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Miranda Wilcox

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**Title** Constructing Metaphoric Models of Salvation:  
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**Author(s)** Miranda Wilcox

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**Abstract** The parable of the laborers in the vineyard in Matthew 20:1-6 demonstrates the possibilities and limitations of constructing metaphoric models of salvation. It also exposes the inadequacy of applying human economic analogies to divine relations and invites its audience to consider the function and purpose of using metaphors to understand spiritual concepts. An anonymous fourteenth-century Middle English poem called *Pearl* retells this parable and questions whether terrestrial concepts of value and exchange should frame salvation as a transaction based on merit. The poem demonstrates in metaphoric models that heavenly relationships, particularly salvation and grace, operate on a different scale, not one of terrestrial binary or comparative value but of celestial fulness.

# CONSTRUCTING METAPHORIC MODELS OF SALVATION: MATTHEW 20 AND THE MIDDLE ENGLISH POEM *PEARL*

Miranda Wilcox

The parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-6) may be the most unsatisfying parable in the Bible. The parable compares an employer remunerating labor and God granting salvation. This parallelism becomes problematic at the parable's end when the employer grants all the employees equal payment in spite of their varying amount of labor. The laborers who worked the entire day express their dissatisfaction that their compensation was not greater than the amount paid to those who were hired in the eleventh hour. Like the angry employees, readers are often perplexed at the apparent lack of commensurate remuneration for human service to God; such exchange contradicts their expectations of proportionality in justice. The interpretative tension generated by this parable demonstrates the possibilities and limitations of constructing metaphoric models of salvation, the process whereby God and humans are reconciled. It also exposes the inadequacy of applying human economic analogies to divine relations, and it invites its audience to consider the function and purpose of using metaphors to understand spiritual concepts.

Parables use metaphors as conceptual models to teach and to generate new insight about spiritual phenomena. Generating metaphors and using them to teach produces the cycle of metaphoric

modeling. The parable in Matthew 20 invites its audience to join this cyclical process of metaphoric modeling. The fourteenth-century poem *Pearl* exemplifies how extending the metaphoric model presented in Matthew 20 conveys a vision of justification and sanctification, dual processes of salvation that transcend some human expectations about commensurate justice and comparative value. *Pearl's* creative strategies demonstrate how metaphoric modeling generates spiritual insight about salvation. The *Pearl*-poet explores analogies between the equal payment of a penny to all the vineyard laborers and the priceless gift of the pearl of great price, the eternal life promised to all faithful Christians.

*Pearl's* retelling of the parable in Matthew 20 questions whether terrestrial concepts of value and exchange should frame salvation as a transaction based on merit. The poem demonstrates in metaphoric models that heavenly relationships, particularly salvation and grace, operate on a different scale, not a scale of terrestrial binary or comparative value, but one of celestial fullness, an endlessly sufficient abundance that satisfies all lack and need. Before discussing the interpretative challenges of the parable in Matthew 20 and its retelling in *Pearl*, this paper will outline the necessity of, as well as the inherent tension in, constructing metaphoric models of salvation.

### **Pedagogical and Generative Functions of Metaphoric Modeling**

Biblical parables tell stories that focus the audience's attention on the relationships between familiar human situations and less familiar divine concepts. Humans are very adept at constructing analogies between familiar and unfamiliar things, and cognitive scientists now argue that much of human thinking employs analogical processes.<sup>1</sup> Essentially, parables are metaphors in narrative

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1. For an introduction concerning the widespread use of conceptual metaphors in human cognition, see George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). For an advanced discussion, see Raymond Gibbs Jr., ed., *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Conceptual phenomena are difficult for humans to articulate and share because they exist outside the realm of visible observation or other sensory perception. Metaphors link source domains of familiar objects or

form. These metaphors function by creating analogies between human experiences and spiritual phenomena and thus communicate complex conceptual relationships more intuitively than propositional statements of doctrine. Understanding how metaphors work enhances the reader's ability to interpret metaphors in scriptures.

Metaphors juxtapose two or more situations in ways that invite reflection about their implicit, shared similarities. For example, the metaphor "life is a journey" invites us to consider how our experiences of traveling on journeys are like our experiences of living. Living and journeying both involve movement, movement that may include temporal, spatial, or emotional aspects. We can then extrapolate from broad correspondences among the experiential domains of journeying and traveling to more specific narrative entailments; for example, being delayed on a journey can be compared to encountering an obstacle in life. Metaphors are powerful cognitive tools that help humans perceive relationships and understand their world.

Metaphors in biblical parables can function in two fundamental ways: pedagogical models and generative models.<sup>2</sup> Teachers frequently use metaphors to instruct students about new paradigms. Pedagogical metaphors link students' existing experiences to new concepts by highlighting familiar structures. A science teacher may introduce the properties of light to students by showing them how a wave moves along a string or along the surface of water. The students then use their visual observations of the properties of waves in their classroom as a model from which to extrapolate about the unfamiliar behavior of electromagnetic waves. The metaphor "light is a wave" has been a crucial instructive model that bridges the gap between students' observations of familiar, visible, physical objects

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activities with target domains of unfamiliar concepts; the linking process reveals new insight about the similarities between the two domains.

2. For a discussion of metaphors as pedagogical models, see Graham Low, "Metaphor and Education," in *Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*, 212-31. For a discussion of metaphors as generative and pedagogical models, see Theodore L. Brown, *Making Truth: Metaphor in Science* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 19-30, 183-94.

and the unfamiliar behavior of invisible atomic phenomena. Yet the metaphor “light is a wave” did not begin as a pedagogical model; it began as a generative model that scientists devised in the seventeenth century as experimental observations challenged the prevailing metaphorical model, “light is a particle.” Scientists applied their knowledge of the physical properties of wave movement to explain previously unexplained aspects of the behavior of light. However, scientists eventually realized that they did not want to abandon the “light is a particle” model. The competition between the metaphorical models of light as a particle and as a wave began to be resolved in the early twentieth century when physicists introduced the wave-particle duality of radiant energy.<sup>3</sup> Today, quantum mechanics explains that all matter simultaneously exhibits particulate and wavelike properties. The history of metaphoric models of light demonstrates how scientists use metaphoric models to generate research and to instruct the uninitiated, and how scientists revise their models when new observations and research alter their conception of a natural phenomenon.<sup>4</sup> Biblical parables employ metaphors for the same cognitive purposes.

