contributed toward the expenses of a play or some other religious spectacle (e.g., a pageant or procession); (b) music, music-making; **maken ~**; (c) a story; story-telling; **pleies in lai**, ?stories in song; (d) dancing.

This definition shows how important and prevalent the cycle pageants were within medieval English vernacular drama. The entries for the verb "pleien" are nearly the same but have an individually listed definition for "plei(e" as craftsmanship: "8. (a) To ply a trade; apply (a craft), employ, ply."[190] The biblical pageant form, then, appropriately combines the purposes of performance with the purposes of craft guilds. Among the 39 quotations listed under this entry is a line from the York Memorandum Book, a manuscript containing ordinances from the city's civic institutions and craft guilds: "Omnes pagine ludi, vocati, Corpus Christi play, sint sustentate et producte suo ordine per artifices dicte civitatis" (All the pages of the play, called the

[189] "plei(e (n.)," *Middle English Dictionary*, ed. Robert E. Lewis, et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952-2001). Online edition in *Middle English Compendium*. ed. Frances McSparran, et al.. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2000-2018), http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/.
[190] "pleien (v.)," *MED*.

Corpus Christi play, are sustained and produced according to the order stated by the city's artisans). Here, both the Latin word *ludi* and the English word *play* are used to describe the performances. Miri Rubin includes this line in fuller detail in her book *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*:

> Quod ab comodum ciuium eiusdem civitatis et omnium extraneorum illuc veniencium in festo predicto, omnes pagine ludi vocati Corpus Christi play sint sustentate et producte suo ordine per artifices dicte civitatis ob honorem precipue et reuerenciam domini nostri Jesu Christi et comodum ciuium predictorum.
>
> (That for the convenience of the citizens of that city and for all the foreigners who come to it on the said feast, all the pageants of the play called Corpus Christi play should be supported and produced by the artisans of the said city in their order, for the due honour and reverence of our Lord Jesus Christ and the benefit of the said citizens.)[191]

This record provides an explicit reason for the performance of the York pageants: to honor Christ and to benefit the citizens. The performance of the York plays, then, is a symbolic act of *caritas*, as it demonstrates love for God by providing a benefit for the community.

Finally, according to James Richard Farr, artisanal status at this time centered around the concept of honor.[192] For example, Rice and Pappano quote a craft association document from Chester as specifying that "not anye brother of the same soecietye and companye shall disorderlye be have hym selfe…"[193] This line implies anxiety about the conduct of one member affecting the reputation of all members, much like professional standards today. The document further states that members may not "disturbe nor interrupte anye of the same brothers in the

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[191] Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 277.
[192] James Richard Farr, *Artisans in Europe, 1300-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000).
[193] qtd. in Rice and Pappano, *The Civic Cycles*, 20.

tellinge or opening of theire tale or matter… nor to give the lye, nor to call any of his saide brothers worst then his or theire proper name or names in anye wrathe or anger, weither in theire meetinge house nor in any other place." Members may not interrupt, lie about, nor insult/name-call their fellow artisans in their shared spaces nor anywhere else. That these rules call for compliance outside of the guild's meeting space shows how important honorable conduct was for the profession. The documents of the craft guilds also show that they believed specialized labor was "performed for God's honor and everyone's benefit."[194] According to this ideology, specialized craftwork, and perhaps all vocational labor, holds a sacred purpose of duty towards God and one's community. Combining work with love for God and neighbor reflects the theological doctrine of *caritas*. Similarly, in *The Critical Edition of The York Plays*, Richard Beadle notes an entry in a House Book dated April 3, 1476, that describes important requirements for the Corpus Christi play. The document instructs guilds to hire "sufficiant in personne and connyng to þe honour of þe Citie and worship of the saide craftes for to admitte and able, and all oþer insufficiant personnes either in connyng, voice or personne to discharge, ammove and avoide."[195] This document speaks to the importance of honor in working one's craft, in this case being an actor talented enough to perform in a Corpus Christi pageant.[196] Clearly, the plays were tied irrevocably to the importance of good works, which included well-performed labor, and their instructional purpose was so important that they could not risk being produced poorly.

[194] Rice and Pappano, *The Civic Cycles*, 21.
[195] Beadle, *The York Plays*, xv-xvi.
[196] Rice and Pappano discuss fines being imposed for poor performances.

Christ's Eucharistic Corporeality in *The Nativity* Pageant

Emphasis on Christ's corporeality occurs throughout the York cycle, and his body and deeds are often compared to food or sustenance for his followers not only to honor the feast of Corpus Christi, but to portray Christ's actions as the ultimate work of charity for Christians. In *The Nativity* pageant, Mary lovingly adores the newborn Jesus just after giving birth to him. Joseph returns from an errand, having missed the birth, and asks Mary what she has upon her knee, to which she replies, "It is my sone, þe soth to saye, / þat is so gud."[197] At his first sight of the baby, Joseph declares, "Wele is me I bade þis day / To se þis foode."[198] By referring to the newborn as "foode," Joseph uses imagery that evokes the Eucharist to acknowledge both Jesus' divinity and his future purpose of sacrificing his body for humanity's salvation. According to the *Middle English Dictionary*, the first entry for "fode" is "1a. (a) Nourishment or sustenance for the human body or a part of the body; food, provender, provisions… 2. *Fig*. (a) Spiritual sustenance, comfort, or support…."[199] The two meanings listed under this definition show that the term is already imbued with religious significance. However, qualifications such as "soule fode" and "foode of god" appear in quotations associated with the second definition, distinguishing the concept of physical food from spiritual food, but Mary makes no such distinction in her dialogue. The second entry for "fode" refers to "1. (a) a young child, a baby," "2. (a) offspring, descendant, son or daughter," and "3. (a) a young man, esp., a young warrior [etc.]."[200] Quotations associated with this definition overwhelmingly come from Middle English texts concerning the birth of Christ, and a lesser amount come from Arthurian legend. Thus, the

[197] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "The Nativity" 88-9.
[198] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "The Nativity" 90-91.
[199] *fode n*.(1) Middle English Dictionary, University of Michigan. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED16484/track?counter=2
[200] *fode n*.(2) Middle English Dictionary, University of Michigan. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED16485/track?counter=2&search_id=40742890.

author(s) of this pageant chose to use a pun, rather than the more common "child" or "babe," both of which include definitions that directly refer to the infant Jesus.[201] During his very first appearance in the cycle, then, Christ provides the ultimate model for charity towards one's neighbor by emulating the Eucharist, the sacrament that celebrates his death as a loving act of charity, and Joseph's words frame this eventual sacrifice as providing sustenance for the entire Christian community.

Providing sustenance (and, more specifically, giving food to the poor) is the quintessential act of charity, represented in this early *Nativity* scene in Christ's body.[202] Of The Seven Corporal Works of Mercy, feeding the hungry is listed first. Most of the included acts derive from Christ's description of the Last Judgment in the Gospel of Matthew: "esurivi enim, et dedistis mihi manducare, sitivi, et dedistis mihi bibere; hospes eram, et collegistis me; / nudus, et operuistis me; infirmus, et visitastis me; in carcere eram, et venistis ad me" ("For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat: I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink: I was a stranger, and you took me in: / Naked, and you covered me: sick, and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came to me").[203] Still an important part of Catholic faith, the Seven Corporal Works of Mercy were expressed to medieval lay people through literature and art. Visual representations of the works portrayed within churches would have been accessible to the average person, and a

[201] *babe n.* Middle English Dictionary, University of Michigan. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED3369/track?counter=1&search_id=40742890.
child n. Middle English Dictionary, University of Michigan. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED7559/track?counter=1&search_id=40742890.

[202] In *Sanctifying Signs*, David Aers provides a useful discussion of the sacrament and community as presented in *Piers Plowman*. He explains that Piers' conception of an autonomous Church "forgets that our spiritual life is like our bodily life in that our flourishing depends on our belonging to a community in which we necessarily live as naturally social creatures, the very community in which we receive sacramental food," 38. He draws on Paul's lesson in Corinthians about "discerning the body of the Lord, a mystical, sanctifying body composed of all Christ's members" to explain the "juxtaposition of wealthy people gnawing on God while their neighbor are destroyed by hunger" in the poem, 39.

[203] Matthew 25:35-36. All Latin verses from the *Nova Vulgata* found at the IntraText Digital Library https://www.intratext.com/IXT/LAT0669/_PUF.HTM. English text is from the Douay-Rheims translation of the Vulgate (ebook #1581) available at Project Gutenberg https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1581.

medieval lay person with minimal or no literacy would likely have encountered these works more commonly than written texts. Recent work such as Federico Botana's *The Works of Mercy in Italian Medieval Art (c. 1050 - c. 1400)* (2012) documents portrayals of the Works of Mercy in various medieval art forms, including paintings within churches.[204] The average medieval lay person who regularly attended Mass and other ecclesiastical events would have been more likely to see these depictions than to read about them in texts. The prevalence of the Works of Mercy in art indicates that medieval people would have been familiar with them and may have recognized references to them in dramatic works like the York biblical plays. References to Christ's body as food, then, would not just have evoked the Eucharist during the Feast of Corpus Christi, but would have also evoked the commandment to "feed the hungry" and perform other charitable works.

The connection of the newborn Christ to food and, more specifically, the Eucharist, occurs later in the pageant in Joseph's and Mary's liturgical dialogue. In her study of how the York plays demonstrate "lay catechesis," Pamela M. King argues that the plays provide instruction on the sacraments. She notes that "the real affirmation of the sacrament of the altar" occurs most "explosively" when "the Virgin Mary the moment she has given birth greets the Word made flesh with the words of greeting conventionally uttered at the moment of the elevation of the host" by laypeople during the medieval mass.[205] King states that medieval English Mass books familiar to laypeople, such as *The Lay Folks' Mass Book* and John Myrc's *Instructions for Parish Priests*, include prayers of greeting for the elevation of the host that often

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[204] Frederico Botana, *The Works of Mercy in Italian Medieval Art (c. 1050 - c. 1400)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012). See also P. H. Cullum, "'Yf lak of charyte be not ower hynderawnce': Margery Kempe, Lynn, and the Practice of the Spiritual and Bodily Works of Mercy," in *A Companion to the Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. John H. Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis (Martlesham, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 2004) for a discussion of the practice of charity by medieval lay people and their knowledge of the Works of Mercy through Church teachings.
[205] Pamela M. King, "The York Cycle and Instruction on the Sacraments," in *Learning and Literacy in Medieval England and Abroad*, ed. Sarah Rees Jones (Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2003), 167.

begin with the words "'Hail' or 'Welcome,'" much like Mary's greeting in the pageant:

> Mary: Hayle, my lord God, hayle prince of pees,
>
> Hayle, my fadir, and hayle my sone;
>
> Hayle, souereyne sege all synnes to sesse,
>
> Hayle, God and man in erth to wonne.
>
> Hayle, thurgh whos myght
>
> All þis worlde was first begonne,
>
> Merknes and light.[206]

According to King, Christ is represented at the moment of his birth as the Eucharist, the spiritual food which will sustain the entire Christian community. King also notes that experiencing this dialogue in the form of a play would have reflected for the spectating audience the lay experience of witnessing Holy Communion at Mass, during which the priest often ingested the host on behalf of the congregation.[207] King shows that Mary's speech recalls the lay accompanying missal, but it may also recall the Latin words spoken by the priest during Holy Communion. While most medieval laypeople were likely not familiar enough with Latin to read and understand it, they may have recognized phrases that they frequently heard during important moments at Mass. For example, when the wine chalice containing what is understood to be Christ's blood is raised during the Sarum Rite, the priest utters the words "remissiónem peccatórum" ("pardon of the sinful"), and Mary's mention of "all synnes to sesse" might be recognized by the audience as a reference to this liturgical moment.[208] Additionally, Mary's

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[206] King, "The York Cycle and Instruction on the Sacraments, 167 and Beadle, *The York Plays*, "The Nativity" 57-63.

[207] Laypeople would have received Holy Communion at least once a year, sometimes more often, but priests received Communion at every Mass.

[208] *The Sarum Rite: Missale Sarisburiense cum nota*, ed. William Renwick (Ontario: The Gregorian Institute of Canada, 2018), 1177. The audience for the plays would likely have been more familiar with the Use of York, which contains some differences outside of this section of text. Thanks to Nicole Guenther Discenza for the suggestion.

monologue encourages audience participation in her adoration. The word "Hail" is commonly used in prayers and similar recitations and likely would be recognized as a call to devotion. By participating in the action onstage, the audience engages in a communal act of pious reverence that they would otherwise almost only experience during the Mass. Although the drama is not enacting an actual sacramental or liturgical ritual, it still similarly brings the community together in an act of devotion. This event is reminiscent of the Eucharist as the culminating event of the Mass. Moreover, the repeated use of the word "Hail" may have evoked thoughts of the Hail Mary prayer, which also refers to Christ as food in the line "and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus." Therefore, even when the infant Christ is not explicitly described in terms of food in *The Nativity* pageant, the dialogue still elicits such images by referencing common prayers and liturgy. Indeed, Joseph's earlier declaration illustrates his joy at *seeing* the food, alluding to the medieval Mass. This speech also enhances the participatory nature of the play because the lay audience would recognize it as recitation they regularly encounter and in which they engage.

The representation of Christ as food occurs in additional pageants at moments that emphasize Christ's sacrifice for humanity. The second King greets Christ in *Herod and The Magi* by saying, "Hayll, foode þat thy folke fully may fede."[209] Here, the dialogue combines both important characteristics of Joseph's and Mary's declarations in *The Nativity*, the reference to Christ as food and the use of the word "Hail" to evoke devotion. Furthermore, specifying that Christ provides sustenance for "thy folke" points to the salvation he provides for all Christians, emphasizing both community and portraying Christ's sacrificial death as the ultimate good charitable deed. This Eucharistic language appears again in *The Death of Christ (Mortificacio Christi)* when Joseph (of Arimathea) comments on the crucifixion, saying, "Full falsely þei fellid

[209] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Herod and The Magi," 321.

þat foode."[210] Here, Joseph refers to Christ's tortured body as food, tying the Passion to the Sacrament of the Eucharist. This line of dialogue makes explicit what medieval Christians would understand implicitly: Christ's deceased body provides the sustenance necessary for salvation. This imagery combined with the devotional language of the pageant and the implicit theological concept that Christ is the savior of all humanity provides a works-based model of charity for pious audience members. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 explicitly connects works with salvation in its first Canon: "And should anyone after the reception of baptism have fallen into sin, by true repentance he can always be restored. Not only virgins and those practicing chastity, but also those united in marriage, through the right faith and through works pleasing to God, can merit eternal salvation."[211] This model of salvation through charitable works occurs in the same Canon that describes the sacrament of the Eucharist and the doctrine of transubstantiation among the most important tenets of the Catholic faith. The Eucharist and charity juxtaposed together in their importance to faith and salvation in theological texts, as well as literary and dramatic texts, as the York pageants show. Descriptions of Christ's body as food during his earliest appearances in the pageants remind viewers of his sacrifice and the representation of charity in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Crucifixio Christi

While *The Nativity* pageant introduces the motif of presenting Christ's body as food in connection with the Eucharist, the *Crucifixio Christi* pageant focuses on Christ's corporeality to emphasize the suffering and sacrifice of his body as commemorated in the sacrament of the

[210] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Mortificacio Christi" 372.
[211] H. J. Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils*, 238-9. The modern catechism also explicitly connects the Eucharist with almsgiving, showing how this concept has endured within the Catholic faith: "From the very beginning Christians have brought, along with the bread and wine for the Eucharist, gifts to share with those in need. This custom of the collection, ever appropriate, is inspired by the example of Christ who became poor to make us rich" (1351).

Eucharist. York's *Crucifixion* pageant contains graphic descriptions of Christ's torture and execution. These depictions focus on Christ's bodily pain and injury, forcing the audience to witness the mortification of Christ's flesh to atone for their sins. The dual emphasis on Christ's corporeality and salvific sacrifice combine the two important aspects of the sacrament of the Eucharist. The play therefore utilizes Eucharistic imagery to promote devotion and a sense of community. In his speech from the cross, the tortured Christ urges the audience to reflect on his physical suffering as an inspiration to renew their faith. The amount of dialogue dedicated to the soldiers' work, moreover, stresses the importance of action. The soldiers who nail Christ to the cross provide vivid dialogue of their own struggle to perform their laborious task and of the pain and injury they are inflicting upon Christ. The soldiers' dialogue both enhances and complicates the representation of *caritas* in the play because they both identify their efforts as important for the community and are obviously antagonists to Christ and the audience. The soldiers' labor directly affects Christ's physical suffering, and their actions, much like Judas's betrayal, are unfortunately necessary for the salvation of Christians. Likewise, Christ's pain is a form of physical labor leading to his death which will fulfill the purpose of saving people's souls. The soldiers' labor and Christ's laborious suffering together perform the action required to save humanity.

In the *Crucifixio Christi* pageant, the soldiers who nail Christ to the cross verbally connect his corporeality to his works and to the larger community, thus linking his body to the medieval notion of *caritas*. The soldiers' graphic descriptions when nailing Christ to the cross and hoisting him up emphasize Christ's labor in suffering physical pain and the value of their own well-performed labor to the larger community, especially, given the religious nature of the play, to the Christian community. The soldiers link their own work to Christ's body by

displaying concern about their workmanship and expertise and commenting on the shoddy craftsmanship of the cross-builders. They even call upon a tortured Christ to admire the work performed upon his body by their bodies - they have all labored intensely in this task. However, the dialogue here briefly directs the audience's attention away from Christ's suffering and towards the soldiers' toil and cooperation. While they are the antagonists of the play, the audience likely would have recognized these local craftsmen. The *Crucifixio Christi* pageant was produced by the pinners' and painters' guild, and its concern with civic and vocational duty, coupled with and enacted upon Christ's body, promotes a form of charity centered on works and community, a theologically orthodox view of *caritas*.[212] However, it broadens the definition of the doctrine to include labor as essential to performed charity. Despite the lack of charity with which the soldiers are treating Christ, they are concerned with how their actions affect one another and the community that has appointed them to their task. Ironically, by directing the concepts of unity and charity towards their neighbors and fellow laborers, rather than towards Christ himself, the soldiers in the pageant encourage charitable works in a way that is perhaps most appropriately suited for medieval Catholic doctrine. Their labor is focused on tangible, beneficial works for the local community, but its association with Christ's body still emphasizes the divinity involved with *caritas*. While the audience may have recognized the actors as their real-life neighbors, their attitude towards them would likely have been complicated by the fact that the soldiers are the characters that are harming Jesus. This very paradox emphasizes Christ's labor as the true embodiment of *caritas* as well as the damnation of the soldiers and non-Christians.