Scientific models and biblical parables demonstrate that there is a perpetual relationship between generative and pedagogical metaphors. Humans generate metaphors to understand unfamiliar phenomena, and if a metaphor proves to be applicable as a conceptual model, then the metaphor becomes a useful pedagogical device. There is a temptation to halt the metaphoric cycle when a generative model becomes a pedagogical model; however, if the metaphoric cycle stops here, the pedagogical model will become reductive and limiting.<sup>5</sup> Pedagogical models not only initiate learning, they also

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3. Brown, *Making Truth*, 89–93.

4. In *Making Truth*, Brown traces the use of metaphors in scientific conceptions of atoms, biochemical molecules, protein folding, cellular processes, and global warming.

5. In *Making Truth*, 157–59 and 183–85, Brown describes how scientists have recently become more aware of the pedagogical possibilities and limitations of using metaphors in scientific discourse as new advances in research render previous models obsolete or incomplete. As such, researchers and students are encouraged to be more self-conscious about employing metaphors because relying strictly on implications of

prompt additional exploration for better models. Thus, the cyclical process of metaphoric modeling perpetuates itself. In the case of the metaphoric models of light, scientists made breakthroughs when they embraced both models rather than when they focused on one or the other. The biblical parables likewise invite readers to explore the metaphoric model narrated in the parable while simultaneously generating new metaphoric possibilities. Therefore, the cyclical process of metaphoric modeling aids seekers in pursuit of spiritual (and scientific) understanding.

**“Every man a penny”: An Economic Model for Salvation in Matthew 20**

In Matthew 20, Christ is the master teacher. He creates a metaphoric model with both pedagogical and generative functions when he aligns the relation between an employer and employee with that between God and his disciples. Evoking our experience with economic relationships, specifically labor remuneration, serves a pedagogical function in that it links an intimately familiar human situation with a less familiar divine condition. The employer, the lord of the vineyard, needs laborers to help care for his vines just as God needs disciples to serve in his kingdom on earth, the church. The lord of the vineyard recruits employees to tend his vines and promises to pay them a wage for their labor much as God invites disciples to follow him and promises eternal life to those who serve faithfully. At the end of the day, the lord of the vineyard assembles his employees to pay them their wage; likewise, at the last judgment, God assembles his disciples and grants them eternal life. More analogical connections could be explored between these relationships.

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the metaphoric domain can lead to oversimplification and errors in argument. Theologians have likewise recognized the fundamental importance of metaphorical models for conceptualizing spiritual phenomena and recently have become more sensitive to the need of recognizing the limitations of the metaphorical domains. For a discussion of the role of theological metaphorical models, see Jan G. van der Watt, ed., *Salvation in the New Testament: Perspectives on Soteriology* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

The paradoxical conclusion of the parable propels the generative function of the metaphor. The parallelism between the employer-employee and the God-disciple relationships becomes strained in the last scene when the lord pays each laborer the same wage regardless of the length of his labor in the vineyard. At the end of the parable the laborers and readers expect, according to the human experience of economic justice, that the payment of the employees should be commensurate to the length of their labor for their employer. Yet the landowner quells their complaints with an unexpected reversal: “So the last shall be first, and the first last” (Matthew 20:16). The equal reward despite the disparities between the merit and value of the laborers’ work in the parable raises questions about divine justice. One way of resolving this crux is to conclude that the metaphoric model is limited—that is, God’s principles of remuneration do not operate with the same assumptions about merit and value that the human economy does. By undermining its own metaphoric application, the parable of the laborers in the vineyard invites the readers to engage in the process of metaphoric modeling to devise new models of salvation.

A Middle English poem named *Pearl* by modern editors embraces this invitation. *Pearl* provides a beautiful and sophisticated example of the process of generating metaphoric models to understand Matthew 20. The anonymous poet constructs models that reveal that terrestrial economic assumptions have limited symbolic valence in the divine economy of salvation. The poet responds to the interpretative crux of the parable of the laborers in the vineyard by linking it with the parable of the pearl of great price in Matthew 13:45-46. Exploring the complexities of the physical, narrative, verbal, and spiritual relations between the penny from the first parable and the pearl from the second parable yields spiritual insight about salvation—namely, that salvation does not result from the value of human labor or the merit of human effort, but from God’s grace.



### **“The grace of God is great enough”: Soteriological Satisfaction in the Middle English Poem *Pearl***

*Pearl* survives in a single manuscript that was produced in the last quarter of the fourteenth century in a West Midlands dialect of Middle English. Although the name of the poet is unknown, he also composed *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Patience*, and *Clean-ness*.<sup>6</sup> *Pearl* begins with a man mourning the loss of his precious pearl. As the poem progresses the audience learns that the man, usually called the Dreamer, is actually grieving the death of a young child, usually called the Pearl Maiden. The Dreamer falls asleep on her grave and finds himself in a liminal forest. Here the Dreamer meets his dead child—now exalted as a shining queen of heaven—wearing pearl-encrusted robes, a crown of pearls, and a single pearl of great price on her breast. The Dreamer is overjoyed to see his child, but he is confused that she has received such a marvelous heavenly reward even though she died so young. The Pearl Maiden recounts the parable of the laborers in the vineyard followed by the parable of the pearl of great price to explain to the Dreamer the logic of heavenly justice and salvation by examining verbal and visual analogies between terrestrial and celestial concepts of space, time, and value.

The *Pearl*-poet constructs the foundation for the metaphoric models by employing a unique pattern of verbal repetition. The 101 stanzas of the poem are divided into twenty sections that contain five stanzas (one contains six); the five stanzas are linked by the device of concatenation, or overlapping repetition. A concatenating word is repeated in the first and last line of each stanza in a section. The pattern of the concatenating words organizes the poet’s metaphoric models and symbolic development, which in turn frame his argument about salvation. Although a comprehensive analysis of the twenty concatenating words is beyond the scope of this paper, the sequence of the six words (*date*, *more*, *inoghe*, *ryght*, *maskelles*,

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6. For background about the *Pearl*-poet, the poem, and the manuscript, see Ad Putter, *An Introduction to the Gawain-poet* (London: Longman, 1996).

and *Jerusalem*) that are repeated at the center of the poem outline how the Pearl Maiden corrects the Dreamer's limited human conceptions about salvation.

The word *date* reveals the temporal limitations of the laborers, who represent all humans, and their linear expectations of celestial experience. As a result of their restricted perspective, the laborers demand *more* and evoke the comparative scale of value used in the terrestrial economy. The lord of the vineyard responds that he pays *inoghe*, or "enough," just as God equally satisfies human need.<sup>7</sup> The celestial state of abundant satisfaction contrasts with terrestrial institutions based on scarcity. To obtain celestial satisfaction, humans must be justified as *ryght*, or "righteous," and sanctified as *maskelles*, or "spotless and flawless," as a pearl is. These justified and sanctified beings live together in *Jerusalem*, the heavenly abode of the saved. The Dreamer's concluding vision of New Jerusalem is the linguistic and symbolic culmination of the poet's explanation of divine grace and salvation.

In the ninth and tenth sections, the poet repeats significant words and visual patterns to construct a metaphoric model that links qualities of spatial dimension, temporal duration, and economic scale; these parallel categories will encompass the terrestrial perspective. The Pearl Maiden begins retelling the parable of the vineyard in the ninth section of the poem; these stanzas are linked with the concatenating word *date* (lines 481-540). The word *date* had a wider meaning in Middle English than a specific point of time; it was used to express dimensions of temporal reckoning. Medieval Europeans, like much of the modern world, imagined time as a linear trajectory that could be identified in discrete units with beginnings and endings, for example, a lifespan, a year, a day, or an hour.<sup>8</sup> The parable's narrative is precisely divided into multiple temporal durations, and the *Pearl*-poet highlights these temporal units

7. Translations of Middle English words and phrases in the text are my own. I provide Marie Borroff's translation of *Pearl* in the indented quotations; see note 9.

8. *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. "date (n.2)," <http://quod.lib.umich.edu.eri.lib.byu.edu/m/med/> (accessed 13 December 2010).

by using *date* to refer to the entire harvest season (505), the beginning of the harvest (504), and the lengths of time that the laborers harvest in the vineyard (516, 517, 528, 529, 540, 541). The focus on temporal units reveals that the laborers are limited by their terrestrial perspective of linearity, not only in reckoning time but also in reckoning value.

As in Matthew 20, the narrative crux occurs in the *Pearl*-poet's retelling of the parable at the end of the day when the lord and steward line up their laborers to receive their wage. Lines 541-56 begin the tenth section of the poem in which the concatenating word shifts from *date*, a word that connotes temporal measurement, to *more*, a word that connotes a scale of value.<sup>9</sup>

“The date of the daye the lorde con knew,	“Duly the lord, at day's decline,
Called to the reve: ‘Lede, pay the meyny.	Said to the steward, ‘Sir, proceed;
Gyf hem the hyre that I hem owe, And fyrre, that non me may reprené,	Pay what I owe this folk of mine; And lest men chide me here, take heed:
Set hem alle upon a rawe And gyf uchon inlyche a peny.	Set them all in a single line, Give each a penny as agreed;
Bygyn at the laste that standes lowe,	Start with the last that came to the vine,
Tyl to the fyrste that thou atteny.’	And let the first the last succeed.’
And thenne the fyrst bygonne to pleny	And then the first began to plead;
And sayden that thay hade travayled sore:	Long had they toiled, they said and swore;

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9. The Middle English text in the columns throughout is edited by J. J. Anderson in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, Cleanness, Patience* (London: Everyman, 1996). This edition standardizes Middle English orthography. For a critical edition of *Pearl*, see Malcolm Andrew, Ronald Waldron, and Clifford Peterson, eds., *The Complete Works of the Pearl Poet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). Please note that the single and double quotations marks are included as they appear in the source—they do not always come in pairs in the portions quoted. The modern English translation in the columns throughout is by Marie Borroff in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Patience, and Pearl: Verse Translations* (New York: Norton, 2001).

<p>‘These bot on oure hem con streny; Uus thynk uus oghe to take more.</p> <hr style="width: 20%; margin: 10px auto;"/> <p>“More haf we served, uus thynk so, That suffred han the dayes hete, Thenn thyse that wrought not houres two, And thou dos hem uus to counterfete.’</p>	<p>‘These in an hour had done their deed; It seems to us we should have more.</p> <hr style="width: 20%; margin: 10px auto;"/> <p>“More have we served, who suffered through The heat of the day till evening came, Than these who stayed but an hour or two, Yet you allow them equal claim.’</p>
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The laborers complain that the varying duration or *date* of their labor should be compensated in a commensurate manner; those who worked longer “oghe [ought] to take more” (552). The word *more* implies a comparative scale of value in which more and less become the criteria of evaluation and reward.<sup>10</sup> The laborers argue that natural justice in a human economy requires a proportional system of recompense. In this scene, the concepts of time and value are linked not only verbally, but also visually. When the laborers are lined up in a row according to the length of time they worked, their spatial orientation visually realizes their expectation of comparative value, yet each laborer is paid “inlyche a peny [a penny alike]” (546).

The complaints of the laborers resonate with the Dreamer’s wonder at his daughter’s exalted state despite her early death. The Dreamer then becomes the voice of the terrestrial perspective in Pearl as he interprets the parable of the laborers in the vineyard. Like the unhappy laborers in the parable, the Dreamer’s perception of justice is also informed by a comparative scale of value; he articulates his concept of divine justice as a monetary transaction in lines 597–600.