[212] Kate Crassons, Nicole R. Rice, Margaret Aziza Pappano, and others have written extensively on the relationships of individual guilds to the pageants they produced.

The *Crucifixio Christi* pageant also links Christ's body to the medieval notion of *caritas* in the way the soldiers nail him to the cross. The second Soldier mentions early in the pageant that "þe foulest dede of all / Shalle he [Christ] dye for his dedis." The "foulest death," meaning a particularly painful one that emphasizes Christ's corporeality, is directly linked to his works, "dedis."[213] The link occurs not only in the substance of the line but in the spelling of the two words. The Middle English noun for "death" is commonly spelled "deth," with a total of 329 quotations in the Middle English Compendium from a wide range of literature.[214] A secondary spelling, "ded," has only 25 associated quotations, most of which come from religious texts or have spiritual connotations.[215] The Middle English Dictionary also notes that the spelling "ded" is found more commonly in Northern and East Midlands dialects, but the effect of including both "dede" and "dedis" for "death" and "deeds" within the same line nonetheless evokes a strong association between the two nouns. This connection of Christ's body to works becomes a model for *caritas* both through Christ's sacrifice for humanity and when the soldiers comment on the value of their labor and work together to raise the cross.

Many critics have examined the York Mystery Cycle as a promotion of civic duty and a guide for urban labor practices.[216] This focus on community relationships represents a broader interpretation of *caritas* as love for one's neighbor. According to James Simpson, "the communities that mounted these plays were also powerfully self-critical of their own domestic and labour practices… they mounted a theology of labour at whose centre stands the practice of

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[213] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Crucifixio Christi" 21-22.
[214] *deth (n)*. Middle English Dictionary, University of Michigan. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED11421/track?counter=1&search_id=33978308
[215] *ded (n)*. Middle English Dictionary, University of Michigan. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED10743/track?counter=2&search_id=33978308
[216] Simpson, in *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, calls this "a model of civic cooperation," 512; see also Sarah Beckwith's *Signifying God* (especially "Chapter 3: Work, Markets, Civic Structure: Organizing the York Corpus Christi Plays"), and Kate Crassons' "The Challenges of Social Unity."

mercy in the active life."[217] Stressing the importance of the active life (in addition to the contemplative life), the York plays promote the value of works and their role in one's salvation. Simpson explains that the plays "emerge" from "that sophisticated lay culture, a culture that shaped its own theology of mercy out of its immersion in and knowledge of the rigours of domestic and civic life. The plays take possession of salvation history by writing the pain of family and political life into scriptural narrative."[218] This concern over performed labor represents a larger concern for the community and one's service to it. As the soldiers nail Christ to the cross in the *Crucifixio Christi*, the first Soldier says, "Thanne to þis werke vs must take heede, / So þat oure wirkyng be noght wronge" and "now wirke we wele," displaying concern over his labor for its own sake and that of the community, not necessarily due to any animosity towards Christ.[219] In the opening lines of the play, the first soldier reminds his colleagues of their civic duty in executing Christ, reminding them that they know "Howe lordis and leders of owre lawe / Has geven dome þat þis doote schall dye."[220] The first soldier goes on to declare at the end of the play that "Als Pilate demed is done and dight."[221] While these lines emphasize the soldiers' desire to please authority figures, their word choice also implies that they perceive their task as beneficial to the whole community. They refer to Christ as "þis traitoure strange" and a "cursed knave," suggesting that he is a danger to their community in particular and more generally to society at large.[222] The soldiers' declaration that Pilate would be pleased with their work occurs when the soldiers also question whether Christ was truly the Son of God, drawing

[217] Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, 513.
[218] Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, 509. See also: Maren L. Donley, "Mercers, Mercantilism, and the Maintenance of Power: The York Last Judgment and The York Register," *Exemplaria* 18.2 (Summer 2006) for a discussion of participation in the consumer economy as a process of salvation.
[219] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Crucifixio Christi," 25-6 and 48.
[220] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Crucifixio Christi," 4-5.
[221] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Crucifixio Christi," 281.
[222] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Crucifixio Christi," 32 and 45.

the audience's attention again to the true model of charity within the pageant: Christ's sacrificial death. Simpson explains that "These workmen enjoy an evident solidarity; they also want to do a job well. The processes of their labour are, however, dwarfed by a larger, ethical account of 'works.'"[223] Beyond that, the soldiers' concerns over their workmanship are further linked to Christ's body. The most vivid descriptions of Christ's corporeality occur when the soldiers discuss the shoddy workmanship of another group of laborers, the cross builders; they have to stretch his body to fit the holes bored into the cross so that "assoundir are bothe synnous and veynis."[224] While the audience may read this moment as the cross resisting its role in Christ's suffering, the soldiers explicitly blame the craftsmen who built the cross, which "Att þe firste tyme was it made ouer-wyde."[225] The third soldier claims that his difficulty in nailing Christ to the cross occurs because "it was ouere-skantely scored, / þat makis fouly for to faile."[226] The cross builders' careless and inefficient labor increases Christ's physical pain, further linking his body to quality of workmanship and therefore the welfare of the larger urban community.

The raising of the cross creates a paradoxical moment in which the audience identifies with their fellow craftsmen as they recognize their neighbors and local parishioners and with the sacrificed Christ, humanity's savior.[227] The soldiers entreat Christ to admire their work once he has been raised:

I MILES: Say sir, howe likis you nowe,

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[223] Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, 524.
[224] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Crucifixio Christi," 147.
[225] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Crucifixio Christi," 231.
[226] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Crucifixio Christi," 112.
[227] While Christ's suffering is the primary focus of the soldiers' work and would have been the focus of the audience's sympathy, the soldiers, likely recognized as local craftsmen, may have elicited some sympathy from the audience as well for their desire to perform their task well. Kolve states that while Latin drama rarely staged Christ's Passion, "the vernacular plays emphasized the scorn, the jesting, and the violence, and thus the problem was correspondingly acute," *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, 29. Therefore, the audience might both empathize with the laborer's efforts and increase their understanding of Christ's sacrifice through such shocking dramatic action.

þis werke þat we haue wrought?

IV MILES: We praye youe, sais vs howe

Ȝe fele, or faynte ȝe ought.[228]

The desire for their victim's approval places the soldiers' concerns over the quality of their labor even deeper into the community – to perhaps the very last person whose approval is required. Christ responds by addressing the audience, representative of the larger Christian community, and drawing attention to his body: "Behold mine head, mine hands, and mine feet."[229] Simpson states that "the speech of the elevated Christ is a massive break in the fictional bounds of the stage: Christ speaks to the audience in the 'street' as much as to the workmen, and beyond them to all who *behold the spectacle of the crucified Christ*" (emphasis mine).[230] Thus, Christ's body becomes the symbol for the work that has been performed upon it by the soldiers and for the proper way that work should be performed for the benefit of the community. The production's staging techniques enhance the ethical imperative for the audience, as Christ, so to speak, breaks the "fourth wall" of the performance. Simpson reads this moment as a cautionary lesson on the separation of work and ethics: "Christ's speech effects a radical alienation effect, prohibiting the audience from immersion in the stage illusion. The point of the theatrical alienation is to underline the more significant alienation of labour from its larger ethical meaning."[231] While the play exposes the alienation of labor from the larger ethical meaning of works and theological understanding of *caritas*, Christ's speech and the soldiers' comments attempt to remedy the disconnect between theory and practice, rather than to further alienate the audience. Viewers understand that Christ's more gruesome injuries have occurred due to the difficulty the soldiers

[228] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Crucifixio Christi," 249-252.
[229] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Crucifixio Christi," 255.
[230] Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, 524.
[231] Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, 524.

have in securing him to the cross. One of the possible reasons for this struggle, as the soldiers have mentioned, is that the previous laborers performed hastily and poorly, thus neglecting their duty to the community. Christ's insistence that the audience witness his suffering draws attention to the problems created by inefficient labor. In a crowded city like medieval York, which depended so heavily on social cooperation, performing one's labor honestly and efficiently was a form of "loving" one's neighbor.[232] Still, the soldiers lack solidarity with their fellow laborers, the cross-builders, when they openly criticize their work, and their labor is, of course, directed into crucifying Jesus. In this way, the soldiers provide a negative model of *caritas* for viewer reflection.

The *Crucifixio Christi* pageant also promotes *caritas* through the way the soldiers help each other perform the task of raising the cross. Their cooperation is evident in their dialogue and in the continuation of the same meter and rhyme; the second Soldier says, "Gyffe me þis wegge, I schall it in dryue… I thryng þame same, so motte I thryve."[233] The discussion of what each man does and their commands to each other suggest the "civic cooperation"[234] necessary for truly expressing love for one's neighbor. Not only is this necessary, but it helps them "thrive." The pain of the soldiers' labor also becomes bound with Christ's pain:

IV MILES: He made vs stande as any stones,
So boustous was he for to bere.
I MILES: Nowe raise hym nemely for þe nonys,
And sette hym be þis mortas heere,
And latte hym falle in alle at ones,

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[232] See also: Sarah Beckwith's *Signifying God*, Chapter 3: "Work, Markets, Civic Structure."
[233] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Crucifixio Christi," 242 and 246.
[234] Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution,* 512.

For certis, þat payne schall haue no pere

. . . .

IV MILES: Latte doune, so all his bones

Are asoundre nowe on sides seere.[235]

The physical struggle to elevate the cross causes bodily pain for the soldiers just as it causes bodily pain for Christ. Even though the soldiers are the cause of Christ's pain, they are all suffering together. This commonality reflects the universal nature of the doctrine of *caritas*. According to Beadle and King, "This leads to the development of an interesting relationship between soldiers and audience, one approaching identification rather than alienation, which the playwright goes on to exploit."[236] The soldiers' dialogue becomes engaging, even humorous, as attention is drawn away momentarily from Christ. The action onstage, evident in the dialogue since the text does not include stage directions, becomes what a modern audience might consider slapstick. As the soldiers struggle to raise the cross, they whine about their pains, which pale in comparison to their victim's pain. They also mock, scold, and tease one another. For example, when the third soldier complains about the cross-builders' poor workmanship, the first soldier scolds him: "Why carpe ȝe so?" and insists that his colleague continue his work.[237] The third soldier replies "þou comaundis lightly as a lorde," implying that the first soldier is taking on an easy managerial role, and insists that he "Come helpe."[238] The first soldier continues the humorous banter by responding "Nowe certis þat schall I doo - / Full sne[l]ly as a snayle."[239] At this point, one can imagine audience members chuckling at this relatable workplace interaction.

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[235]Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Crucifixio Christi," 217-224.
[236]Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Crucifixio Christi," 211.
[237] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Crucifixio Christi," 113.
[238] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Crucifixio Christi,"115-116.
[239] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Crucifixio Christi," 117-118. (Brackets in original.)

As the soldiers raise the cross, their dialogue becomes even more comical as they rapidly express their struggle:

I MILES: Lifte vppe!

IV MILES: Latte see!

II MILES: Owe! Lifte alang.[240]

The soldiers' first attempt is unsuccessful, so a second attempt provides more terse, hyperbolic dialogue and, presumably, comedic action. These two instances may give the audience several moments of laughter during the play as they watch their neighborhood craftsmen struggle with their appointed task. However, the scene abruptly returns to Christ's ordeal as the cross is finally raised and the dialogue focuses again on his bodily suffering. Beadle and King explain that "As the cross rises and drops upright into the mortice, the full force of the soldiers' workmanship becomes apparent, and the audience realize that in their laughter at the awkward efforts of four local workmen, they have been seduced into condoning the Crucifixion."[241] In this way, the soldiers' concern over the quality of their labor, even as they torture Christ, as well as their excessive toil in hoisting the cross, creates an even stronger lesson for viewers in understanding the magnitude of Christ's sacrifice. This moment shows the complicity of all of humanity in Christ's suffering.

The character of Christ himself draws particular attention to his corporeality after he is hoisted up on the cross and revealed to the audience: "Byholdes myn heede, myn handis, and my / feet." He does so again during his death scene in the next pageant, *Mortificacio Christi*, but

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[240] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Crucifixio Christi,"186-188.
[241] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Crucifixio Christi,"212.

links his own bodily sacrifice to the material sacrifices the faithful must make as imitatio Christi in order to achieve their own salvation.[242] Christ tells the onlookers in *Mortificacio Christi*:

> þus for thy goode
>
> I schedde my bloode.
>
> Manne, mende thy moode,
>
> For full bittir þi blisse mon I by.[243]

While calling attention to his own suffering for the sake of humanity, Christ instructs his followers to make changes as well. The Middle English meaning of *menden (v.)* has a relatively broader definition than the modern *mend*, with the *MED* listing five definitions. The first definition, usually the most common, is

> (a) To put right (sth. wrong or harmful), alleviate (distress); atone for (faults, errors), remedy; amend (one's life), repent of (a sin); (b) to cure (sb.) of vice, reform; **so god me mende**, as God may cure me, so help me God; **as mahoun me mende**; (c) *refl.* to repent, reform; (d) without obj.: to amend one's life, repent.[244]

The fifth definition is also relevant to Christ's speech: "To keep (sth.) in a good state; control (the universe), regulate (morals, laws)."[245] More than simply *to repair*, the word *mende* here carries the additional connotations of atonement, transformation, and repentance. The noun form especially has a second definition that is explicitly listed in the *MED* as theological: "*Theol.* (a) Satisfaction, penance; **to mendes**, as satisfaction; **don mendes**, perform the penance; **mendes**

[242] "imitation of Christ": The idea that Christians must imitate Christ in order to become true disciples. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity* edited by Daniel Patte, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511780165.010 explains that the concept derives from Aristotle's idea of perfectionism gained only through apprenticeship, and believers must therefore "be transformed into Christ's likeness" (586).
[243] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Mortificacio Christi," 127-130.
[244] *menden (v)*. Middle English Dictionary, University of Michigan. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED27302/track?counter=4&search_id=18581710. (Bold text in original.)
[245] *menden (v)*. Middle English Dictionary, University of Michigan.

making, penance; (b) atonement; **maken ~ of**, to make atonement for."[246] Given its appearance in Christ's speech, it is likely that *mende* is meant to be understood in its theological sense here. Similarly, the *MED*'s entry for the word *moode* includes nine definitions. Some of these definitions are: "mind as that constituent of the soul possessing the faculties of knowing, understanding, etc… the mind as governing instincts, thoughts, etc… the seat of man's spiritual life, religious beliefs, moral consciousness, etc."[247] In addition to our current understanding of mood as *emotional state* or *temperament*, the Middle English word *moode* carries a more spiritual connotation. Therefore, when Christ tells "[manne]" to "mende thy moode" as he emphasizes his own suffering, he implies that his sacrifice creates an imperative for Christians to improve their faith. For a medieval Christian, such an instruction would imply both a more personal relationship with Christ and active service. Thus, the spiritual sustenance Christ has provided through (the death of) his body becomes a call of action to the audience to participate in their own salvation by performing similar works of *caritas*. According to Beadle and King, when the cross is raised, "The tenor of Christ's address to 'all men that walk by way or street,' combined with this visual impact, makes it plain that, for the playwright, the Crucifixion is an act in which all men at all times are necessarily implicated."[248] Both visually and verbally, Christ emphasizes his corporeality at moments when he instructs believers to increase their faith and, implicitly, to demonstrate their love and devotion through charitable deeds that reflect the Corporal Works of Mercy and benefit the community.

[246] *mend(e (n)*. Middle English Dictionary, University of Michigan. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED27300/track?counter=1&search_id=18581710. (Bold text in original.)
[247] *mod (n)*. Middle English Dictionary, University of Michigan. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED28406/track?counter=27&search_id=18581830
[248] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Crucifixio Christi," 212.

The communal nature of the *Crucifixio Christi* play and the larger York cycle extends beyond the citizens of the city to anyone watching the pageant. Rice and Pappano note that the plays became so popular that people would have visited the city from elsewhere to experience the performance. They translate a 1399 petition to the leaders of York, which includes a description of the biblical plays as "a work of charity for the benefit of the said commons and of the strangers who have travelled to the said city for the honor [of] God and the promotion of charity among the same commons."[249] Apparently open to anyone, the plays evoke a sense of community not just among the citizens of York but among all Christians. This line in the petition also directly relates the plays to acts of charity and the "promotion" of charity. According to Rice and Pappano, "This double invocation of charity defines the play as a devotional act, 'a charitable' offering to York's own citizens and a means of enfolding strangers into the civic body on Corpus Christi, the day celebrating Christian unity."[250] Furthermore, the plays encourage charitable material actions among the viewers, like using one's labor for the good of the community and providing sustenance for the needy.

Medieval Corpus Christi cycles, morality plays, and religious literature in general have long been studied for their didactic purposes, especially regarding lay piety. The York Mystery Cycle, however, seems to strive towards loftier aspirations, as its instructions for individuals take into consideration the needs of the community, both of the citizens of medieval York and the world's Christians. As Kolve states regarding the didactic purpose of medieval drama, "The power of the sacrament must be understood as well as believed in, and this requisite understanding is centered on a narrative."[251] Representing the doctrine of *caritas* through the

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[249] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Crucifixio Christi," 22.
[250] Rice, Nicole R. and Margaret Aziza Pappano. *The Civic Cycles: Artisan Drama and Identity in Premodern England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), 22.
[251] Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, 49.

sacramental body of Christ is just one of the many complex ways in which the cycle does this. This York play focuses most directly on Christ's corporeality and the importance of committing charitable deeds within one's community of neighbors, labor, and fellow Christians. These embodied depictions of Christ evoke Eucharistic imagery, and this representation of the sacrament draws a unique connection between the staged drama and the audience, thus enhancing the imperative towards charity.

The Least of These and the Corporal Works of Mercy in the *Doomsday* Pageant

Graphic depictions of Christ's body within the *Doomsday* pageant also promote material charity by stressing his corporeality alongside dialogue that reflects the Corporal Works of Mercy. In a recent study on the disparity between the ideal form of charity promoted in the *Doomsday* pageant and the exclusivity evident in the mercer's guild documents, Kate Crassons links Christ's body in the play to the larger community of Christians.[252] Crassons explains that, in the pageant, as in Scripture, Christ proclaims that the way people treat the poor reflects their treatment of him, since he is present within all Christians. Quoting Scripture, Christ explains that "To leste or moste whan ȝe it did, / To me ȝe did þe selue and þe same."[253] This omnipresence promotes an indiscriminate and generous view of charity that confuses both the saved and damned souls who seem to therefore feel tricked by it. The damned souls demand to know when Christ was ever in prison, hungry, thirsty, naked, or in any other need. They ask, "When did we þe þis wikkidnesse?"[254] Christ responds that whenever someone asked for help in his name, and the plea was ignored, "To me was þat vnkyndines kyd."[255] Similarly, the saved souls ask,

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[252] Crassons, "The Challenges of Social Unity."
[253] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Doomsday," 363-4.
[254] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Doomsday,"356.
[255] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Doomsday," 361.

"Whanne was'te þat we þe clothes brought, / Or visite þe in any nede,...?"[256] Both groups of souls are surprised to hear that their lord is present within the lowliest of beggars. According to Crassons, "the pageant places special emphasis on the absolute importance of aiding the hungry, sick, and naked who make appeals for help. The York *Doomsday* play thus shows that the criteria for salvation center around one's response to poverty and need."[257] Within their questions, the saved souls refer to "clothes" and "visit[ing]," reflecting the Corporal Works of Mercy that specify the kinds of material support Christians should provide for the needy. This focus on material charity within the same dialogue that links Christ to all Christians reflects a model of *caritas* that demonstrates love for God through love for one's neighbor by means of tangible action.

Similar to the *Crucifixio Christi* pageant, the *Doomsday* pageant graphically depicts Christ's tortured body. Although Crassons does not mention the word *caritas* because her examination is not a theological one, this emphasis on active charity and concern for the entire community embody the two tenets of the medieval notion of *caritas*. Christ appears to the souls in his bodily form – that is, the wounded body in which he died – and stresses his corporeality by calling attention to his body's individual parts in dialogue that reflects lines from The *Crucifixio Christi* pageant:

> Here may ȝe see my woundes wide,
>
> þe whilke I tholed for youre mysdede.
>
> Thurgh harte and heed, foote, hande, and hide,
>
> Nought for my gilte, butt for youre nede.
>
> Beholdis both body, bak, and side,

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[256] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Doomsday," 305-6.
[257] Crassons, "The Challenges of Social Unity," 307.

How dere I bought youre brotherhede.

Þes bittir peynes I wolde abide,

To bye you blisse þus wolde I bleede[258]

In these lines, Christ draws attention to the wounds he received during the crucifixion and explicitly links his injuries with humanity's "nede," framing the act of salvation as a form of material charity. Christ's death was a physical action that fulfilled the needs of the Christian community. Christ goes on to list the events of his death in order and again connects these deeds to his love for humanity:

On crosse þei hanged me, on a hill,

Blody and bloo, as I was bette,

With croune of thorne throsten full ill.

Þis spere vnto my side was sette,

Myne harte-bloode spared noght þei for to spill;

Manne, for thy loue wolde I not lette.[259]

In this graphic depiction of the passion and crucifixion, Christ links his bodily pain to his "loue" for "Manne." These lines reiterate those stated by Christ when he is hoisted up in the *Crucifixio Christi* pageant and in *Mortificacio Christi* in which he draws attention to his wounds and directly explains to the audience that he has done this for humanity's salvation.[260] Additionally, within this speech, Christ also states that "Mi body was scourged withouten skill," recalling the botched work done by the soldiers of the *Crucifixio Christi* pageant who nailed him to the cross and, according to the soldiers, the cross-builders who did not craft an efficient execution

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[258] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Doomsday," 245-52.
[259] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Doomsday," 255-60.
[260] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Crucifixio Christi," 255 and "Mortificacio Christi" 127-30. See pg. 84 and 88.

device.[261] As in the previous pageants, the *Doomsday* pageant portrays Christ's suffering as labor that is beneficial to the community. These pageants tie "work" with "works," adding a layer of obligation to material charity as not merely recommended for Christians, but as essential to daily life as one's vocation is.

Finally, Christ asks humanity how they have reciprocated his love with a question that likely would have been addressed to the audience directly: "All þis I suffered for þi sake – / Say, man, what suffered þou for me?"[262] Here, Christ acknowledges that he physically suffered for the salvation of mankind, articulating an interpretation of *caritas* that is linked to his body, and directs the audience with a rhetorical question to likewise provide physical offerings. Crassons states, "as the crucified Christ reappears in this pageant, his wounded body emerges as a symbol extending beyond his own sacrifice on the cross to encompass the poor as well as the wider community to which they belong."[263] Yet Christ's body not only represents the larger Christian community; it also represents the medieval theological imperative of active charity (*caritas*) through the combined discussion of Christ's corporeality and his address to mankind regarding the quantity of their works. After pointing to his wounds and describing his physical torture, Christ turns his attention towards the spectators (most likely comprised of the actual audience in the streets of York, heightening the instructional purpose of this scene) and what they will do in return for his sacrifice. Despite Christ's use of first person pronouns, his "me" includes the entire community of the faithful, particularly the poor. He says,

Mi blissid childir, I schall ȝou saye

What tyme þis dede was to me done:

[261] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Doomsday," 253 and "Crucifixio Christi," 231-232. See pg. 79, 82, and 85-86.
[262] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Doomsday," 245-252, 255-260.
[263] Crassons, "The Challenges of Social Unity," 307.

When any þat nede hadde, nyght or day,

Askid ȝou helpe, and hadde it sone.[264]

By specifying acts performed to benefit those in need and claiming that such acts are "to me done," Christ conflates his presence with every individual person. His use of the word "any" stresses the fact that charity must be directed toward the needy indiscriminately. Furthermore, this reference to the Scriptural passage on Christ's presence in the "least" of mankind qualifies his previous speech about reciprocal sacrifice between him and humanity. In order to imitate Christ's sacrifice, people must perform charitable deeds towards one another.

The importance of charity being *active* is evident as Christ emphasizes the Corporal Works of Mercy when he tells the saved souls:

Whenne I was hungery, ȝe me fedde,

To slake my thirste youre harte was free;

Whanne I was clothles ȝe me cledde,

Ȝe wolde no sorowe vppon me see.

In harde presse whan I was stedde,

Of my penaunce ȝe hadde pitee;

Full seke whan I was brought in bedde,

Kyndely ȝe come to coumforte me.[265]

These lines recite, nearly exactly, the Corporal Works of Mercy found in Matthew 25: 35-36 and portrayed in medieval artwork, so the reference likely would have been obvious to the audience of late medieval York.[266] This focus on feeding the hungry and thirsty, clothing the naked, and

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[264] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Doomsday," 309-312.
[265] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Doomsday," 285-92.
[266] See pg. 74-75.

caring for the sick encourages tangible acts of charity, rather than relying solely on inner faith, to achieve salvation. This speech also seems directed towards the audience, with its use of the second person plural pronoun, and not solely meant for the actors or props representing the saved. The audience may feel that Christ is directing them to perform these basic material acts of charity. In the *Doomsday* play, then, Christ's body does represent the entire Christian community, as Crassons argues, but it additionally symbolizes the requirement of active charity (*caritas*) in achieving salvation. Immediately before quoting the Corporal Works of Mercy, Christ explains that his followers will be judged "for youre good dede," stressing more generally the importance of works.[267] Additionally, the first commands of the Corporal Works of Mercy to feed the hungry and provide drink for the thirsty recall references to Christ's body as food in earlier pageants, specifically *The Nativity* and *Crucifixio Christi*. Medieval audiences, many of whom would have attended Mass regularly, may recognize the remembrance of Christ's suffering and death during the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The graphic portrayals of Christ's suffering and death in the *Doomsday* pageant, and the larger collection of York biblical pageants, therefore compel audience members toward tangible acts of charity for the needy by evoking their participation in the sacrament of the Eucharist and their duty to the wider Christian community.

Conclusion

The York biblical plays emphasize the importance of community through multiple levels of interpretation, including its textual/spoken dialogue, the medium of public drama, the participation of the city's craft guilds, and the theological themes that emphasize material charity. Rice and Pappano quote a contemporary document to note that, like the other biblical

[267] Beadle, *The York Plays*, "Doomsday," 283, "s" left out of the plural "dede" in original. According to the *MED*, the plural for "dede" can appear as such.

cycles, “Chester’s plays are instituted ‘for the Augmentacion & incresse of the holy and catholyk ffaith . . . but Also for the comen welth & prosperitie of this Citie,’ suggesting that the artisans’ dramatic work was similarly cast as a beneficent act that helped the city both spiritually and financially,” and the York plays fulfilled similar purposes.[268] Christ’s corporeal body appears throughout the cycle alongside devotional dialogue that recalls the celebration of the Eucharist and promotes acts of material charity that benefit the needy and the larger community. The devotional nature of much of the dialogue juxtaposed with graphic depictions of Christ’s tortured body underscore Christ’s sacrifice compelled by love for humanity. Individual pageants focus on cooperative labor, Christ’s physical suffering, and material acts of charity to equate works with the theological concept of *caritas*, love for God demonstrated through love for one’s neighbor.

Instances of Christ’s appearance throughout the York plays develop a narrative of Christ’s sacrifice that presents the perfect model of *caritas* through works. *The Nativity* pageant establishes the Eucharistic imagery present throughout the cycle’s depiction of Christ by acknowledging the eventual sacrifice of his body and referring to him using the word “foode” and other such devotional terms. Later in the cycle, the *Crucifixio Christi* play draws attention to Christ’s physical suffering as a form of works meant to benefit all Christians and provide a model for material charity. The soldiers’ cooperative labor in crucifying Christ also reminds Christian audiences of the consequences of their works and the importance of devoting their labor to righteous causes that materially benefit the community. In the *Doomsday* pageant, Christ speaks directly to Christian souls with dialogue that resembles the Corporal Works of Mercy, emphasizing the importance of indiscriminate material charity. He accompanies these words with

[268] Rice and Pappano, *The Civic Cycles*, 22.

references to his tortured body that recall the celebration of the Eucharist.[269] The York biblical plays therefore use dramatic technique to emphasize the theological doctrine of *caritas* through Eucharistic symbolism.

Religious practices and texts from the area around medieval York provide insight into the importance of the Eucharist and its connections to *caritas* in medieval theology and lay understanding. The Use of York contains some differences from the Sarum Rite, and one notable addition is that during the kiss of peace, the priest says, “Retain ye, the bond of charity and peace that ye may be fit for the sacred mysteries of God,” as opposed to the Sarum Rite’s simpler “Peace to thee and the Church.”[270] The Christian churches in and near York, then, prioritized charity and community and connected them to closeness to God. In their study of England’s civic biblical plays, Rice and Pappano highlight the necessity of charity in everyday life for medieval craft workers, stating that “artisan charity is connected with brotherly solidarity, public honor, and status.”[271] That artisan guilds prioritized charity, incorporated it into their dramatic productions, and felt that it would enhance their standing within the community suggests that medieval English society at large also highly valued charity. The York plays reflect this value in literary and dramatic form by tying charity to God’s love manifested in Christ’s sacrifice and celebrated in the Eucharist. According to Kolve, the “cycle form” is the natural format for presenting Eucharistic theology to lay audiences: “To play the whole story, then, is in the deepest sense to *celebrate* the Corpus Christi sacrament, to explain its necessity and power, and to show

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[269] According to Pamela King, in the York plays, “[t]he verbal combined with the visual effects of each appearance of Christ which, in pageants attributable to a number of different hands, create dramatic moments not merely recollective of New Testament history, but intentionally analogous to the process of transubstantiation,” “The York Cycle and Instruction on the Sacraments,” 167.

[270] Herbert Thurston, “Use of York,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 15. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912), http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15735a.htm.

[271] Rice and Pappano, *The Civic Cycles*, 22.

how that power will be made manifest at the end of the world."[272] The York plays show how *caritas* was expressed in late medieval drama and literature through Eucharistic symbolism and theological lessons on material charity.

[272] Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, 48, emphasis in original.

CHAPTER III: THE EMBODIMENT OF *CARITAS* IN *PIERS PLOWMAN*

Like the York biblical plays, William Langland's *Piers Plowman* depicts *caritas* as charitable works symbolized in bodily representations of Christ. The late 14th-century poem depicts the eight dream visions experienced by the main character Will when he falls asleep among Malvern Hills. His first vision is of a field full of people, representing the world, with a tower and a dungeon, representing heaven and hell, nearby. Much of this first vision details the marriage negotiations of Lady Mede, who represents profit, with the characters False and Conscience, along with the input of other allegorical figures. The second vision introduces the titular character Piers, a plowman who agrees to help the people in the field repent for their sins if they help him plow. In this vision, each of the Seven Deadly Sins appears and confesses their wrongdoings to Reason, and Truth provides a pardon for the penitent field workers. However, Piers destroys the pardon when its validity is questioned, and encourages those seeking salvation to seek Dowel, a symbol of good works. In the third vision, Will seeks Dowel and meets several allegorical figures. He also meets Troianus (the Roman Emperor Trajan), who discusses his salvation by good works and Christian intercession despite having been a pagan. In vision four, Will shares a feast with more allegorical figures, and Piers Plowman defines Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest. They encounter Haukyn, the Active Man, who demonstrates the necessity of good works and asceticism in achieving salvation. In the fifth vision, Will meets Anima, and they discuss the duty of the church and the importance of charity. Will sees Piers at the Tree of Charity and witnesses episodes from the life of Christ, inspiring him to seek Charity and Christ. In vision six, Will again experiences events from Christ's life, this time focusing on his death, which compels

Will to encourage his family to attend Mass with him. Will meets more allegorical figures in the final two visions and further discusses Christ's life and the corruption of the church. He wakes as Conscience vows to seek out Piers Plowman.

The poem, also like the York biblical plays, reached a relatively wide audience and influenced contemporary events and ideology. According to editor and translator A. V. C. Schmidt, evidence supports *Piers Plowman*'s popularity and relevance. He explains that "over sixty manuscripts survive, compared with over eighty of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and sixteen of his *Troilus and Criseyde*, and some forty of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*," which shows that the amount of interest in *Piers Plowman* was similar to that of other influential contemporary works.[273] Additionally, Schmidt, Steven Justice, and others note that a letter dated from the Rebellion of 1381 in England written by John Ball conspicuously references Piers Plowman: "...stondeth togidre in Godes name, and biddeth Peres Ploughman go to his werk… And do wel and bettre, and fleth synne…"[274] The fact that the leaders of a large uprising not only found inspiration in a secular literary work, but also mention the work in their communication attests to the contemporary popularity of the work and its influence on medieval society. Schmidt also notes an early printing date of 1550 and several reprintings to show that the poem maintained its prevalence into England's early modern period. Furthermore, Schmidt claims that the B-version of "the poem became known to, and influenced, English poets such as Spenser, Marlowe, and (possibly) Shakespeare."[275] *Piers Plowman*, therefore, provides insight into medieval popular theology and its continued influence into early modern writing. In this dissertation, I use A. V. C.

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[273] A. V. C. Schmidt, "Introduction" in William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, 2nd ed., ed. A. V. C. Schmidt (London: Orion, 2011), xix-xx.
[274] Qtd. in Schmidt, "Introduction," xx. See also Steven Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1996); Kathryn Walton, "Piers Plowman and the Great Uprising of 1381" Medievalists.net; and Sebastian Sobecki, "Hares, Rabbits, Pheasants: *Piers Plowman* and William Longewille, a Norfolk Rebel in 1381," *The Review of English Studies* 69, no. 289 (April 2018): 216–236.
[275] Schmidt, "Introduction," xviii.

Schmidt's edition of the B-Text due to its influence on medieval and early modern literature. As Schmidt explains in his introduction, the B-Text is likely a revised and lengthened version of the original A-text by the same author and the Z-text "is not universally accepted as authentic."[276] While the C-text is a further revision and addition to the B-text, Schmidt notes that it was not printed until 1813, while the B-text was printed by 1550 and therefore available to early modern readers. His edition of the B-text takes into consideration the context of the other three versions of the poem as well as current scholarship.

My analysis of *Piers Plowman* builds on studies of the poem's instructional and religious qualities, especially in its depiction of charity. For example, Emily Steiner has studied Langland's interpretation of the theological notion of *caritas*, love for God and neighbor, as an ethical imperative to perform charitable acts that he encourages throughout the poem. The poem promotes this notion of active charity as essential to the salvation of the entire Christian community and the duty of all its members. Elizabeth Salter, however, warns that to read *Piers Plowman* as purely homiletic is "false and damaging" and overshadows the poem's artistic beauty.[277] In this chapter, I trace *how* Langland depicts the concept of *caritas* throughout the poem, focusing particularly on its embodiment within Christ and the figures Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest. While Steiner provides a comprehensive introduction to the poem by using the doctrine of *caritas* to illustrate Langland's concern with the community, that is, the political, social, and literary debates of the time, I intend to focus on the theological and sacramental uses of the doctrine. This is not to say that other, more passive forms of charity are not deemed important by the text, but that the active form is presented as most essential to lay salvation.[278] Embodied

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[276] Schmidt, "Introduction," xvii
[277] Elizabeth Salter, *Piers Plowman: An Introduction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 6.
[278] By "passive charity," I mean forms of charity that may not be traditionally akin to almsgiving or other material support, but might be viewed as benefiting the community in a spiritual way. Such acts might include praying on

depictions of *caritas* throughout *Piers Plowman*, then, encourage a form of active charity consistent with medieval orthodoxy and sacramental theology. Langland's juxtaposition of instructional words and embodied figures work to compel his audience to enact *caritas* personally and individually. Additionally, I argue that embodied depictions of *caritas* within the poem recall Christ's Eucharistic sacrifice and that these portrayals, like those in the York biblical plays, symbolize all Christians within the body of Christ.