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10. Jill Mann traces the medieval categories of value and the relationship between economic theories and theological frameworks in “Satisfaction and Payment in Middle English Literature,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 5 (1983): 17–48.

Now he that stod the long day stable,	Now he who all day kept his station,
And thou to payment com hym byfore,	If you to payment come in before,
Thenne the lasse in werke to take more able,	Then the less, the more remuneration,
And ever the lenger the lasse, the more. <sup>7</sup>	And ever alike, the less, the more. <sup>7</sup>

The poet contrasts the Dreamer's perspective with the celestial perspective of the Pearl Maiden. She spends the remainder of the poem teaching the Dreamer, and thus the audience, how to "escape the earthly habit of comparative measurement."<sup>11</sup> She does this by expanding the metaphoric model of spatial dimension, temporal duration, and economic scale that the poet crafted in the retelling of the parable from Matthew 20 and the concatenating words of *date* and *more*.

The Pearl Maiden repeatedly cautions the Dreamer concerning his terrestrial assumptions about celestial dynamics. She prefaced the parable of the laborers in the vineyard by explaining to the Dreamer that neither God's time nor his grace are limited or bounded by human expectations: "'Ther is no *date* of hys godnesse, / . . . 'For al is trawthe that he con dresse, / And he may do nothynk bot ryght [There is no limit of his goodness, for everything is truth that He is able to ordain, and He may do nothing except right]" (493-96, emphasis added). While retelling this parable, she expands the dialogue between the laborers and the lord of the vineyard, whom she explicitly names Christ. Christ asks the laborers to reconsider *more* in terms of God's covenant with and mercy for humanity.

Thenne sayde the lorde to on of tho:	Then said the lord to one of that crew,
'Frende, no waning I wyl the yete;	'Friend, I will not change the game;
Take that is thyn owne, and go.	Take your wage and away with you!
And I hyred the for a peny agrete,	I offered a penny, to all the same;

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11. Marie Borroff, "Introduction," in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Patience, and Pearl*, 116.

Quy bygynnes thou now to threte?	Why begin to bicker and blame?
Was not a pené thy covenaut thore?	Was not our covenant set of yore?
Fyrre then covenaunde is noght to plete.	Higher than covenant none should aim;
Wy schalte thou thenne ask more?	Why should you then ask for more?
—————	
“More, wether loulyly is me my gyfte,	“More, am I not at liberty
To do wyth myn quat-so me lyketh?	To give my own as I wish to do?
Other elles thyn yye to lyther is lyfte	Or have you lifted an evil eye,
For I am goude and non byswykes?’	As I am good, to none untrue?’
‘Thus schal I,’ quoth Kryste, ‘hit skyfte:	‘Thus,’ says Christ, ‘shall I shift it awry:
The laste schal be the fyrst that strykes,	The last shall be first in the queue,
And the fyrst the laste, be he never so swyft;	And the first the last, were he never so spry,
For mony ben called, thagh fewe be mykes.”	For many are called, but friends are few.’
Thus pore men her part ay pykes, Thagh thay com late and lyttel wore;	So poor men take their portion too, Though late they came and puny they were,
And thagh her sweng wyth lyttel atslykes,	And though they make but little ado,
The merci of God is much the more. (557-76)	The mercy of God is much the more.

The Pearl Maiden narrates through the voice of Christ, the lord of the vineyard, that the comparative scales of value and competitive compensation advocated by the laborers are not appropriate means of measurement in the kingdom of heaven. The laborers and the Dreamer are asked to transform their linear and comparative expectations of celestial affairs. Christ explains that God’s abundant mercy “is much the more” by using a metaphor of a queue: “the last shall be the first who comes, and the first the last.” The metaphor readily suggests linear reorganization in which the people at the beginning and end of the line are switched; however, the metaphor also imagines the union of the beginning and end of the line into a

circle.<sup>12</sup> People standing in a circle are equally arranged with respect to each other; their position no longer indicates sequential priority or privilege. The *Pearl*-poet repeatedly converts linear images into circular images throughout the poem; transforming linearity to circularity symbolizes a shift from limited human perspective and experience to celestial understanding and being.

Next, the Pearl Maiden redefines *date* and *more* in terms of *inoghe* (or *inough*). The poet replaces the concatenation of *date* in the ninth section and *more* in the tenth section, terms that both evoke the comparative expectations of the laborers and the Dreamer, with the concatenation of *inoghe* in the eleventh section (lines 601-60). The Middle English word *inoghe* has a wider meaning than the modern English word *enough*. In Middle English, *inoghe* meant not only adequate or sufficient but also perfect and complete satisfaction.<sup>13</sup> The Pearl Maiden explains that God's justice and his mercy are "enough" because they are absolute and beyond the measurement of comparative value.

‘Of more and lasse in Godes ryche,’	“Of more and less,” she answered straight,
That gentyl sayde, ‘lys no joparde,	“In the Kingdom of God, no risk obtains,
For ther is uch mon payed inlyche,	For each is paid the selfsame rate
Whether lyttel other much be hys rewarde.	No matter how little or great his gains.
. . .	. . .
For the grace of God is gret inoghe. (601-4, 612)	The grace of God is enough for all.

12. In “*Pearl*’s ‘Maynful Mone’: Crux, Simile, and Structure,” in *Acts of Interpretation: The Text in Its Contexts, 700-1600*, ed. Mary J. Carruthers and Elizabeth D. Kirk (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 1982), 163-64, Marie Borroff offers this insight: “The sequence [of the laborers in a row] is thus a spatial analogue to the temporal sequence made up of the successive hours of the day; each has a beginning and an end. The lord’s decree on the order of the payment reverses the expected order of both time and space. . . . All the saved participate equally in this reward, and its value is infinite, literally ‘beyond compare,’ unlike earthly rewards, which are measured in terms of quasi-linear scale of values or degrees ranging from high to low.”