Piers Plowman Manuscripts: The Case for the B-Text

Four versions of *Piers Plowman* exist: the A-text, B-text, C-text, and Z-text. Most scholars generally accept versions A-C, totaling over 50 extant manuscripts, as works by the same author who added to and revised his work over time. The Z-text's authorship is contested by *Piers Plowman* scholars, as it exists in a single manuscript, MS Bodley 851, and appears to have lines taken from the A-text and "265 lines unique to Z" that indicate the voice of another writer.[279] Some scholars view the Z-text as a recreation of the A-text, while some consider it an earlier draft of version A. Schmidt dates the Z-text to about 1365, agreeing with A. G. Rigg and Charlotte Brewer that it predates the A-Text, which he dates around 1370.[280] The story established in the A-Text ends abruptly, and the B-Text, written c. 1379 adds thousands of additional lines for a more fully developed narrative. Most scholars acknowledge the C-Text as a further revision of the B-Text with some rearrangement and additional material.[281] Early editor Walter Skeat chose the B-Text for his 1869 edition of the poem and other prominent scholars have also chosen it for their analyses, including Elizabeth Salter, James Simpson, and A. V. C.

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behalf of others, preaching in accordance with Church doctrine, and living an ascetic lifestyle. Rosanne Gasse discusses the "contemplation tradition" as a focus on individual spiritual growth in medieval Catholic theology and literature, presenting it as a secondary interpretation to *Piers Plowman* in her article "Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest in Middle English Literature."

[279] A. V. C. Schmidt, "The Authenticity of the Z-Text of 'Piers Plowman': A Metrical Examination," 297.

[280] A.G. Rigg and Charlottes Brewer, Ed. *Piers Plowman: The Z Version.* Toronto: PIMS, 1983.

[281] Schmidt, "Introduction," xvii.

Schmidt.[282] While editions of A, C, and Z versions have since become available, I am using the B-Text in part because of its rich scholarly history.

Equally important to my decision to use the B-Text of *Piers Plowman* is that it is the version that would have been available to early modern readers, since it was the first version of the poem printed in 1550 by Robert Crowley.[283] Crowley updated his printing with two more editions, attesting to the text's popularity. He also added a preface and marginal notes with his reformist perspective, thus complicating the way the medieval text may have been received by sixteenth-century audiences.[284] The C-Text was printed in 1813 by Thomas Whitaker, and manuscripts of the A-Text were lost or not recognized as an alternate version until 1824 and published by Skeat in 1867.[285] I am therefore using the B-Text due to its manuscript and scholarship history, as well as its influence on the early modern texts I will discuss in the following chapter.

The Poor as Embodiments of Christ

The connection between salvation and almsgiving is made evident in *Piers Plowman's* many depictions of the poor as representatives of Christ. In Passus XI, Scripture explains to Will that the poor are particularly aligned with God because he has often appeared in their "liknesse."[286] However, this portrayal of the blessed poor is not limited to connections with Christ. Saints are also depicted as the lowest members of society, for "Seint Johan and othere

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[282] Elizabeth Salter, *Piers Plowman: An Introduction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969); James Simpson, *Piers Plowman: An Introduction to the B-Text* (London and New York: Longman, 1992); and Schmidt's edition cited above in footnote 273. Schmidt has since released an edition of all four versions of Piers Plowman: *Piers Plowman: A Parallel-Text Edition of A, B, C and Z Versions* (London and New York: Longman, 2008).
[283] Schmidt, "Introduction," xviii.
[284] John N. King, "Robert Crowley's Editions of *Piers Plowman*: A Tudor Apocalypse," 342. King states that "Crowley kidnapped this orthodox medieval demand for reform of monasticism and society, converting it, through his preface and marginal notes, into a powerful revolutionary attack against monasticism and the Roman Catholic hierarchy."
[285] Schmidt, "Introduction," xviii.
[286] William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, 2nd ed., ed. A. V. C. Schmidt (London: Orion, 2011), 11.231.

seints were seyen in poore clothing."[287] The holy, then, whether truly divine or not, is associated with poverty. Troianus previously says that good Christians

> apparaille us noght over proudly – for pilgrymes are we alle.
> And in the apparaille of a povere man and pilgrymes liknesse
> Many tyme God hath ben met among nedy peple,
> Ther never segge hym seigh in secte of the riche.[288]

In these lines, Troianus provides a familiar description of God appearing in the clothing of the poor, but he moves from metaphorical to literal when he states that God has been "met" among the needy, linguistically implying that God *is* the poor, since he is counted among them.[289] Thus, any Christian who desires true salvation emulates the poor to thus emulate God. All Christians are obligated to do so because they are all "pilgrymes," all members of the same community. The next line reminds Will and the reader that Christ was born to a woman who "Was a pure povere maide and to a povere man ywedded," again emphasizing the fact that God literally is the poor and came to Earth via a poor family.[290] His human form, his corporeal body, *is* among the earthly poor.

Langland further praises poverty when Scripture describes the poor as more graced by God because, if they suffer with "pacience," they will be able to direct all their thoughts toward God, instead of toward worldly goods.[291] Despite this seeming exclusivity, the entire Christian community actually participates in this grace because it is the duty of the wealthy to give alms to the poor. With such deeds, active charity unites all Christians to each other and God, perhaps

[287] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 11.244.
[288] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 11.240-243.
[289] "mēten v.(4): 1.(a) To come across… (b) to encounter," *Middle English Dictionary*.
[290] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 11.247
[291] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 11.255

even performing a function similar to that of a sacrament. In her examination of the characters Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest, Rosanne Gasse shows how, according to the theology expressed in *Piers Plowman*, Christians who perform charitable acts emulate Christ and experience grace, much like they do when receiving a sacrament:

> Jesus too did well, did better, and did best during his life on Earth. In also striving to do well, to do better, and to do best, in receiving the sacraments, each Christian in effect imitates Christ and can thus partially realize the desire of every martyr and of every mystic: a share in the experience of the divine.[292]

Identification with the poor, expressed through almsgiving, therefore, is identification with God. According to Aers, "the Eucharist is the sacrament of the Church's unity… it *signifies and causes* this unity, the communion [communio] through which believers are joined to Christ."[293] As Langland continues the tradition of depicting Christ as a member of the poor, he emphasizes embodied poverty: pilgrim's garb and the apparel of the poor. By promoting material charity, Langland focuses on the corporeal needs of the poor and therefore Christ's own corporeality. By associating Christ's *body* with the poor, Langland creates a Eucharistic image of active charity, one that is sacramental and efficacious. When the embodied Christ is associated with the poor, those who can help *must* act if they want to be redeemed.

Langland further utilizes this Eucharistic image by his references to the Christian community as "blody bretheren." When Piers Plowman is introduced in Passus VI, he takes pity on the hungry people who had refused to work the field, saying that they are "my blody

[292] Rosanne Gasse, "Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest in Middle English Literature," *Florilegium* 14, no. 1 (1995-96): 171-195, 188.
[293] David Aers, *Sanctifying Signs: Making Christian Tradition in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 2004), 40-41.

bretheren, for God boughte us alle."[294] While "blody bretheren" may mean kinship, the people in the field represent the world, so close familial bonds would not necessarily apply to all. Rather, with the addition of the second part of the line, Piers refers to Christ's sacrificial death that "boughte" salvation for Christians. Referring to the people as "blody bretheren," then, recalls the unity of Christ's Church as well as his brutal death. This emphasis on his suffering and corporeality creates a Eucharistic image in which humanity is united in the body of Christ. The next lines from Piers confirm that this consideration is inclusive, especially of the poor: "Truthe taughte me ones to loven hem ech one / And to helpen hem of alle thyng, ay as hem nedeth."[295] Piers has been instructed to help each Christian, especially the needy, since they are all brothers in Christ.

In Passus XI, Troianus explains the theology that informs the poet's use of the embodied Christ as representative of *caritas*:

> Almighty God [myghte have maad riche alle] men, if he wolde,
>
> Ac for the beste ben som riche and some beggeres and povere.
>
> For alle are we Cristes creatures, and of his cofres riche,
>
> And brethren as of oo blood, as wel beggeres as erles.
>
> For at Calvarie, of Cristes blood Cristendom gan sprynge,
>
> And blody bretheren we bicome there, of o body ywonne.[296]

Because the Crucifixion redeemed all Christians, their community of Christendom has "sprung" as a social and political body from Christ's blood. Thus, they are united by his blood and

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[294] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 6.207.
[295] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 6.208-209.
[296] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 11.196-201. Brackets in Schmidt's edition: "Square brackets enclose elucidation of the meanings of words or phrases that cannot be translated easily, and also Biblical and other quotations which the text cites only in part" (lxxxii).

suffering body, and the sacrament of the Eucharist, in which the host and wine are expected to literally transform into Christ's body and blood, serves as a reminder of that connection.

Troianus also explains that, while God could have chosen to make all men rich, he allows for social stratification because it compels humans to perform the active charity that promotes neighborly love. Troianus further explains that all men must help one another in order to fulfill their obligations to God:

> And we hise bretheren through hym ybought, bothe riche and povere.
> Forthi love we as leve children shal, and ech man laughe up oother,
> And of that ech man may forbere, amende there it nedeth
> And every man helpe oother.[297]

This cooperation is strongly associated with *caritas*, or love. Omnipotent God allows for socioeconomic disparity so that the rich and poor may perform and receive charity, and therefore all will participate in this expression of God's love.

Troianus explains that education is useful only when it is utilized in service to, or love for, God: "But thei ben lerned for Oure Lordes love, lost is al the tyme, / For no cause to cacche silver thereby, ne to be called a maister, / But al for love of Oure Lord and the bet to love the peple."[298] In her article on the figures of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest in medieval literature, Rosanne Gasse discusses the value of education as described in Lollard texts. She shows how three stages of obedience to God's commandments lead one to perform charity by educating others. Doing so makes "one look outside of one's self to help others by teaching them… an act of the highest charity, undertaken out of love for God and love for one's fellow Christians,

[297] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 11.207-210.
[298] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 11.172-174.

extending aid to others beyond their physical needs to their spiritual."[299] At the end of the passage on education, Troianus declares that it is even better to love the people than to be educated out of love for God. If God is the Truth and greatest good, how does love for the people supersede love for Him? Troianus is implying that neighborly love, or *caritas*, is a more direct path to God's love than education is, even if that education is focuses on theology. Here, Langland portrays communion with others as the most efficacious means of salvation, one that is embodied in the corporal suffering of the poor. Troianus further stresses the importance of love by quoting St. John: "For Seint Johan seide it, and sothe arn hise words:… / Whoso loveth noght , leve me, he lyveth in deeth deyinge."[300] Thus, love is the key to life and to eternal life, while lack of love leads to separation from others and God, or "death."

Troiaunus further describes St. John's teachings on neighborly love in the next lines:

> And that alle manere men, enemyes and frendes,
>
> Love hir eyther oother, and lene hem as hemselve.
>
> Whoso leneth noght, he loveth noght, Oure Lord woot the sothe,
>
> And comaundeth ech creature to conformen hym to lovye
>
> And [principally] povere peple, and hir enemyes after.
>
> For hem that haten us is oure merite to lovye,
>
> And povere peple to plese – hir preiers may us helpe.[301]

Here, the elevated position of the poor in the eyes of God is inclusive, rather than exclusive, of the larger Christian community. If Christ's presence is especially conspicuous within the poor, then to minister to them is not to prioritize the poor over Christ, but to properly serve Him.

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[299] Gasse, "Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest," 176.
[300] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 11.175-176.
[301] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 11.177-183.

Moreover, through loving the poor, even the rich can enhance their "merite" in the eyes of God, which can help them achieve eternal salvation, as I discuss below. Troianus further explains that Christ "In a povere mannes apparaille pursueth us evere, / And loketh on us in hir liknesse and that with lovely chere."[302] Christ himself, therefore, appears often as a poor man, dressing his human body in clothing indicating poverty. He does so as he "pursueth" Christians to test their charity. Like the sacrament of the Eucharist, the embodiment of Christ within the poor offers a path to salvation for the entire Christian community. The corporal suffering of the poor reflects the corporal suffering of Christ during the Crucifixion, acting as a sacramental manifestation of Christ on earth. Langland uses this concept to emphasize the importance of *caritas* to spiritual salvation throughout the poem.

***Caritas*: Charity as Love**

To emphasize the idea that performed charity is an act of love for God, Scripture explains in Passus X that

> Poul preched the peple, that parfitnesse lovede,
>
> To do good for Godde's love, and gyven men that asked,
>
> And [to swiche, nameliche], that suwen our bileve;
>
> And alle that lakketh us or lyeth us, Oure Lord techeth us to lovye.[303]

Here, love is directly associated with "giving" ("gyven"), and, therefore, with charity. According to Scripture, Paul instructs Christians to love all people, even one's enemies ("lakketh us or lyeth us"). Scripture calls this form of love "Godde's love," directly linking love for one's neighbor (or the community) with love for God and illustrating that this teaching (especially since it is "preched" by "Poul") adheres to Christian theology.

[302] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 11.185-186.
[303] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 10.202-205.

In Passus XI, quoted in the section above, Troianus emphasizes the importance of love to one's salvation according to St. John's teachings.[304] Those who do not prioritize the poor are separated from God and fellow Christians. Schmidt glosses "lenen" as "to give," but the *MED* shows that the term is imbued with religious connotations, with some entries specifically defining giving to the poor or associating the lending with God or other biblical or saintly figures.[305]Those who do not love, according to Troianus, experience a living death, a life of spiritual isolation removed from one's community, and, therefore, from God. The proper kind of love includes the poor and even one's enemies, inclusive of the entire Christian community and, by extension, of God. Charity is further connected to love in Passus XIII, when Conscience connects deeds to thought: "With wordes and with werkes," quod she, "and wil of thyn herte /Thow love leelly thi soule al thi lif tyme./ And so thow lere the to lovye."[306] Here, one's actions directly reveal one's intentions and the state of one's soul, that is, whether or not one truly loves the community and God.

The Active Life vs. The Contemplative Life

Aquinas believed that charity was the highest virtue and "a precept, not a counsel, which is to say, it is a duty established by God and not merely a desirable but optional practice."[307] *Performance* of charity, then, is essential to salvation. According to Aquinas, "One aspect of our neighborly love is that we not merely will our neighbor's good, but actually work to bring it about."[308] Works are emphasized as the outward expression of one's love for neighbor and God. To feel such love is, of course, essential, but it is not enough; feeling sympathetic toward the

[304] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 11.176-183
[305] "lenen," Middle English Dictionary, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED25108/track?counter=3.
[306] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 13.141-143
[307] James William Brodman, *Charity and Religion in Medieval Europe*, (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 26.
[308] qtd. in Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, 26.

poor does not help their condition. Brodman explains Aquinas's stance: "While he allows that spiritual alms (such as instructing the ignorant, reproving sinners, comforting the sorrowful or forgiving injuries) might be superior to the corporal works of feeding, sheltering, and clothing, nonetheless he argues that common sense dictates that nutrition has to precede instruction and thus has a certain priority."[309] Superior though they may be, one cannot receive spiritual alms without first receiving practical alms. Thus, corporal works are essential to the very foundation of the Christian community.

As illustrated in *Piers Plowman*, this form of active charity also benefits the rich. In my earlier discussion of the poor as embodiments of Christ, I claim that Langland presents the poor as embodiments of Christ and as the doctrine of *caritas* to both promote almsgiving and unite the entire Christian community with their participation in good works. Indeed, "Aquinas also acknowledges the reciprocal benefits of charity for the donor. On the one hand, if a benefactor feeds a pauper out of love for God, he accrues spiritual benefits for himself; on the other, a grateful pauper would be moved to pray for the source of his assistance."[310] Thus, Langland's promotion of active almsgiving is grounded in contemporary theological orthodoxy. Emily Steiner shows how Langland focuses on community throughout the poem and engages in contemporary religious debates, and I argue that he does so through a promotion of the active life, the active form of charity. However, Brodman does remind readers that Aquinas "acknowledges limitations on almsgiving."[311] Property rights, social status (and maintaining it), and wealth all limit one's ability to provide for those in need, some purposefully so. For example, one should not give away so much wealth that it lessens his or her *own* social status in

[309] Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, 26.
[310] Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, 26.
[311] Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, 26.

the process. The existence of the three states of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest show that Langland acknowledges limitations to one's ability to demonstrate charity. Thus, the active life as emphasized through active charity is not necessarily the only virtue promoted by contemporary theologians and Langland, but it is essential to one's salvation.

Langland emphasizes activity throughout the poem. In Passus VI, Hunger tells Piers, "Kynde Wit wolde that ech a wight wroghte, / Or in dichynge or in delvynge or travaillynge in preieres – / Contemplatif lif or actif lif, Crist wolde men wroghte."[312] Here, Hunger declares that all men must labor, but "labor" may be categorized as either active or contemplative. However, the use of the word "wroghte" for work implies a more physical kind of industry, perhaps implying that even contemplative labor is a form of activity. The *Middle English Dictionary* lists"wroghte" as one of the many forms of "werken." With so many variations under this head word, the *Dictionary* offers 16 definitions with additional subdefinitions. Definition 1(a) is "to act, behave, proceed" and 1(b) specifies: "to establish one's customary behavior (in accordance with a specified set of principles, according to God's will, by someone's example, etc.)."[313] The first definition, therefore, shows that this seemingly simple word could have several layers of meaning to medieval audiences, and those meanings included both mundane actions and pious actions. The definition with the most quotations associated with it (99) is definition 3a, which also specifies religious obligations: "(a) To perform (an action), do (a deed); engage in (an activity); do (one's assigned task), discharge (one's duties), complete (a job); perform (a function)... (c)... **cristen (godes) werkes, ~ godes werk**, etc., carry out God's purposes, serve

[312] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 6.246-248.
[313] "werken," *Middle English Dictionary*, ed. Robert E. Lewis, et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952-2001). Online edition in *Middle English Compendium*. ed. Frances McSparran, et al.. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2000-2018), http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/.

God; also, meet one's religious obligations."[314] The examples for this religious sense of "godes werk" also contain the spelling "wroghte" used here in *Piers Plowman*. Additional entries associate the word more closely with physical labor: "5.(a) To perform physical labor, work with one's hands, toil; do servile or humble work, perform menial tasks; also, work for a living."[315] The *Dictionary* also ties the word to artisanal labor: "7. (a) To exercise manual skill, work at a craft or trade; hold employment as an artisan or a tradesman; (b) to practice (a trade, craft), ply (one's trade); (c) to perform a particular skilled operation pertaining to a craft, trade, or discipline; specif. forge metal, cut stone, weave cords in lacing, etc." Like the York biblical plays, then, *Piers Plowman* presents civic/craft labor as a form of charity that benefits the community. Thus, whether "dichynge" or "delvynge" or "travaillynge in preieres" both contemplation and activity count as "works" if they benefit the community.

In Passus XIII, Pacience explains that "Bothe with werkes and with wordes fonde his [God's] love to wynne."[316] In this line, both the active ("werkes") and the contemplative ("wordes") life, and, by association, active and passive charity, are promoted as equally important to one's spiritual state. In Passus VII, Troianus claims that he was saved "for the soothness that he [Gregorie, a clergyman, possibly Pope Gregory] seigh in my werkes."[317] Here, while Langland again emphasizes the importance of works to salvation, he pairs deeds with intent. Troianus's "werkes" only save him because they are genuine and true. As a pagan Roman emperor, Troianus would not have been baptized into Christianity, but the good nature of his deeds, still renowned in Langland's time, have afforded him salvation. Thus the intent behind the

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[314] "werken," *MED*. (bold text in original)
[315] "werken," *MED*.
[316] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 13.146.
[317] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 7.147. "Square brackets enclose elucidation of the meanings of words or phrases that cannot be translated easily, and also Biblical and other quotations which the text cites only in part" (Schmidt, "Introduction," lxxxii).

deeds is just as important as the deeds themselves. To prevent himself from too highly praising the clergyman Gregory, Troianus explains that "al the clergie under Crist ne myghte me cracche fro helle/ But oonliche love and leautee of my laweful domes."[318] Editor A. V. C. Schmidt glosses the phrase "laweful domes" as "upright judgments," emphasizing both contemplative judgment and legally binding decisions. Still, both secular and religious authorities had and continue to have real power over populations, meaning their choices result in material consequences for individuals. Langland's inclusion of active charity as an absolutely essential component of salvation, even when coupled with the importance of intent, establishes the importance of the theological doctrine of *caritas* in promoting an active form of charity and encouraging an active life. For Langland, the performance of charity is what truly unites the Christian community to each other and to God.

Finally, the genre of dream vision itself also emphasizes the importance of active charity. Editor A. V. C. Schmidt claims that the movement between dreaming and waking periods compels Will to act upon the lessons he has learned:"Only a passive recipient so far, he now becomes an active seeker."[319] Will himself, therefore, also represents active charity, as he is "striving to translate the truth of visions into the practice of daily living."[320] Will thus provides readers with a model of putting into action the will to love God. Inspired by his second vision, Will endeavors to seek Dowel and eventually Charity, showing his intention to be a better Christian by performing the good deeds implied in those figurative characters. Will also urges his family to attend Mass after he witnesses the Christian mysteries during his sixth vision. Thus,

[318] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 7.144-145.
[319] A. V. C. Schmidt, "Introduction," xxxii.
[320] A. V. C. Schmidt, "Introduction," xxxii.

not only does Will promote his own salvation by the act of attending Mass, he promotes the salvation of his loved ones by helping bring them closer to God.

Indiscriminate Charity

Also important to the notion of active charity is the principle of indiscriminate charity, which encourages Christians to freely give of their wealth and goods to anyone who seems to be in need, regardless of that person's supposed worth. Such giving is promoted throughout the poem. In Passus VII, the narrator explains: "Ac Gergory was a good man, and bad us gyven alle/ That asketh for His love that us al leneth:/… For wite ye nevere who is worthi – ac God woot who hath need."[321] Christians should give alms to everyone who asks for them because no one knows who is truly worthy – except God. God will determine who has begged in earnestness and who has been deceitful. For the almsgiver's conscience, the action is more important than the worthiness of the receiver. As long as the action is performed out of genuine concern, the almsgiver will receive his or her spiritual reward. As Brodman explains, however, such intention may be more ambiguous, but it is nonetheless rooted in theology: "underlying any decision to assist such individuals was a religious motive, whether it be a selfless love of God and neighbor or a more selfish concern with one's own sin and salvation."[322] This is not to say, however, that those who unjustly receive alms will go unpunished by God. A few lines after he promotes indiscriminate charity, the narrator commands, "Forthi biddeth noght, ye beggeres, but if ye have gret need./ For whoso hath to buggen hym breed – the Book bereth witnesse –/ He hath ynough that hath breed ynough, though he have noght ellis:"[323] Only those who cannot afford food, the most basic element of survival, have the right to beg for alms. Those who have been provided

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[321] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 7.74-75, 76.
[322] Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, 10.
[323] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 7.82-84.

with adequate sustenance should not ask for more. Earlier, in Passus VI, Hunger says, "And alle manere of men that thow might aspie/ That nedy ben and naughty, [norisse] hem with thi goodes/ Love hem and lake hem noght – lat God take the vengeaunce."[324] The character Hunger encourages Christians to give to all who appear needy because God will punish those who unjustifiably take alms. What matters, according to Hunger, is what the individual presented with the opportunity to give does. Even helping a duplicitous beggar counts as an act of charity towards Christ because the giver intended to provide material comfort to someone apparently in need. This emphasis on indiscriminate charity also promotes the doctrine of *caritas* because it highlights the notion that every person is united to Christ and the community – each beggar one encounters is connected to God. Christians are also expected to express "love" for every beggar through an *act* of almsgiving, encouraging the active form of charity.

***Caritas* as Embodied in Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest**

The figures Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest, most directly embody the concept of *caritas* within the poem, although they are described differently by various characters. Indeed, the juxtaposition of these characters within the text provides various models for performing charity and shows how accessible a life fulfilled by *caritas* is for willing Christians. As Schmidt states, "The three ways [Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest] are considered together, even if the full meaning of Dobest cannot be brought out until Christ's victory over death…"[325] Each representation, therefore, stands for a different level of charity, not all of which are accessible. In Passus VIII, Dowel is described as simply obeying the law and performing according to one's station, Dobet is described by Thought as helping others and possibly taking Holy Orders, and Dobest is described as a bishop, presiding over the other two as "kyng" (although the passage is slightly

[324] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 6.224.
[325] A. V. C. Schmidt, "Introduction," xxxiii.

ambiguous regarding whether or not the episcopal role is to be taken literally). At other times, the allegorical figures become more like distinct characters, such as when Dowel is portrayed as a daughter, showing that each figure does have a distinct purpose and meaning in its representation of charity. For example, Dowel is the figure most associated with accessible lay charity. In Passus IX, Wit describes the roles of the Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest:

> Dowel, my frend, is to doon as lawe techeth.
>
> To love thi frend and thi foo – leve me, that is Dobet.
>
> To yyven and to yemen bothe yonge and olde,
>
> To helen and to helpen, is Dobest of alle.[326]

Because to Dowel is simply to do as the law teaches, this is the most available form of charity to laypeople. This does not necessarily promote a passive form of obedience over a more active role in piety, since, as discussed above, the law does teach Christians to actively care for the poor. Still, Dobet is the figure described as "loving thy friend and thy foe," perhaps more directly promoting the concept of performed charity. Dobest requires one to "heal" and to "help," perhaps most explicitly promoting the theological concept of *caritas*. In this passage, all three embodied figures work together to delineate the ideal path to heaven: *doing* for others. In Passus VII, Ymaginatif gives another explanation of the role of Dowel:

> "'Poul in his pistle,' quod he [Ymaginatif], 'preveth what is Dowel:
>
> …. . . . .
>
> Feith, hope, and charitee – alle ben goode,
>
> And saven men sondry tymes, ac noon so soone as charite.'"[327]

[326] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 9.200-203.
[327] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 7.29-31.

Here, Ymaginatif emphasizes charity as the most important component of "doing well," stressing its importance even for the least actively religious person. Indeed, at the end of passus 7, after Piers tears apart the priest's pardon he describes Dowel as the path to salvation:

> And so I leve leelly (Lordes forbode ellis!)
>
> That pardon and penaunce and prieres doon save
>
> Soules that have synned seven sithes dedly. Ac to trust to these triennals – trewely, me thynketh,
>
> It is noght so siker for the soule, certes, as is Dowel."[328]

Piers does not necessarily deny that penance and pardons, when performed correctly and with pure intent, can provide salvation;, he emphasizes Dowel, or charity, as the surest means of assuring God's grace. He goes on to say that "Theighe ye be founde in the fraternitie of alle the five orders/ And have indulgences doublefold – but Dowel yowe helpe, / I sette your patentes and youre pardon at one pies hele."[329] Schmidt glosses "hele" as "crust," meaning that a pardon is only worth a pie crust, very little in value. Here, Piers seems to subvert the concept of taking Holy Orders as "doing better" (Dobet), but, again, he does not say that they are completely useless. They just are so without the help of Dowel. A simple pardon or indulgence, without performing good works, is of as little value as pie crust. In Passus X, Dame Studie explains to Will, "Loke thow love lelly, if thee liketh Dowel, / For Dobet and Dobest ben of loves k[e]nn[yng]."[330] Here, Dowel is associated with an active form of love. Dobet and Dobest already naturally embody love, so the sinner or layperson who wishes to strive for salvation should "dowel" to achieve that ability to love. He or she must actively strive for it by doing for

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[328] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 7.177-180.
[329] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 7.193-195.
[330] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 10.189-190.

others, particularly the poor. Despite the hierarchal superiority of Dobet and Dobest, this constant association back to Dowel makes this figure the most important of the three. Although Dobest is “kyng” of Dowel and Dobet, Dobest is the highest form of piety and thus the most difficult to achieve. In her discussion of these three figures, Rosanne Gasse explains that Dobest represents the ultimate communion with God in a tripartite hierarchy of grace.[331] Such unity is achieved by martyrdom and other extreme forms of devotion. In a Christian-majority environment, sacrifices like martyrdom may not be realistic expectations. Dowel is therefore a step towards true *caritas* and the most accessible for Langland’s audience; his consideration for the average person is truly an emphasis on the entire Christian community.

However, one might argue that Dobet seems like the figure out of the three that most promotes more active charity. After all, Dobet is portrayed variously as a call to Holy Orders, performed charity, and active instruction or preaching. Schmidt, for example, explains his interpretation of Dobet (rather than Dobest, which the text seems to indicate as the most sacred of the three figures) as the best representation of active charity: “it would be incorrect to equate Charity, shown in XVII-XVIII as the highest virtue, potent where Faith and Hope fail, with Dobet *rather than* Dobest on the mere grounds that the Tree of Charity and the Samaritan, exemplar of Charity, happen to appear in the section headed ‘Dobet.’”[332] One cannot, therefore, rely merely on the ordering of the figures to determine which provides the best example of charity. Instead, the text provides various forms of charity possible for Christians of various means and ability.

In this model, Dowel is portrayed in the theologically essential moments of Passus XIX as the most closely associated with Christ, and therefore most accessible to Christians. In Passus

[331] Gasse, “Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest.”
[332] A. V. C. Schmidt, “Introduction,” xxxiii, emphasis in original.

XIX, Dobet is associated with Christ's healing and feeding miracles, an active form of charity. In this same passus, however, to illustrate Dowel, Piers tells Will that Christ's divine conception occurred through will and power: "He wroghte that by no wit but thorugh word one, / After the kynde that he cam of; there comsede he Dowel."[333] With the birth of Christ comes the creation of Dowel. The gift of the embodied divine, familiar to the audience in the form of the Eucharist, is the ultimate act of charity and humanity's union with God. As previous descriptions of Dowel emphasize following the law and performing one's duty, Langland here similarly describes it as God's fulfillment of his word, promise, or covenant with humanity. Here, Dowel acts as the connection between God and the Christian community, the ultimate function of *caritas*. Thus, Dowel, by association with the incarnation, is an embodiment of Christ here and throughout the poem. Christ's body, already representative of the entire Christian community through his blood and suffering for humanity's salvation, further represents this community by its association with the form of charity most readily available to all Christians. Because of this, Langland's allegorical embodiment of Dowel, as associated with Christ's own body, is the figure in the poem that best represents the theological doctrine of *caritas*, love for God through love for one's neighbor.

Roseanne Gasse argues that Conscience describes Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest in language that evokes "the sacraments most available to Christians as an avenue to divine grace, Penance and the Eucharist."[334] Representations of Christ's body occur throughout the poem because "Christians can only do well, do better, and do best with the sustaining power of divine grace, and this power is available to all through the sacraments of the Church," especially the

[333] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 19.122-123.
[334] Gasse, "Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest," 188.

Eucharist.[335] According to Gasse, *Piers Plowman* "emphasizes the individual as a necessarily social being (obeying laws, helping others in the community, participating as a member of the Church in the reception of sacraments) where faith and works go hand in hand with divine grace. One, after all, must *do* well, not *know* well."[336] Through the example of Will, Langland emphasizes the medieval Catholic prioritization of material charity based on James' assertion that faith without works is dead.

Depictions of Piers the Plowman as Christ's Body in the Poem

Throughout the poem, Christ is described with emphasis on his corporeal body. Earlier, I discussed the portrayals of Christ as one of the poor, and the physical suffering of the poor also calls attention to Christ's physical body. However, later in the poem, Piers the Plowman appears as Christ, further associating Christ's body with *caritas* because Piers has been portrayed throughout the text as an Everyman figure and thus representative of the entire Christian community. A plowman, Piers is a common laborer, representing the majority of the population. He stirs the people gathered before the dungeon to begin ploughing the field and otherwise performing some kind of active labor. Like the soldiers in the York *Crucifixio Christi* play, workers must perform their duty well to enable society to function. Piers and Hunger explain that everyone must contribute labor to the community in order to love one's neighbor. Thus, Piers himself is, in this way, an embodiment of *caritas*, and his association with Christ's human body further emphasizes the connection.

When Will awakens from his last dream vision at the beginning of Passus XIX, he goes to Church, where Piers Plowman appears as Christ: "Piers the Plowman was peynted al blody,/ And com in with a cros bifore the comune peple,/ And right lik in alle lymes to Oure Lord

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[335] Gasse, "Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest," 188.
[336] Gasse, "Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest,"191, italics in original.

Jesu."[337] Piers's "blody" body highlights the Crucifixion, Christ's sacrifice that redeemed and still unites all Christians. He appears this way to a crowded church, theologically, an extension of Christ and the entity that unites the Christian community on earth. Grace offers to build Piers a house to store his harvest, and builds it with the body of Christ and materials used during the crucifixion. Langland describes the process graphically, emphasizing Christ's physical body and suffering:

> And Grace gaf hym the cros, with the croune of thornes,
> That Crist upon Calvarie for mankynde on pyned;
> And of his baptisme and blood that he bledde on roode
> He made a manere morter, and mercy it highte.
> And therwith Grace bigan to make a good foundement,
> And watlede it and walled it with hise peynes and his passion,
> And of al Holy Writ he made a roof after,
> And called that hous Unite – Holy Chirche on Englissh.[338]

This house, of course, represents the church, and the harvest represents Christians, but the particular use of Christ's (or Piers's) pains, body, and blood, moves the metaphor beyond symbolic to sacramental. The process of using these corporeal materials to build an analogue of the Holy Church mirrors the sacrament of the Eucharist performed during Mass to transform bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Aers explains that "[t]he humiliated, tortured, whipped, nailed-down, pierced, dying but life-giving body of Christ, the very body literally present in the eucharist – this body became the dominant icon of the late medieval church and

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[337] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 19.6-8.
[338] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 19.324-331.

the devotion it cultivated and authorized."[339] Portraying the penitent Piers in the figure of Christ's body (or Christ in Piers' body), then, links his mission of practical charity, and therefore the notion of *caritas*, to the sacrament of the Eucharist. Previous depictions of Christ and Piers portray each figure as an embodiment of *caritas*, and this association combined with the performance of a sacrament make the text efficacious and instructional, compelling its readers to implement what they have learned from it. Here, *caritas* is embodied both within the sacrament of the Eucharist and the bodies of Piers and Christ, and Grace's gift to Piers of the tools of his trade symbolize the role of this text as "tilling" the soil of Christianity. She gives him "a cart highte Cristendom," "sheves," "caples to his carte," and "Contricion and Confession" – the essential practices for redemption.[340] Piers's mission is to go on "to tilie truthe/ And the lo[nd] of bileve, the lawe of Holy Chirche."[341] Likewise, readers are compelled to do so with their interpretations of the text. The sacramental use of *caritas* throughout the poem enacts such a call.