13. *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. “inough,” n. and adv. (accessed 12 March 2010). See also *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “enough,” <http://dictionary.oed.com> (accessed 12 March 2010).

The refrain “for the grace of God is gret inoghe” is repeated with slight variation four more times. The word *sufficient* could replace *enough* in the refrain: “the grace of God is sufficient for all” because *inoghe* indicates the midpoint between “too much” and “too little” or between “more” and “less” and represents satisfaction.<sup>14</sup> Need is eradicated by enough and is satisfied; more turns satisfaction into excess.<sup>15</sup> In *Pearl*, the connotations of *inoghe* signify “endlessly sufficient abundance,” as do the metaphorical models of flowing water and an immaculate pearl, two metaphors that the Pearl Maiden develops next.<sup>16</sup>

Patterns of thematically significant words are not the only means by which the poet constructs metaphorical models that compare human and celestial dimensions of measurement. The Pearl Maiden expands the metaphorical model with two additional domains to illuminate how celestial satisfaction is achieved through the two interrelated processes of cleansing sanctification and righteous justification. First, the Pearl Maiden metaphorically explores the concept of divine graciousness through sanctification when she shifts the Dreamer’s focus from the merit accumulated by the laborers in the vineyard during fixed durations of time to an endless flowing spring that unites the sacramental elements of water and blood shed during Christ’s saving sacrifice. Second, the Pearl Maiden metaphorically depicts the divine graciousness of justification when she encourages the Dreamer to imagine the payment of the two-dimensional penny, the human monetary marker of comparative value and merit, from the parable of the laborers in the vineyard in terms of the gracious gift of a three-dimensional pearl, whose spherical form indicates celestial satisfaction in the parable of the pearl of great price.

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14. Jill Mann outlines medieval constructions of value based on proportionate exchange in “Price and Value in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,” in *Chaucer to Spenser: A Critical Reader*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 187–205.

15. Mann, “Satisfaction and Payment,” 30. Mann concludes, “In the heavenly kingdom renunciation is paradoxically rewarded with satisfaction. In its fullness the desire for ‘more’ falls away, not because one prudently settles for ‘less’ but because that endless desire is endlessly satisfied, and it is the completeness of that satisfaction that constitutes ‘enough.’”

16. Mann, “Satisfaction and Payment,” 29.



Drawing on multiple biblical images and words, *Pearl* explores the process of sanctification. Sanctification is a purifying process whereby humans are allowed to come into contact with God, specifically in ritual worship in a sacred space. The Middle English term *sanctificacioun* derives from the Latin *sanctificatio*, which expresses the multivalent New Testament term *hagiasmos*, a Greek word with roots in the term *hagios* “holy” and its cognate *hagnos* “purity.”<sup>17</sup> The concept of holiness was intimately and anciently connected to divine worship. Drawing on related Levitical concepts for holiness, worship, and purity in the Old Testament, holiness in the New Testament specifically expresses the idea of sanctification when persons are “drawn into the holy sphere, and for that reason consecrated, are made holy. This happens through baptism . . . [and] through the blood of Christ.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, sanctification is a communal practice that involves the pure becoming holy by withdrawing from the profane.<sup>19</sup> The Pearl Maiden instructs the Dreamer how he can become holy by being cleansed in the waters of baptism and by the atoning blood of the Lamb.

After telling the parable of the laborers of the vineyard, the Pearl Maiden uses images of water pouring out in abundance to express the copious satisfaction of God’s grace to explain why all of the laborers were equally paid the same wage. The properties of flowing water metaphorically reveal the consolatory and restorative power of divine mercy:

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17. Hans Küng, “Justification and Sanctification according to the New Testament,” in *Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection* (London: Burns & Oates, 1964), 295-96.

18. Küng, “Justification and Sanctification,” 296.

19. In “Justification and Sanctification,” 297, Küng, a prominent Catholic theologian, defines sanctification as “the action of God which sets life in opposition to sin and lays claim to it for himself: a separation from what is worldly and sinful and a special election for what is divine and sacred. So, according to the New Testament, holiness in the context of ritual worship consists in being snatched out of this world of sin, of darkness and of Satan, and consequently in being called to share in the heritage of the saints. At the same time, this concept of holiness receives a transcendental character and expresses the divine elevation of God above the world, which saints can share.”

For the gentyl Cheventayn is no chyche,	No niggard is our chief of state,
Quether-so-ever he dele nesch other harde;	Be it soft or harsh his will ordains;
He laves hys gyftes as water of dyche,	His gifts gush forth like a spring in spate
Other gotes of golf that never charde	Or a stream in a gully that runs in rains.
Hys fraunchyse is large that ever dard	His portion is large whose prayers and pains
To Hym that mas in synne rescoghe.	Please him who rescues when sinners call.
No blysse bes fro hem reparate,	No bliss in heaven but he attains:
For the grace of God is gret inoghe. (605-12)	The grace of God is enough for all.

Here the Pearl Maiden links the vineyard owner's payment of the equal wage to the laborers in the parable with God's gift of the kingdom of heaven, or in other words eternal life, to the faithful after their deaths.<sup>20</sup> God's grace is as boundless as a flowing spring or stream; God's grace satisfies all individually. Grace is not finite; every human has the opportunity to be equally satisfied—just as any container, regardless of variations in size, can be filled with water until it is full.<sup>21</sup> The imagery of flowing water culminates in the description of the river of life that flows through New Jerusalem at the end of the poem. In lines 1057-59, this river, shining brighter than the sun and moon, is the "living water" that Christ announces to the woman at Jacob's well; it is "a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). Like water, God's abundant mercy cannot be quantified or meted out in discrete proportions.

In addition to its overflowing abundance, water is also pure, and the poet links the cleansing power of the water's purity with the blood that flowed from Christ's dying body.

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20. See also *Pearl*, lines 625-36.