The Pardon: Emphasizing Dowel as the Embodiment of *Caritas*

Langland's participation in the debate over the most efficacious form of charity is dramatized rather early in the poem, when Piers is presented with and tears apart a pardon in Passus VII. The ensuing discussion is theologically complex and engages contemporary debates over the roles of penance, contrition, clerical authority, and charity, among others. Piers accuses the priest of misunderstanding the role of pardons. While the priest is correct to say, "Do wel and have wel, and God shal have thi soule," he is incorrect to believe that the pardon itself can

[339] David Aers and Lynn Staley, Eds, *The Powers of the Holy: Religion Politics, and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture*, (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996) 17.
[340] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 19.333-334.
[341] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 19.336-337.

perform this function.[342] As Piers rips the pardon, he exclaims that he would rather perform works to earn forgiveness than to receive a pardon undeservedly. Moreover, a pardon that requires nothing of the beneficiary cannot, according to Piers and in line with medieval orthodoxy if not actual practice, provide true salvation. Although Piers does not necessarily declare pardons completely void, he does imply that they must be coupled with active penance and genuine contrition. Britton J. Harwood explains that

> While God and humanity meet at suffering, God suffers principally, at least in this poem, the pain of flesh. Piers represents this. Humanity suffers psychologically from knowledge of the broken Law [that is of their own disobedience]. The unity of God and humanity in suffering is signified by Piers's embodiment of this, the suffering of contrition, as well.[343]

Piers declares that he intends to avoid pleasures of the flesh and instead to focus on "preieres" and "penaunce."[344] While abstinence and prayer are not necessarily active forms of restitution and must always be coupled with deeds, they are nonetheless more participatory than a written pardon, and participating in penance reflects Christ's suffering to redeem humanity. In this way, the body of Piers and the body of Christ are again linked to encourage a form of penance that reflects the doctrine of *caritas* by promoting active charity towards the larger Christian community.

Dowel is first introduced in a conversation is Passus VII, initially as a concept and eventually as the allegorical figure for whom Will searches throughout the poem. Dowel becomes the concept of embodied *caritas*, and this association continues throughout the poem. In this passus, "Dowel at the day of dome is digneliche underfongen [honorably received], / And

[342] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 7.112.
[343] Britton J. Harwood, *Piers Plowman and the Problem of Belief*, 141, brackets mine.
[344] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 7.120.

passeth al the pardon of Seint Petres cherche."[345] At the Day of Judgment, Dowel, or one's charitable works, will take precedence over church-issued pardons. The narrator explains that Dowel is a surer guarantee for salvation than pardons. Robert Adams explains the theological relationship between works and intent in medieval Catholic penance:

> Absolutely speaking (*de potentia absoluta*), God owes no one anything, and good deeds, of themselves, have no salvific value. Nevertheless, God is under a self-imposed obligation (*de potentia ordinata*) in that he has freely agreed to honor good deeds as though they had either full merit (*meritum de condigno*) or half merit (*meritum de congruo*), depending on the spiritual condition of the one who performs them.[346]

God has chosen to honor good deeds, but those that are performed with genuine good will are more effectively salvific than those performed selfishly or without clear intent (although they still count for something). True redemption, then, absolutely requires good (charitable) works. The introduction of Dowel during Piers's pardon scene highlights the figure as an important part of penance, which requires active charity, and one of the central characters of the entire poem. Harwood notes that "the quest for 'dowel' will turn into the quest for Piers."[347] Dowel's association with Piers makes it the most important of the three allegorical representations of deeds.

Conclusion: *Piers Plowman* as Instructional and Efficacious

In *Public Piers Plowman*, C. David Benson discusses the "poem's engagement with the common culture of late medieval England."[348] As a form of discourse, the poem had the power to

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[345] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 7.172-173.
[346] Robert Adams, "Langland's Theology," *A Companion to Piers Plowman*, Ed. John A. Alford (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988): 87-114, 97.
[347] Harwood, *Piers Plowman and the Problem of Belief*, 156
[348] C. David Benson, *Public Piers Plowman: Modern Scholarship and Late Medieval Culture* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), xii.

influence thought and opinion. Benson categorizes popular literature, such as *Piers Plowman*, as a public space: "the public places I discuss are not only physical locations, such as the local church or city streets, but also discourses, including writing and art, that were available to the many and not just to the few."[349] The poem itself, then, functions as a form of *caritas* by including the entire community in its teachings. Benson emphasizes the fact that the poem, and any literary work, does not only belong to its author, but to its readers, the public. He explains that the text was widely read during its time, and many scholars have noted its influence on the Rebellion of 1381 and Reformation thought. Benson further argues that the poem's public presence compels its readers to act on their interpretations of it: "*Piers* is an interactive text meant to be applied to its readers' lives…. In form as well as direct injunction, the poem constantly insists upon interpretation (not that it is unaware that the lessons drawn may be erroneous)."[350] However, good interpretation is not the only goal of the text. Benson explains that understanding prompts action and that interpretation must be "performed."[351] He explains, "Only by adapting the complex narrative strategies and thought of *Piers* to themselves can readers achieve anything like the 'kynde knowing' the poem demands."[352] Stephanie L. Batkie also declares the poem as instructional and makes a similar argument. According to her, Langland teaches his readers through Will's failures and "by incorporating error and ambiguity of text and interpretation" into the work.[353] Langland thereby compels his readers to consider the theological groundwork he lays and perhaps even perform the kind of charity many of his characters seem to promote. Thus, the work itself embodies a sacramentally efficacious form of

[349] Benson, *Public Piers Plowman*, 74.
[350] Benson, *Public Piers Plowman*, 74.
[351] Benson, *Public Piers Plowman*, 75.
[352] Benson, *Public Piers Plowman*, 75.
[353] Stephanie L. Batkie, "'Thanne artow inparfit': Learning to Read in Piers Plowman," *The Chaucer Review* 45, no. 2 (2010): 169-193, 170.

caritas, encouraging Christians to act on their understandings of the text. In *Piers Plowman*, Langland effectively draws connections between characters, allegorical figures, and theology to create a complex representation of *caritas*, both in the text itself and the figures of Christ, Piers, and Dowel. Langland's portrayal of the doctrine reflects both reflects and builds upon contemporary definitions of it by focusing on the entire Christian community, loving God by loving one's neighbor, expressing that love through active charity, emphasizing care for the poor, and signifying all this through representations of Christ's body. The poet, therefore, both invites readers to participate in this discussion and reflect on their own practices.

CHAPTER IV: *CARITAS* AND THE EUCHARIST IN SHAKESPEARE AND MARLOWE

During the Protestant Reformation in England, Christian theology shifted to more individually-focused piety as religious texts became available in the vernacular and laypeople thus became less reliant on the structure of the Church. Anglican theology built upon the Lutheran concept of *caritas*, which "signifies an affective bond between man and God that is initiated by the communicant's acquisitive love and desire for self-fulfillment. For Augustine, acquisitive love directs its path away from material goods and upwards to God." [354] For this branch of reformers, then, love for one's neighbor need not be displayed in outward acts of charity as medieval piety required, but it must figure within the individual's consciousness. The Anglican church added the requirement that this kind of contemplative charity must be accessible to all Christians.[355] In the preface to his English translation of the Bible, Thomas Cranmer declares, "Herein may princes learn how to govern their subjects; subjects obedience, love and dread to their princes: husbands, how they should behave them unto their wives; how to educate their children and servants: and contrary the wives, children, and servants may know their duty to their husbands, parents, and masters."[356] In describing people's obligations towards one another, Cranmer names both active and contemplative forms of charity.[357] He goes on to

[354] Paul Cefalu, *Moral Identity in Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 134.
[355] This was part of the larger debate over translating the Bible into the vernacular.
[356] qtd. in Christopher Baker, *Religion in the Age of Shakespeare* (London: Greenwood Press, 2007), 163.
[357] By using words like "govern," "obedience," "love," and "behave." My own use of the term contemplative charity refers to the more interior/personal feelings of good will to others that coincides with the inner faith emphasized by reformation theology.

say that the Bible's teachings apply to everyone and lists "all manner of persons," naming all classes of people and occupations. Cranmer says in his preface to the Great Bible (1539) that by simply reading the Bible, Christians will "learn all things what they ought to believe, what they ought to do, and what they should not do, as well concerning Almighty God, as also concerning themselves and all other."[358] According to this broad view, Christians must both believe and act, and they must consider God and others when doing both. After 1500, the definitions of charity in the *OED* shift to descriptions of a more personally interior virtue. For example, 3b reads: "A disposition to judge leniently and hopefully of the character, aims, and destinies of others, to make allowance for their apparent faults and shortcomings; large-heartedness. (But often it amounts barely to fair-mindedness towards people disapproved of or disliked, this being appraised as a magnanimous virtue.)"[359] This definition implies a shift towards a more personally interior approach to charity post-Reformation. The instructions of influential reformers to bear good will towards all members of the community show that charity remains an important concept in Christianity during and after the Reformation, even if the emphasis broadens from material deeds to more general benevolence. In this chapter, I will show how English Reformation drama articulated contemporary notions of charity while staging Christ's body as representative of the whole Christian community. These dramatizations were less explicit than medieval productions of Christ's body and therefore relied more heavily on implication. Such techniques made Eucharistic imagery and language especially helpful, as the discourse of representation allowed early modern dramatists to portray *caritas* in embodied figures.

[358] qtd. in Christopher Baker, *Religion in the Age of Shakespeare* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2007), 164.
[359] "charity," *OED Online*, Oxford University Press.

Changing Ideas about Charity During the Reformation

As I described in Chapter One, Reformation theology moved away from defining charity strictly as good works but maintained its emphasis on the entire Christian community and its connection to the doctrine of *caritas*, or love for God displayed through love for one's neighbor. In his article on the economics of charity conveyed in *Twelfth Night*, Mark Bayer states

> While charity was probably more vital than ever to the prosperity of London and its citizens, the Reformation had disrupted previous channels of benevolence, giving way for new opportunities and new religious justifications for these practices. Charity, for reformers, was reinterpreted not as an action that in itself might lead to salvation, but nevertheless as an imperative for all members of the community – an extension of an individual's indwelling faith and personal communion with scripture.[360]

According to Protestant theology, then, charity was an essential part of salvation because it signified one's faith and participation in the community, thus connecting an individual to God. While deeds were not the cause of salvation according to this reformed doctrine, charity, more broadly defined as love for fellow Christians, was necessary for the kind of piety that would lead to salvation.

Although reformation theology deemphasized active charity as essential to salvation, almsgiving still occurred in early modern England, especially during holy seasons such as Christmas. Records show that the monarch was especially generous at Christmastime, setting an example for other nobles and conveying their apparent munificence to their subjects.[361] Therefore, while almsgiving still had a place in Protestant forms of charity, the means and

[360] Mark Bayer, "*Twelfth Night* and the Economics of Christian Charity," *Reformation* 28, no. 1 (May 2023): 35.
[361] See Bayer, "*Twelfth Night* and the Economics of Christian Charity," 34-35 for Henry VIII's and Elizabeth I's charitable donations.

manner by which Christians should give shifted from the medieval ecclesiastical model. Instead of giving alms through the authority of the Church (in the form of indulgences, donation drives, or festival events), reformers instructed the pious to give on an individual basis to ensure that they were truly giving out of love for God and neighbor.[362]

Similarly, many reformers also viewed compulsory charity as suspect. For both theological reasons and the increasingly popular view that the Catholic Church profited from and/or misused charitable contributions, almsgiving, tithing, and other material and monetary forms of donation required by custom or religious authority fell out of favor in Reformation England. Laypeople often contributed to this form of almsgiving at church festivals and similar public gatherings, which became associated with marketplace transactions, ecclesiastical profiteering, drunkenness, vain pleasure, and other vices. Many of these functions required attendance and accompanying fees and also posed the problem of the duplicitous beggar. While medieval theology and literature promoted indiscriminate charity, some Protestants, such as Thomas Cooper, warned that charitable giving in such circumstances would be wasted on vices and was therefore immoral.[363] While some traditionalists pushed back on this perception, some reformers viewed events that had initiated medieval pageants, such as the Corpus Christi feast in York, as inappropriate and outdated venues for performing charity, their compulsory nature disconnecting charity from benevolent intent and thus not displaying true *caritas*.[364] Conversely, festivals could also be seen as a site of "social reconciliation" in which all strata of society interacted and in which givers and receivers of charity blended together in the community.[365]

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[362] Bayer, *Twelfth Night* and the Economics of Christian Charity," 36.
[363] Jill Ingram, "'You ha'done me a charitable office': Autolycus and the Economics of Festivity in *The Winter's Tale*," *Renascence* 65, no. 1 (2012): 66-67. Ingram also discusses how Shakespeare uses the festival setting to explore Autolycus as a charitable figure in *The Winter's Tale*.
[364] Ingram, "Economics of Festivity in *The Winter's Tale*," 64-67.
[365] Ingram, "Economics of Festivity in *The Winter's Tale*," 69.

These changing views on charity are evident in the debates regarding English translations of the bible during the Reformation. In his translation of the New Testament (1525), reformer William Tyndale translates the Greek word "agape" to "love," which Thomas More, a traditional Catholic, found to be too closely connected to romantic feelings and not specific enough to denote good works:

> For sithe Luther and hys felowes amonge other theyre damnable heresyes have one that all our salvacyon standyth in fayth alone and toward our salvacyon nothynge force of good workys therfore yt semeth that he laboreth of purpose to mynyshe that reverent mynd that men bere to charyte and therefore he chaungeth that name of holy vertuous affeccyon into the bare name of love comen to the vertuouse love that man berith to god and to the lewd love that is bytwene flekke and his make.[366]

More felt that the translation of "agape" to the general term "love" diminished ("mynyshe") the place of works in humanity's salvation (and that it could easily be mistaken for "lewd" sexual love). He couples this polemic on the translation with a more general attack earlier in the quotation on the Lutheran "heresy" of preaching salvation by faith alone. For More, charity, especially almsgiving, conveys a more sincere love for God and neighbor than can be expressed verbally with the mere word "love" and all of its vulgar interpretations. Tyndale challenges More's reasoning by saying that "charite is no knowen Englesh in that sens whych agape requireth."[367] Tyndale finds that the word "charity," which was associated with almsgiving through the authority of the Church, has such a specific meaning as to be insufficient in

[366] qtd. in Hannibal Hamlin, "How Far is Love from Charity?: The Literary Influence of Reformation Bible Translation," *Reformation* 25, no. 1 (2020): 72. Hamlin adds a footnote explaining that "flekke" was likely a generic name to represent the average person: "Though the evidence is scarce, Flekke seems to be a common name that was proverbial in this phrase, perhaps more common in oral speech than in print."
[367] qtd. in Hamlin, "Literary Influence of Reformation Bible Translation," 73.

expressing the kind of love for neighbor that connects one to God. For Tyndale and other reformers, the word "love" best reflects the relationship one should have with other Christians and, therefore, with God. Tyndale further explains, "I saye not charite god or charite youre neyboure… but love God and love youre neyboure…," indicating that "love" is the best translation for the kind of relationship one should foster with the community and God.[368] Similarly, More felt that the word "charity" "also better reflected the Latin *caritas* in the Vulgate."[369] Therefore, despite their differences in translation and theology, reformers and traditional Catholics both centered their views on charity, salvation, and community on the doctrine of *caritas*. It remained an important aspect of faith through the Reformation and is expressed in the period's cultural artifacts, including literature.

Continuing Influence of Medieval Drama

David Bevington's book *From Mankind to Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England* (1962) addressed what he called the "critical bias against the medieval heritage in Elizabethan drama."[370] Recognizing that scholars had long ignored medieval influence on early modern literature and prioritized discussions of classical revival and contemporary innovation, Bevington argued that medieval drama, especially the morality play, continued to influence the structure, stagecraft, and content of early modern plays. Bevington traces how late fifteenth and early sixteenth century drama "inherited from the late medieval stage a predilection for inclusiveness of characterization, elaborate mechanical and visual contrivances, and sumptuous production."[371] Bevington finds this inheritance most obvious in

[368] qtd. in Hamlin, "Literary Influence of Reformation Bible Translation," 73.
[369] Hamlin, "Literary Influence of Reformation Bible Translation," 73.
[370] David Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962) 1.
[371] Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe*, 114.

the morality plays that intersected the late medieval and Tudor periods. The increasing popularity of morality plays and the declining prevalence of “cycle drama” occurred as a result of reformation debates, according to Bevington:

> In the age when the popular moralities began to flourish, the great medieval cycles were waning, partly because of profound alterations in the economic system that had fostered them and partly because of calculated governmental opposition to their Catholic intent. Moralities had the advantage of greater independence from Church doctrine, and were accordingly more flexible in doctrinal content — Catholic one day and violently anti-Papist the next, concerned with spiritual matters in one reign and with politics or social problems in another.[372]

Early modern playwrights during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, such as Shakespeare and Marlowe, adapted this form to address contemporary religious, political, and social issues. Even when their plays do not address specifically religious themes, they often utilize dramaturgical techniques from the late Middle Ages. However, I argue that the medieval biblical plays and other traditionally orthodox works of literature, such as *Piers Plowman*, influenced religious representations in early modern plays by offering ways to depict Christ’s body and other forbidden images through Eucharistic symbolism.

Despite the ongoing debate about whether Shakespeare had actually seen a performance of the late medieval biblical plays, many scholars now acknowledge the likely influence Shakespeare drew from this earlier dramatic form. Emrys Jones discusses how the form of certain scenes in Shakespeare’s plays suggest knowledge of Passion episodes in previous biblical

[372] Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe*, 114. Also Rowland Wymer: “the morality form was capable of mutation and adaptation, the allegorization of Catholic spiritual teaching easily converting to an allegorization of Protestant or humanist moral and political teaching,” Shakespeare and the Mystery Cycles, 265; and Theresa Colletti “The Chester Cycle in Sixteenth-Century Religious Culture.”

plays.[373] Jay Zysk shows that "Shakespeare refers to incarnational drama on more than one occasion" and "engage[s] the semiotics of Christ's wounded body in a Eucharistic context."[374] These scholars and others have provided compelling evidence that medieval biblical plays survived to some extent into the second half of the sixteenth century and possibly beyond in adapted forms. Michael O'Connell asserts that, whether or not Shakespeare actually attended a performance, "Clear and unambiguous references to the mystery cycles are not frequent in Shakespeare's plays, but those that occur are vivid enough to establish his knowledge of the earlier drama."[375] O'Connell further argues that, while no record exists of Shakespeare ever having seen a biblical pageant play, his work conveys a level of familiarity with the earlier drama "that suggests a memory of theatrical enactment."[376] Whether or not Shakespeare, Marlowe, or any of their contemporaries attended the performance of a biblical play with medieval origins, Bevington and others have shown how medieval drama had been so popular that it influenced generations of English playwrights and audiences. O'Connell states that the earlier plays were so ingrained in English drama that "the cultural memory was still vital, still something that could be invoked, used, transmuted."[377] Building on these readings, I will show how Shakespeare and Marlowe depict the body of Christ in ways that reflect its association with *caritas* in the earlier biblical plays. Specifically, Marlowe does not directly stage Christ's body, but he refers to Christ's blood at the moment when his salvation is at stake and his treatment of his neighbors comes to account. Shakespeare uses Eucharistic language in relation to the bodies

[373] Emrys Jones, *The Origins of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).
[374] Jay Zysk, *Shadow and Substance: Eucharistic Controversy and English Drama across the Reformation Divide*, (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017) 55 and 61.
[375] Michael O'Connell, "Vital Cultural Practices: Shakespeare and the Mysteries," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 157.
[376] O'Connell, "Shakespeare and the Mysteries," 157.
[377] O'Connell, "Shakespeare and the Mysteries," 164.

of important characters who make overwhelming sacrifices for their communities, recalling Christ's own sacrifice as the ultimate demonstration of *caritas*.

Staging Christ in Early Modern England: Restrictions and Depictions

Changes in theology in Reformation England also brought changes to dramatic representation. Eamon Duffy and others have thoroughly documented the reformist rejection of iconographic images in churches and religious texts, which resulted in increasingly strict laws, culminating in the Injunctions of 1559, that banned such use of images.[378] The resulting perception that sacred images themselves could be considered blasphemous affected art and culture beyond the confines of church buildings. In lay devotional practices, secular art, and popular theater, images of the saints, portrayals of the sacraments, and representations of Christ were deemed sacreligious, by both decree and public opinion. This shift in theology created widespread changes in any form of representation, including theatrical drama: "in Renaissance England, figural representations – that is, fictive and symbolic articulations of something other than themselves – are the site of profoundly important cultural negotiations… the function of representation in England has a specific, and very important, political and religious history."[379] Despite these restrictions, however, playwrights, literary authors, and other artists continued to address issues of religious and sociopolitical importance through additional layers of representation:

> Religious belief is 'about' God and the soul as much as it is 'about' the sociopolitical order… Religion in this period supplies the primary language of analysis. It is the cultural matrix for explorations of virtually every topic: kingship, selfhood, rationality, language,

[378] Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) 568.
[379] Timothy Rosendale, *Liturgy and Literature in the Making of Protestant England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 1.

marriage, ethics, and so forth. Such subjects are, again, not masked by religious discourse but articulated in it; they are considered in relation to God and the human soul."[380]

In their exploration of social and personal themes, then, early modern playwrights used acceptable religious language to represent both sacred and secular ideas. The theology of the period supports such use of language. For example, "in Cranmer's usage, the words 'sacramentally' and 'figuratively' are often synonymous."[381] Religious rhetoric, then, could still be used if it was perceived as figurative rather than literal. I argue that early modern playwrights used such language to present a reformed doctrine of *caritas* through symbolic representations of Christ's body.

This multilayered use of language, theology, and representation, I argue, is akin to Bevington's concept of "doubling" in Tudor and early modern drama. Bevington explains that, as theater became professionalized in England, the constraints of commercial productions, such as funding and audience demands, compelled dramatic entertainers to "achieve a maximum of scope with a minimum of means."[382] Although medieval pageants "were waning" in popularity due to "alterations in the economic system" and "governmental opposition to their Catholic intent," they nevertheless set the standard for expectations in dramatic productions.[383] Without access to the free labor of trade guilds and other volunteer performers, professional dramatists in early modern England developed a structure of "doubling" to economically present complex plots and ideas.[384] Bevington initially describes doubling as casting actors in multiple roles but expands this meaning throughout his chapter "The Origins of Popular Dramatic Structure" to

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[380] Debora Shuger, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance: Religion, Politics, and the Dominant Culture*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) 6.
[381] Rosendale, *Liturgy and Literature*, 106.
[382] Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe*, 114.
[383] Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe*, 114-115.
[384] Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe*, 116.

additional techniques, such as alternating symmetrical scenery and employing soliloquies to bridge action and plot. Bevington's concept of doubling thus provides a useful lens through which we might view Eucharistic language in early modern plays. I will show how Shakespeare and Marlowe use representations of Christ's body to demonstrate charity as concern for the entire community, according to Reformation theology and consistent with the doctrine of *caritas*.

Doctor Faustus

In *Doctor Faustus*, images of Christ's blood are used in much the same way as Christ's body is utilized in the York biblical plays: to remind Faustus of his (failed) duty to uphold the reformed doctrine of *caritas* – that is, joining the community of the faithful through his love for God. Faustus conjures Mephistopheles for purely selfish reasons and uses the demons to perform deeds for his own material pleasure. Neglecting God, Faustus has focused too heavily on his own corporeality, and Christ's corporeality, symbolized by blood, represents this disconnect.

Dr. Faustus exists in two versions, an A-text and a B-text. The A-text is dated earlier, around 1604, and the B-text is dated to 1616 with subsequent printings over the next several years. Despite the propagation of the B-text, it includes additions that many scholars speculate were written either by or in collaboration with at least one other author. For this reason, I use the A-text as the more authoritative version and closest to Marlowe's original vision. Scholars such as David Bevington (whose edition I use in this chapter) and Michael Keefer have released critical editions of the A-text that promote its use by scholars.[385]

[385] Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* (A Text), in *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, ed. David Bevington (New York: Norton, 2002); Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus: A Critical Edition of the 1604 Version*, ed. Michael Keefer (Ontario: Broadview, 2007).

Faustus's pride and narcissism are evident early in the play; he is focused on gaining his own "desires": "Lines, circles, signs, letters, and characters – / Ay, these are those that Faustus most desires."[386] However, despite his own claim, Faustus does not seem to desire these things for their own sake, but for what they will give him:

> Oh, what a world of profit and delight,
>
> Of power, of honor, of omnipotence
>
> Is promised to the studious artisan!
>
> All things that move between the quiet poles
>
> Shall be at my command.[387]

Faustus's desires lie within the material world and not with God. This alienates Faustus both from God and the larger Christian community (he wants to "command" them, not join them). The two magicians, Valdes and Cornelius, describe what Faustus can gain from conjuring: wealth, power, women, and knowledge. Faustus cannot resist, declaring, "Come, show me some demonstrations magical,/ That I may conjure in some lusty grove/ And have these joys in full possession."[388] Faustus desires the materiality of the world over the spiritual faith required to join him with God and his fellow Christians. While the material world played an essential part in performing acts of mercy towards the poor according to medieval theology, Faustus's material concerns actually separate him from the community according to the reformed doctrine of inner faith. He values worldly goods for their own sake, and not for the good works he can perform with them while remaining mindful of God and the doctrine of *caritas*. Mephistopheles acknowledges that the key to damnation is separation from God: "the shortest cut for conjuring/

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[386] Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, ed. Bevington, 1.1.53-54.
[387] Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, 1.1.55-59.
[388] Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, 1.1.152-154.

Is stoutly to abjure the Trinity/ And pray devoutly to the prince of hell."[389] This constitutes a refocus of the individual's thoughts from God to Satan, the ultimate violation of *caritas* as reciprocal love towards God.

Faustus not only alienates himself from God in his desires and thoughts, but also with his actions. After expressing his desire for wealth and power, Faustus conjures the demons and acts upon his wishes. He views a pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins, tours Europe, and disrupts the Pope's feast. The visual spectacle of the representations of sin, the distance traversed on the journey across the continent, and the sumptuousness of the dinner all emphasize the physical pleasure that Faustus has embraced. This is perhaps most evident in Faustus's desire to make Helen of Troy his mistress "to glut the longing of [his] heart's desire."[390] This desire is purely physical, as the conjured spirit is not the real Helen, but an image in her exact likeness. As Faustus has previously explained to the Knight and Emperor when producing the likenesses of Alexander the Great and his paramour, these are not "true substantial bodies… [b]ut such spirits can lively resemble" them.[391] Faustus's physical desire for a false Helen replaces his love for God: "for heaven be in these lips."[392] He admits so when he declares

> That I might have unto my paramour/ That heavenly Helen which I saw of late,/ Whose sweet embracings may extinguish clean/ These thoughts that do dissuade me from my vow,/ And keep mine oath I made to Lucifer.[393]

Faustus's obsession with his own individual, physical desires has separated him from God and the community of faith.

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[389] Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, 1.3.53-55. Conjuring is what leads to Faustus's pact with the devil and his damnation.
[390] Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, 5.1.82.
[391] Marlow, *Doctor Faustus*, 4.1.46 and 50.
[392] Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, 5.1.95.
[393] Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, 5.1.83-87.

The material pleasure for which Faustus's thoughts and actions are deflected from God is countered by the corporeal representation of *caritas* in Christ's blood. This occurs early in the play, as Faustus's blood congeals while he tries to write his contract with Lucifer. Referring to his flowing blood, Faustus declares, "let it be propitious for my wish."[394] It is at this moment of individualistic violation of the doctrine of *caritas* that Faustus's blood congeals as if trying to prevent him from writing the contract. When his blood flows again, Faustus asks, "Why shouldst thou not? Is not thy soul thine own?"[395] This rejection of Christ's saving blood seals Faustus's pact with Lucifer.

Yet, Christ's saving blood serves as a reminder throughout the play that Faustus may still accept God's mercy and rejoin the community of the faithful. Before the play's final scene, the Old Man reminds Faustus that he may still reconcile with Christ, "[w]hose blood alone must wash away thy guilt."[396] Faustus's subsequent speeches ("I do repent, and yet I do despair")[397] do not necessarily reveal whether he is saved or damned. They do, however, reveal that Faustus declines the reciprocal love between man and God established by the doctrine of *caritas*. God upholds His end of that bargain with His ever-present blood – it even "streams in the firmament"[398] as Faustus despairs over his chosen fate. This appearance of the corporeal Christ during Faustus's final moments reflects the image of Christ pointing out his wounds to the judged souls in the York *Last Judgment* pageant.[399] While the medieval body of Christ represented the entire community of the faithful and the active charity necessary for salvation,

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[394] Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, 2.1.57.
[395] Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, 2.1.67.
[396] Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, 5.1.46.
[397] Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, 5.1.63.
[398] Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, 5.2.75.
[399] For a more thorough discussion of the blood streaming in the firmament's Eucharistic and "salvific" qualities, see: Jay Zysk, "The Last Temptation of Faustus: Contested Rites and Eucharistic Representation in *Doctor Faustus*," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 43.2 (Spring 2013).

this early modern equivalent represents the inner faith and trust in God necessary for Faustus's participation in the Christian community and, perhaps, his salvation. However, while Faustus describes the blood, it is unlikely that the audience actually sees it. God stretches out his arm,[400] recalling Christ's bodily sacrifice at the crucifixion, but Faustus again refuses aid and refuses to take responsibility[401] for his lack of faith: "No Faustus, curse thyself. Curse Lucifer,/ That hath deprived thee of the joys of heaven."[402] Faustus remains in violation of the early modern theological doctrine of *caritas*, even during his last moments. While his soul's ultimate destination may remain ambiguous to the audience, Faustus quite clearly rejects the notion of reciprocal love for God and has rejected his role in the larger Christian community by focusing on attaining his own individual desires. Despite his purported atheism, Marlowe was staging a production for an early modern audience, and the theological concepts in his play reflect that particular belief system. While doctrines like *caritas* may have been revised during the reformation, they continued to be represented onstage in much the same ways as their medieval counterparts. Marlowe's appropriation of the medieval staging of the Eucharistic body of Christ to represent a reformed doctrine of caritas reveals one of the ways that medieval literature and "traditional religion"[403] continued to influence drama, literature, and even a popular understanding of theology in the early modern era.

Coriolanus

In *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare employs the medieval biblical play technique of depicting *caritas* in relation to a physical body. Coriolanus's wounds, received while fighting the

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[400] Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, 5.2.80.
[401] See also: Norma J. Engberg, "The Truncated Passive: How Dr. Faustus Avoids Laying Blame or Taking Responsibility, *Journal of the Wooden O. Symposium* 5 (2005).
[402] Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, 5.2.111-112.
[403] Popular thought and practice as defined by: Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

commander of the Volscians, Aufidius, become representative of the Roman populace and Coriolanus's duty and service towards them. Following Roman tradition, Coriolanus is asked to publicly display his wounds in front of a crowd to prove his service and loyalty to the Roman people. To be elected consul, Coriolanus must participate in a ceremony that emphasizes community. It is Coriolanus's refusal to engage with the community, and not necessarily his dismissal of tradition, that brings him to tragedy.

Coriolanus's body is tied to the Roman state by his mother from the time of his birth. Volumnia's language when describing her view of a Roman mother's role in rearing children is vividly corporeal. She explains that "The breasts of Hecuba/ When she did suckle Hector looked not lovelier/ Than Hector's forehead when it spit forth blood/ At Grecian sword, contemning."[404] This analogous image of mother and son connects their physical bodies to their roles in protecting their people. Shakespeare emphasizes the physical brutality of Hector's fight against the Greeks and his mother's physical nurturing. Both bodies perform a kind of sacrifice for the community, reflecting Christ's physical sacrifice for the Christian community as depicted in the biblical crucifixion plays. While the violence that has been inflicted upon Coriolanus results from his own participation in violence, in contrast to Christ's innocence, both figures have been wounded in service of their people. Volumnia imagines her son's battle experience in graphic terms: "He'll beat Aufidius' head below his knee/ And tread upon his neck."[405] She tells Virgilia:

> Methinks I hear hither your husband's drum,
>
> See him pluck Aufidius down by th' hair;

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[404] William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Coriolanus* in *The Norton Shakespeare*. 2nd ed. Eds. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: Norton, 2008), 1.3.37-40.
[405] Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, 1.3.43-44.

> As children from a bear, the Volsces shunning him.
> Methinks I see him stamp thus, and call thus:
> 'Come on, you cowards, you were got in fear
> Though you were born in Rome!' His bloody brow
> With his mailed hand then wiping, forth he goes,
> Like to a harvest-man that's tasked to mow
> Or all or lose his hire.[406]

While it is not surprising that a description of a battle is written with such physical detail, Volumnia's portrayal specifically ties the corporeal suffering with birth and one's membership in a community. This passage serves as a precursor to the depiction of *caritas* in Coriolanus's wounds.

At the beginning of the play, the Roman plebeians are furious with their leaders for failing to alleviate the current famine. The rulers have violated the doctrine of *caritas* by failing to provide for the neediest among them. Coriolanus shows charity to the people when he insists that they be given grain, but his efforts are in vain and go unnoticed.

Coriolanus is viewed by the public as a member of the group that withheld food from them, and they feel further rejected by him when he refuses to show them his wounds, an important tradition in the election process for Roman consulship. Appeals to tradition and ceremony suggest that this practice is important to the entire community. Sicinius says, "Sir, the people/ Must have their voices, neither will they bate/ one jot of ceremony."[407] Thus, the voices of the Roman people are written onto the wounds of the candidate. Coriolanus's public display of his wounds becomes one in the same with the public's will. Similar to the way Christ's body

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[406] Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, 1.3.26-34.
[407] Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, 2.2.136-138.

represents his Church in the medieval biblical plays, the corporeal body of the consul becomes a symbol of the people. The Third Citizen explains in Act 2 scene 3:

> We have power in ourselves to do it [voice support for Coriolanus], but it is a
> power that we have no power to do. For if he show us his
> wounds and tell us his deeds, we are to put our tongues into
> those wounds and speak for them; so if he tells us his noble
> deeds we must also tell him our noble acceptance of them.
> Ingratitude is monstrous, and for the multitude to be ingrateful
> were to make a monster of the multitude, of the which we,
> being members, should bring ourselves to be monstrous members.[408]

Here, the wounds are directly connected to the voice of the people, and the word "power" almost implies a kind of sacramental efficacy. The citizen acknowledges the public's role in the community when he claims that to be ungrateful to their leaders would be monstrous. He exudes the kind of charity, that is, concern for the community, that Coriolanus fails to show. Finally, the image of the populace placing their tongues into Coriolanus's wounds recalls the biblical story of Thomas being invited to put his fingers into the resurrected Christ's wounds.[409] This image puts Coriolanus's actions into dialogue with those of Christ and validates the comparison between the two. Here, Shakespeare purposely recalls an image of Christ to contrast Coriolanus's refusal to adhere to the doctrine of *caritas* by participating in the Roman community.[410]

Coriolanus, however, rejects community with the people when he says

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[408] Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, 2.3.4-11.
[409] John 20:27.
[410] Stanley Cavell analyzes Coriolanus as an inverted Christ figure in "Who Does the Wolf Love?: Reading *Coriolanus*," *Representations* no. 3 (Summer 1983): 1-20. By invoking "the central figure of the Eucharist," Coriolanus, according to Cavell, fails to participate in the community. I argue that this is not only an inversion of the Christ figure, but an inversion of the Christ figure portrayed in the mystery cycles.

I do beseech you,

Let me o'erleap that custom, for I cannot

Put on the gown, stand naked, and entreat them

For my wounds' sake to give their suffrage.[411]

Coriolanus's primary reason for objecting to the ceremony is the very thing that *should* compel him to perform it: that is, symbolically uniting oneself with the common people. Coriolanus violates the doctrine of *caritas* by refusing to acknowledge and address the needs of the community, and this propels him towards tragedy.

Coriolanus more directly rejects the Roman people when he describes the little value that he places on them. He tells the consuls, "your people,/ I love them as they weigh."[412] Coriolanus does not love the plebeians for their own sake, the kind of love that would embody true *caritas*, but only as much as "weigh," implying their economic significance, which is apparently very little. Menenius attempts to remedy the way Coriolanus has presented himself to the Roman plebeians and leadership, but his rhetoric only supports the fact that Coriolanus rejects the Roman populace: "He loves your people,/ but tie him not to be their bedfellow"[413] Menenius claims that Coriolanus cares for the people, but he does not want to be counted among them. This rejection of being tied to the community violates the doctrine of *caritas*. Coriolanus does show some concern for the people, as his warrior status proves, but he does not consider them members of his community. This perspective is the opposite of Christ's portrayal as a representation of the entire Christian community in the York biblical plays, and Shakespeare

[411] Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, 2.2.133-135.
[412] Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, 2.2.69-70.
[413] Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, 2.2.60-61.

inverts this mode of representation to show that Coriolanus is isolated from the community and lacks true *caritas*.