21. Mann, "Satisfaction and Payment," 25-26.

Ryche blod ran on rode so roge, And wynne water then at that plyt;  The grace of God wex gret innoghe.	Rich blood ran down rood-tree tall And with it flowed forth water bright:  The grace of God was enough for all.
—————	—————
‘Innoghe ther wax out of that welle,  Blod and water of brode wounde. The blod uus boght fro bale of helle,  And delyvered uus of the deth secounde.  The water is baptem, the sothe to telle,  That folwed the glayve so grymly grounde,  That wasches away the gyltes felle That Adam wyth inne deth uus drounde.  Now is ther noght in the worlde rounde  Bytwene uus and blysse bot that he wythdrow,  And that is restored in sely stounde;  And the grace of God is gret innogh. (646-60)	“Enough for all flowed from that well,  Blood and water plain to behold: By the blood our souls were saved from hell  And the second death decreed of old.  The water is baptism, truth to tell,  That followed the spearhead keen and cold,  Old Adam’s deadly guilt to dispel That swamped us in sins a thousandfold.  Now all is withdrawn that ever could hold  Mankind from bliss, since Adam’s fall,  And that was redeemed at a time foretold  And the grace of God is enough for all.

The iconographical association between water and blood stems from John 19:34, where water and blood gush from Christ’s pierced side as he dies on the cross. Christ’s wound metaphorically becomes a “well” from which the cleansing liquid of two saving rites flows: baptism and the sacrament.

The poet returns to imagery of flowing blood at the end of the poem when the Dreamer sees the Lamb presiding over New Jerusalem; the Lamb’s white fleece is marred by blood perpetually flowing from a wound in his side.

So worthly whyt wern wedes hys, His lokes symple, hymself so gent.	His dress so white, so mild his mood, His looks so gracious, himself the same;
Bot a wounde ful wyde and weete con wyse	But a wound there was, and wide it stood,
Anende hys hert, thurgh hyde torente;	Thrust near his heart with deadly aim.
Of his quyte syde his blod outsprent.	Down his white side the red blood came;
Alas, thocht I, who did that spyt?	“O God,” thought I, “who had such spite?”
Ani breste for bale aght haf forbrent	A breast should consume with sorrow and shame
Er he therto hade had delyt.	Ere in such deeds it took delight.”
—————	
The Lombe delyt non lyste to wene; Thagh he were hurt and wounde hade,	The Lamb’s delight was clearly seen, Though a bitter wound he had to bear;
In his sembelaunt was never sene, So wern his glentes glorious glade. (1133-44)	So glorious was his gaze serene, It gladdened all who beheld him there.

The wounded lamb seems anomalous amidst the perfection of New Jerusalem and the spotless host of sanctified maidens who each bear a shining pearl. The Dreamer expects the lamb, as a symbol for Christ, to embody the same spotless, monochrome perfection as the pearls, but the lamb, wounded and covered in flowing blood as seen through the eyes of the Dreamer, is the most flawed creature in his vision. The complex duality of the juxtaposed symbols makes “the claims for imperfection against perfection.”<sup>22</sup> Hugh White argues that the Lamb “represents an inclusive generosity that is prepared to forgive, indeed to embrace the imperfections of those who are to be forgiven in such a way as to constitute with the help of those imperfections a new perfection, which must be a higher perfection since the Lamb is the summit of the universe.”<sup>23</sup> White’s explora-

22. Hugh White, “Blood in Pearl,” *Review of English Studies*, n.s., 38/149 (1987): 6.

23. White, “Blood in Pearl,” 6.

tion of the intriguing paradox of symbolic values embodied by the pearl and lamb suggests that grace plays a large role in the soteriological model communicated in *Pearl*. White's conclusion that "*Pearl* subtly celebrates imperfection and the human experiences of sin and suffering" revises the exclusive human binary of absolute exalted perfection versus fallen sinfulness in which the only relation between the two is opposition.<sup>24</sup> *Pearl* suggests otherwise; the poem narrates a relationship between the Dreamer and God via the Pearl Maiden. God's act of gracious forgiveness of human sin not only sanctifies humanity but also justifies humanity. Justification is a process that confers a state of grace on an individual freed from the bondage of sin.

The theological concept of justification has been the subject of much debate in Judeo-Christian traditions and was a topic of concern among Scholastic theologians contemporary with *Pearl*.<sup>25</sup> The Latin term *justificatio* and the Middle English loanword *justificacioun* have legal connotations that derive from biblical terminology, terminology that associates God's judgment as being like a legal trial in which God, as the judge, graciously absolves or forgives human sin and grants righteousness.<sup>26</sup> Since justification is the process by which humans are made righteous before God, righteousness is a condition of salvation as well as a fruit of salvation. Humans cannot possess righteousness in themselves; they possess it only in relation to God, who transforms their very being.<sup>27</sup> The *Pearl*-poet employs verbal repetition and metaphoric models rather than logical propositions to envision how God justifies the righteous.

The twelfth section (lines 661-720) employs the concatenating word *ryght*, a Middle English word that evokes the biblical conceptions of justice, righteousness, and justification. In this section, the

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24. White, "Blood in *Pearl*," 12; and Jena Theresa Trammell, "*Pearl* and Contemporary Theological Controversy," *Medieval Perspectives* 17/1 (2003): 171-77.

25. Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 186-207.

26. Küng, "Justification and Sanctification," 292-94; see also McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 6-21.

27. Küng, "Justification and Sanctification," 294.

Pearl Maiden explains to the Dreamer that a *ryghtwys man* must suffer guilt and punishment and be saved by God's grace so that his heart can become innocent and clean again; for only "the ryghtwys man schal se hys face [the righteous man shall see his face]" (675). She continues in the thirteenth section by explaining that a *ryghtwys man* must be as "ryght as a chylde [as righteous as a child]" (723), who is "harmles, trwe, and undefylde, / wythouten mote other mascle of sulpande synne [harmless, true, and undefiled, without mote or stain of polluting sin]" (725-26). An innocent child and the soul of a person made righteous are as pure as a "perle maskelles [a pearl without spot]" (744). The term *maskelles*, meaning "without spot, mark, stain, fault, or blemish," is the concatenating word in the thirteenth section (lines 721-80), where the Pearl Maiden introduces the second biblical parable, the parable of the pearl without price.<sup>28</sup>

As in Matthew 13:45-46, the jeweler sells all of his wealth to purchase the precious pearl that represents the eternal life of those saved by God.

<p>'This makelles perle, that boght is dere, The joueler gef fore alle hys god, Is lyke the reme of hevenesse clere; So sayde the Fader of folde and flode. For hit is wemles, clene, and clere, And endeles rounde, and blythe of mode, And commune to alle that ryghtwys were. Lo, even inmyddes my breste hit stode. My Lorde the Lombe, that schede hys blode, He pyght hit there in token of pes.</p>	<p>"This immaculate pearl I tell you of,  The jeweler gave his wealth to gain, Is like the realm of heaven above; The Father of all things said it plain. No spot it bears, nor blemish rough, But blithe in rondure ever to reign,  And of righteousness it is prize and proof: Lo, here on my breast it long has lain, Bestowed by the Lamb so cruelly slain, His peace to betoken and designate;</p>
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28. *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. "mascelles" (accessed 4 December 2010). See *Pearl*, lines 721-80.

I rede the forsake the worlde wode  
 And porchase thy perle maskelles.<sup>7</sup>  
 (733-44)

I bid you turn from the world insane  
 And purchase your pearl  
 immaculate.”

The pearl’s shape, color, and price analogically convey the sublime state of living in the celestial kingdom. The pearl is without spot like the souls of the innocent and pure; it is perfectly round and thus “endless” like eternity; it is precious beyond comparative value; and it is “blithe” as it represents the bliss of the redeemed. The three-dimensional pearl becomes a salient symbol of fullness, perfection, and satisfaction in the poem. The circularity and roundness of the pearl emphasize the endlessness of eternity—that is, “freedom from measurements of time, as the circumference of a circle is free from interruptions, that is, from beginnings and ends.”<sup>29</sup> For medieval Christians, “eternity is not perpetual duration, ‘longer than’ time; it is the absence of time. So too with the worth of the heavenly pearl. It is not ‘greater than’ the worth of anything on earth; it is absolute, literally ‘beyond measure.’”<sup>30</sup> The pricelessness of the immaculate pearl contrasts the finite value of the penny wage or any other form of monetary compensation.

To help the Dreamer understand the divine gift of eternal life, the Pearl Maiden transforms the two-dimensional circular penny in the parable of the laborers in the vineyard into the three-dimensional spherical pearl in the parable of the pearl of great price. The spherical nature of the pearl is an “abstraction from the linear or dimensional, two-ended mode[s] of earthly space, time, and value” described in the parable of the vineyard.<sup>31</sup> The penny and the pearl are alike in the roundness that symbolizes the eternity of the heavenly kingdom, and they are alike in their role as valuable objects, as indices of worth.<sup>32</sup> However, the penny coin in the

29. Borroff, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Patience, and Pearl*, 113.

30. Borroff, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Patience, and Pearl*, 116.

31. Borroff, “*Pearl’s* ‘Maynful Mone,’” 164.

32. The circular pearl and penny are also linked to the circular garland of flowers on the daughter’s grave (25-60) and the crown that Pearl Maiden wears as a bride of heaven (205-10, 413-16, 445-80).

parable could be cut in half because the earthly idea of value involves splitting money and sharing it in quantifiable portions; however, a pearl loses its entire value if it is marred or split in any way. The replacement of the metaphoric model of the penny with the pearl enables the Dreamer to understand that the kingdom of heaven is not a divisible good—it can be given “in its entirety or not at all.”<sup>33</sup>

The Pearl Maiden uses the metaphoric model of the pearl to address the crux of the parable of the vineyard. The payment to those who labored in God’s kingdom is not a meager coin but a pearl of great price, and this pearl can only be “payed inlyche” (603). In Middle English, *pay* could mean “payment” in a monetary sense, but it also could mean “satisfaction.” Jill Mann concludes that if everyone is “payed inlyche” in the kingdom of heaven, then

all are equally “paid” because all are equally “satisfied”—that is, everyone has *enough*. The earthly notion of “payment” is transformed into the heavenly notion of “satisfaction,” with the emphasis on the element “satis-,” that is, on the idea of “enough.” The idea of “more” then becomes an absurdity; once one is satisfied, there is no need for more—indeed, there is no room for its absorption.<sup>34</sup>

The heavenly notion of satisfaction replaces the earthly notion of payment. The transformation of the two-dimensional disk of the penny into the three-dimensional sphere of the pearl illustrates the concept of eternal satisfaction to the Dreamer, whose limited temporal expectations are shaped by competitive compensation. Terrestrial economics are governed by division and comparable scales of worth; celestial economics, in contrast, are based on satisfaction and fullness. In heaven, value exceeds human imagining; *more* is not comparative—it is beyond articulation.<sup>35</sup> Since human language cannot precisely express what lies beyond human expectations,

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33. Mann, “Satisfaction and Payment,” 26-27.

34. Mann, “Satisfaction and Payment,” 25.

35. Borroff, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Patience, and Pearl*, 115-17; Mann, “Satisfaction and Payment,” 30.



metaphoric models can gesture toward heavenly concepts of fullness, grace, and satisfaction.

The poem culminates when the Pearl Maiden grants her father, the Dreamer, a vision of her home, the Heavenly Jerusalem. The poet uses images from the book of Revelation to describe the holy city where the Pearl Maiden and her fellow sanctified and justified companions dwell with the Lamb of God. Symbols of perfection multiply exponentially to depict the indescribable state of salvation and echo or enlarge metaphors previously introduced in the poem. For example, the number twelve, a numerological symbol of perfection, develops significant eschatological implications. The poem has 1,212 lines. During the retelling of the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, the “payment,” or last judgment, takes place at the twelfth hour. *Pearl* concludes with a description of the twelve gates and twelve precious stones that comprise New Jerusalem (see Revelation 21:10-27). In this divine realm of absolutes, there cannot be more or less with respect to perfection.