Not only does Coriolanus refuse to commune with the Roman people – he actually insults them. He mockingly tells Menenius to "Bid them wash their faces/ and keep their teeth clean."[414] This implies that they have do not even subscribe to basic hygiene. Coriolanus insults the people in the very first scene when he says to them:

> What's the matter, you dissentious rogues,
>
> That, rubbing the poor itch of your opinion,
>
> Make yourselves scabs?[415]

Like scabs, the people, according to Coriolanus, are an annoyance. They should be endured, not served. Coriolanus tells the people, "you should account me the more virtuous that I have not been common in my love"[416] While Coriolanus touts his rejection of community as a virtue, this actually violates the doctrine of *caritas* which does call for common love. Coriolanus directly espouses a principle that is contrary to reformation theology.

Coriolanus and the Roman public are not the only people to associate his warrior's body with his role in the community. I previously discussed Volumnia's association of Coriolanus's body from the time of his birth throughout his life as a warrior as connected to his service to Rome. Her rhetoric when she begs Coriolanus to stop his attack on the nation he once served emphasizes corporeality and his connection to the community. She first tells him, "Thou art my warrior./ I holp to frame thee."[417] The use of the first person "my" makes the connection more

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[414] Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, 2.3.56-57.
[415] Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, 1.1.153-155.
[416] Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, 2.3.85-86. While Coriolanus deems selectivity a virtue, Christ touches many "undesirables" in the Gospels, including the sick and infirm. In Luke 13, for example, Christ heals a crippled woman by speaking and by touching her. Coriolanus behaves in the opposite manner towards the Roman public.
[417] Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, 5.3.62-63.

personal, to the immediate family, the closest form of community, the bond with one's mother. In calling attention to their mother/son relationship Volumnia specifically uses language that emphasizes their physical, bodily connection by stating that she helped to "frame" him; that is, she physically formed his body. This connects Coriolanus's body, more than any other part of him, to his duty to Rome. Volumnia continues to point out his duty by emphasizing corporeality, even the bodies of others:

> Volumnia [showing Coriolanus his son]: This is a poor epitome
> Of yours,
> Which by th'interpretation of full time
> May show like all yourself.[418]

Coriolanus's body is further connected to Rome through the body of his son. Volumnia hopes that by emphasizing physical connection, she can convince Coriolanus to end his attack and embrace the community into which he was born. Thus, she connects caritas to physical embodiment, continuing the tradition of the medieval biblical plays. Not only that, but Volumnia is pointing to her grandson, Coriolanus's son, one who was physically formed by the warrior, to emphasize this connection. Volumnia further emphasizes corporeality when she highlights the grief and fear of Coriolanus's family:

> Should we be silent and not speak, our raiment
> And state of bodies would bewray what life
> We have led since thy exile. Think with thyself
> How more unfortunate than all living women
> Are we come hither, since that thy sight, which should

[418] Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, 5.3.67-69.

Make our eyes flow with joy, hearts dance with comforts,

Constrains them weep and shake with fear and sorrow,

Making the mother, wife, and child to see

The son, the husband, and the father tearing

His country's bowels out; and to poor we

Thine enmity's most capital[419]

Volumnia physically describes the emotions that she, Virgilia, and Coriolanus's son feel. She ties concern for the state, the well-being of Rome, to their physical bodies. They are a part of Rome and accept its community. Volumnia's words do not necessarily work to change Coriolanus's heart. Instead, the image of his family kneeling, or, as he calls it, "this unnatural scene"[420] is what finally makes Coriolanus halt the attack on Rome. But it is too late. Coriolanus has not embraced his community in time to reverse the tragedy.

The Winter's Tale

In *The Winter's Tale*, the main character does fulfill the doctrine of *caritas*, but only at the end of the play. Leontes violates the reformation iteration of the doctrine throughout most of the play by refusing to acknowledge his wife's innocence. He does not understand Hermione's devotion to him and fails to consider her perspective. By accusing her of having an affair with his friend and fellow king, Polixenes, Leontes rejects community at its most basic level, that community that should exist between husband and wife. He only recovers his wife at the end of the play by reversing this action through his acknowledgement of wrongdoings. Continuing the tradition of embodied representations of *caritas*, the doctrine is emphasized in Hermione's statue, which serves as a physical reminder of Leontes' violation. Hermione embodies *caritas*;

[419] Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, 5.3.95-105
[420] Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, 5.3.185.

she is not Christ, but her stage presence "doubles," to use Bevington's term, to represent love and the community.

At the beginning of the play, Leontes suspects Hermione's innocent friendship and ability to convince Polixenes to stay as a sign that the two are having an affair. Despite the evident innocence of their interaction, Leontes mistakes simple moments between the two for supposed indications of their infidelity. The signs that Leontes believes he sees are mainly physical, such as holding hands and walking in the garden together:

> But to be paddling palms and pinching fingers,
> As now they are, and making practiced smiles
> As in a looking-glass; and then to sigh, as 'twere
> The mort o'th' deer – O, that is entertainment
> My bosom likes not, nor my brows.[421]

He also describes his jealousy and suspicion in physical terms: "Too hot, too hot!/ To mingle friendship far is mingling bloods."[422] Leontes also describes his own reaction physically: "I have *tremor cordis* on me. My heart dances/ But not for joy, not joy."[423] In his article on the influence of the medieval mystery plays on Shakespeare's work, Michael O'Connell compares Leontes' "male sexual jealousy" to Joseph's in the Coventry *Shearman and the Taylors' Pageant*. The pageant portrays Joseph's doubt and anger after finding out that Mary is pregnant.[424] Like Joseph, Leontes falsely accuses his wife while the audience is aware of her innocence. In both plays, the woman's role, with Mary giving birth to the savior Christ and Hermione returning to life and salvifically forgiving Leontes, leads to the restoration of order and hope for the future.

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[421] William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*. Ed. John Pitcher. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 1.2.115-119.
[422] Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, 1.2.108-109.
[423] Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, 1.2.110-111.
[424] O'Connell, "Vital Cultural Practices," 162.

Shakespeare's play overtly reflects the earlier pageant and recalls biblical drama; in doing so, he reminds the audience of the real biblical mysteries they represent.

When Leontes openly accuses Hermione of infidelity, he does so publicly. In front of onlookers, he claims that their son is not his. Leontes tells Hermione, "though he does bear some signs of me, yet you/ Have too much blood in him."[425] Here, Leontes emphasizes the boy's physical attributes similar to the way Volumnia emphasizes the physical body of her son. Like Coriolanus, the boy's body represents a lack of *caritas* in Leontes, who is accusing his wife of faithlessness in bodily terms. It is ironic that Leontes thinks he is using the boy's body to represent Harmione's lack of *caritas*, that is, her inability to obey her husband and king, something that she is bound by society to do. As a legitimate son, the boy's body does actually represent Hermione's fidelity. Leontes again emphasizes physicality when he further accuses Hermione: "Away with him, and let her sport herself/ With that she's big with [to Hermione] for 'tis/ Polixenes/ He made thee swell thus."[426] He believes he has physical evidence of Hermione's infidelity. Leontes further violates the doctrine of *caritas* when he compels the whole crowd to join him in accusation. He tells the people, "You, my lords,/ Look on her, mark her well."[427] Leontes includes the community in his accusations against Hermione, but, in an inverse of the doctrine of charity, he violates the principle of community in doing so because it is a false accusation.

Leontes' inability to adhere to the reformation doctrine of *caritas* is emphasized by the contrast in his subjects. His people display the charity towards Hermione that Leontes himself should show his wife. One of his lords says,

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[425] Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, 2.1.56-57.
[426] Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, 2.1.60-62.
[427] Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, 2.1.64-65.

For her, my lord

I dare my life lay down, and will do't, sir,

Please you t'accept it, that the queen is spotless

I'th' eyes of heaven and to you – I mean

In this which you accuse her.[428]

The assertive claim to lay down one's life echoes Christ's words in John 10:18 when he reiterates his choice to sacrifice himself for humanity's salvation. The Lord's claim that he would lay down his life to guarantee that Hermione is innocent displays the kind of *caritas*, the kind of love and unity that recall's Christ's own bodily death, that Leontes lacks. Despite this direct portrayal, Leontes refuses to follow the Lord's example. Until the very end of the play, Leontes continues to violate the doctrine of *caritas* by remaining convinced of his own volition and refusing to consider the perspectives of his wife and his people, thus rejecting their community.

Sarah Beckwith discusses the role of language in enacting a theatrical form of penance in *The Winter's Tale*. While Hermione transforms physically, Leontes' language indicates that he has undergone an interior transformation. It is only through this true recognition of and repentance for his sins that Leontes' wife is brought to life.[429] I agree with Beckwith's reading, and I think it can be extended to a discussion of charity. Leontes must show true, selfless concern for his wife in order to be reunited with her, enacting the kind of charity required in the early modern conception of the doctrine of caritas.

I am ashamed. Does not the stone rebuke me

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[428] Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, 2.1.129-133.
[429] Sarah Beckwith, "Shakespearean Resurrections: The Winter's Tale," *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

For being more stone than it? O royal piece!

There's magic in thy majesty, which has

My evils conjured to remembrance, and

From thy admiring daughter took the spirits,

Standing like stone with thee.[430]

These are the lines Beckwith cites as evidence of Leontes' penance. However, not only does Leontes seek reconciliation, his words reflect the initial sorrow and shock when Jesus's friends and disciples discover that his body is not in the tomb. I would go further and say that here Leontes finally embraces the doctrine of *caritas* by seeing things from his wife's perspective. He finally believes her innocence and feels remorse for what he has done. He embraces the community of his wife by considering her needs. As a result, the statue comes to life, and Leontes and Hermione are finally reunited. Shakespeare uses this physical transformation to provide an embodied representation of *caritas* that, while it stands for the reformed notion of contemplative charity, employs techniques earlier used in the medieval biblical plays. Hermione's transformation from inanimate statue back to her living self is analogous to Christ's bodily death and resurrection, celebrated in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Her transformation is imbued with sacramental significance for the couple, as "[Leontes] is restored to full grace not only in divine grace but in his marriage too."[431] Like Christ's body, Hermione's body is the site of "the restoration of faith in grace and in personal bonds."[432] According to Ingram, "Shakespeare imbues such social bonds with a devotional significance, found in the sacramental rhetoric of reconciliation uttered in moments of forgiveness in the play's final act."[433] Thus,

[430] Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, 5.3.37-42.
[431] Ingram, "Autolycus and the Economics of Festivity," 63.
[432] Ingram, "Autoclys and the Economics of Festivity," 63.
[433] Ingram, "Autoclys and the Economics of Festivity," 64.

while early modern playwrights did not, and often legally could not, depict Christ onstage, parallel and metaphorical depictions of biblical events reinforce the devotional nature of the plays and maintain their medieval roots.

Conclusion

While ideas about charity and how to best express *caritas* changed during the English Reformation, both the medieval tradition of almsgiving and the broader definition of charitable goodwill encouraged by reformers had their merits and their shortcomings. While I have looked at popular trends in this dissertation, it is important to remember that personal faith is not uniform, nor is public discourse. Debates about theology occurred throughout the medieval and early modern periods. The Lollards, Waldensians, Cathars, and others had beliefs that contradicted orthodox medieval Catholicism, and different sects of Protestants, such as Puritans and Lutherans, disagreed over doctrine as well. Uprisings of Catholics, such as the Pilgrimage of Grace of the 1530s, occurred in response to reforms. Protestants also resisted Catholicism in England during the early years of the Reformation and through the changing religious landscape, especially the reign of the Catholic queen Mary I.

Dramatists and poets dealt with these complex theologies in their work through various forms of representation. However, the literary and dramatic symbolism of Christ's body as *caritas* endured across the Middle Ages and Reformation. Early modern playwrights developed multiple layers of representation to effectively convey ideas about charity and provide the means of representing the unified community of Christians found in the body of Christ. The statue of Hermione, Faustus's vision of Christ's blood, and Coriolanus's wounds double as representations of Christendom and align with orthodox reformation theology: "relocation of the eucharistic action from transformed elements to transformed and remembering subjects…

Remembrance, faith, and thanksgiving – all enjoined of each individual participant at the very moment of reception – replace divine immanence as the essence of the Eucharist."[434] According to Rosendale, "This negotiation takes place on the ground of representation and interpretation, a mode which requires the belief that sign and referent are not copresent, and that meaning and identity are thus created and mediated through the careful reading of signs."[435] These signs occur within characters, settings, and dialogue. The setting of a festival, as in *The Winter's Tale*, or a public forum, such as *Coriolanus*, "affirm community ties and allegiances."[436] These connections and symbols remain at the heart of charity in both doctrine and literature.

[434] Rosendale, *Liturgy and Literature*, 99.
[435] Rosendale, *Liturgy and Literature*, 19.
[436] Ingram, "Autoclys and the Economics of Festivity," 64.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

The quick reference for "alms" in *Oxford Reference* defines the term as "money or food given to poor people," which coincides with the way it has been used in the texts discussed in this dissertation.[437] The etymology traces back through Old English and Christian Latin to the Greek word for "compassion," *eleēmosunē*, which derives from the root *eleos*, meaning "mercy." The word "alms" has therefore developed from a term with much broader usage. While the theological debates come from political, philosophical, and ecclesiastical sources, these literary sources (while not necessarily accessible to a large audience) and dramatic sources (much larger audience) show that these definitions had more widespread adherence. Debates about charity and doctrine continue today, even in secular discourse.

The John Knox House in Edinburgh, Scotland is a surviving testament to the prioritization of *caritas* in both medieval and early modern Christianity. Still visible today, the historic building's facade features a quotation adapted from Mark 12:30-31: "Lvfe God abvfe al and yi nychtbovr as yi self" ("Love God above all and your neighbor as yourself").[438] The text was added by traditional Catholic owners in the 1500s and has remained intact through Protestant ownership. While the home's various occupants may have had different views of charity and other Christian theological principles, they apparently all proudly valued the doctrine

[437] "alms," *Oxford Reference.* Accessed 26 Feb. 2024. https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095404684.
[438] "'you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." Mark 12:30-31, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, ed. Michael D. Coogan et. al. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001).

of *caritas* as articulated in the Gospel of Mark. Despite changing theologies, the importance of expressing love for God and love for neighbor endured.

Concern over the idea of *caritas* endures in religious debates today. On October 29, 2018, then United States Attorney General, Republican Jeff Sessions, was giving a speech in Boston when a pastor who was attending the event interrupted Sessions to quote Matthew 25:42-43: "I was hungry, and you did not feed me. I was a stranger, and you did not welcome me. I was naked, and you did not clothe me… I was in prison, and you did not visit me." Rev. Will Green followed his recitation with his own remarks, stating, "Brother Jeff, as a fellow United Methodist, I call on you to repent, to care for those in need, to remember that when you do not care for others, you are wounding the body of Christ."[439] Green's remarks show that modern Christians still understand Eucharistic references to Christ's body as representative of the most vulnerable members of the population. After Rev. Green was escorted out, a second pastor, Rev. Darrell Hamilton II, defended Green's comments, saying that they were the "words of Jesus himself." The pastors' comments were a reaction to the Trump administration's treatment of immigrants and refugees, which included policies of detention, family separation, and religious discrimination.[440] The pastors' concern for demonstrating material charity to these vulnerable populations through corporal acts of mercy implies a belief in *caritas* exhibited through good works. Their pleas to someone in a position of leadership whom they viewed as a member of their own religious community show that depictions of Christ's body as representative of the needy remain effective symbols of *caritas*.

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[439] Global News, "Pastor heckles Jeff Sessions, demands he 'repent' for treatment of immigrants, refugees," *YouTube*, video uploaded October 30, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vCC8rqShhqA&ab_channel=GlobalNews.

[440] Alex Johnson, "Ministers interrupt Sessions, are removed from religious freedom conference," *NBC News*, October 29, 2018. https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/ministers-interrupt-sessions-are-removed-religious-freedom-conference-n925981

On February 11, 2024, a television commercial ran during the Superbowl sponsored by the Christian organization He Gets Us.[441] The ad features multiple still scenes of a person washing someone else's feet. The people featured in the scenes represent diverse demographics and lifestyles, including immigrants, protesters, police officers, people of color, residents of urban environments, residents of rural environments, teenagers, and members of the LGBTQ+ community. The video ends with a textual message denouncing hate and inviting viewers to visit a page on the organization's website: HeGetsUs.com/LoveYourNeighbor. The page features the same video played during the Superbowl and a discussion of foot washing as a metaphor for love and humility. This advertisement sparked controversy after it aired during the Superbowl, inciting two main complaints.[442] First, the inclusivity demonstrated in the images angered conservative Christians who felt offended by "woke ideology," a term popularized in political discourse to discredit diversity and inclusion. For these viewers, the message of charity was overshadowed by the visual representation of tolerance. The other controversy stemming from the ad was over the decision to spend so much money on a television commercial in the first place. Critics felt that the resources could be spent better on serving the communities represented in the video.

These instances show that laypeople still value charity as an expression of *caritas* and hold their leaders, religious or secular, accountable. Questions over the importance of material sustenance continue, as do questions about the value of spending resources on evangelizing. Christianity today represents a broad range of beliefs, and both almsgiving and prayer can be viewed as efficacious acts, just as they were in the Middle Ages and Early Modern periods.

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[441] He Gets Us, "Foot Washing, *YouTube*, video uploaded February 11, 2024. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=94BqlDQ-Ppo&ab_channel=HeGetsUs

[442] AJ Willingham, "The truth behind the 'He Gets Us' ads for Jesus airing during the Super Bowl," CNN, February 13, 2023. https://www.cnn.com/2023/02/11/us/he-gets-us-super-bowl-commercials-cec/index.html

Understanding the ways in which literature can inform our interpretation of religious doctrine can help even modern societies navigate the difficulties of basic morality and larger issues of wealth inequality, immigration, and homelessness. The wisdom of medieval and early modern authors endures and continues to provide ways to interpret important ideas regarding both humanity and the divine.

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