The numerological symbolism is enhanced by the Dreamer’s description in one of the final scenes of the poem of the procession of the pearl maidens led by the Lamb of God through bejeweled streets flowing with living water and illuminated by Christ’s own light. This procession echoes the line of laborers in the vineyard awaiting their payment. The spatial transformation of a line into a circle encourages the conceptual transformation of comparative duality to abundant graciousness. The linear extension of the laborers is analogous to the temporal economics of monetary compensation and its inherent hierarchy of poor and rich. This impoverished state contrasts that of the procession of the brides circling through the streets of New Jerusalem spatially depicting the endlessness of eternal life.

I was war of a prosessyoun.  
This noble cité of ryche enpryse  
Was sodanly ful wythouten  
sommoun

I saw a procession wend its way.  
Without a summons, without a sign,  
The city was full in vast array

<p>Of such vergynes in the same gyse That was my blysfyl anunder croun.  And coronde wern alle of the same fasoun, Depaynt in perles and wedes qwYTE;  In uchones breste was bounden boun The blysfyl perle wyth gret delyt.</p> <hr style="width: 20%; margin: 10px auto;"/> <p>Wyth gret delyt thay glod in fere On golden gates that glent as glasse.  Hundreth thowsandes I wot ther were, And alle in sute her livrés wasse; Tor to know the gladdest chere.  The Lombe byfore con proudly passe, Wyth hornes seven of red golde cler; As prayسد perles his wedes wasse. Towarde the throne thay trone a tras. (1096-113)</p>	<p>Of maidens in such raiment fine As my blissful one had worn that day.  As she was crowned, so crowned were they; Adorned with pearls, in garments white; And in like fashion, gleaming gay, They bore the pearl of great delight.</p> <hr style="width: 20%; margin: 10px auto;"/> <p>With great delight, serene and slow, They moved through every golden street; Thousands on thousands, row on row, All in one raiment shining sweet. Who gladdest looked, was hard to know; The Lamb led on at station meet, Seven horns of gold upon his brow, His robe like pearls with rays replete. Soon they approached God's mighty seat.</p>
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Unlike the laborers lined up after their service in the vineyard, all the pearl maidens in the procession are satisfied completely and uniquely; there is no hierarchy of rank in heaven.<sup>36</sup> Here the communal aspect of justification is depicted. Justification as righteousness is a relationship and thus involves covenantal nomism—that is, “the law understood as governing life within the covenant people, obedience to the law understood as the proper expression of covenant membership.”<sup>37</sup> *Pearl* depicts how righteousness, or the receipt of

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36. See also *Pearl*, lines 445-67 and lines 601-12.

37. J. D. G. Dunn, “The Justice of God: A Renewed Perspective on Justification by Faith,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s., 43 (1992): 18. See also Küng, “Justification and Sanctification,” 297-98.

the pearl of great price, obligates the covenant members towards God and towards each other.

The metaphoric logic of the narrative exegesis of two biblical parables in the medieval poem *Pearl* reminds its reader that divine justice transcends human institutions and expectations. God does not use money to measure value; there is no scarcity of his resources. God measures value on the intimately personal level: the cleanliness, desires, and intents of human hearts. The merit of an individual is not compared or ranked according to the achievement or failure of others, but only in relation to the person's own potential. Celestial measurements of value transcend the "comparative deserts" of terrestrial existence. *Pearl* teaches that every individual receives the gift of salvation perfectly appropriate to satisfy his or her state of need and desire; it is a loving gift that is calibrated according to the individual's ability to be transformed.

### **Constructing Metaphoric Models of Salvation**

*Pearl* articulates a deeply moving and consoling testament of the divine graciousness of justification and sanctification through its metaphoric models of salvation. The poem exemplifies how constructing and expanding metaphoric models generate new insights about salvation, insights that suggest alternatives to the traditional economic models of salvation. While there has been a long tradition in the history of Judaism and Christianity of using economic metaphors to conceptualize sin, atonement, and salvation, human economic assumptions can limit a person's ability to conceptualize divine graciousness.<sup>38</sup> The poet's critique may be a reaction against the legalistic language of Scholastic theologians, specifically William of Ockham, Thomas Bradwardine, and John Wycliffe, who attempted to parse out specific mechanisms of divine grace

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38. For a history of metaphors used for atonement in the Judeo-Christian tradition, see Peter Schmiechen, *Saving Power: Theories of Atonement and Forms of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005).

and human merit in salvation in the fourteenth century.<sup>39</sup> These Oxford scholars were among many theologians who interpreted divine mechanisms within the framework of human justice and value. Economic metaphors were (and are) useful soteriological models because they represent value in familiar terms—monetary transactions. Over time, these economic metaphors became deeply entrenched into Judeo-Christian consciousness, theological language, and ritual practices.<sup>40</sup> For example, during the era of Persian rule (538–333 BC), there was a shift from conceptualizing sin as a burden, which could be lifted by transferring the weight to a scapegoat, to construing sin as a debt, which must be repaid through bondage of slavery to a creditor. In the Second Temple period, the metaphor of sin as a debt was extended into the metaphor of redemption as balancing the debt of sin or generating credit with virtues of almsgiving and good works. Human agency could be exercised to counteract the consequences of sin in this model, and soteriological doctrines of merit developed. Christians subsequently inherited and expanded these economic models of atonement, including such theories as retributive atonement and penal substitution.<sup>41</sup>

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39. Trammell, “*Pearl* and Contemporary Theological Controversy.” See also David Aers, *Salvation and Sin: Augustine, Langland, and Fourteenth-Century Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009); McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 138–50; and Ian C. Levy, “Grace and Freedom in the Soteriology of John Wyclif,” *Traditio* 60 (2005): 279–337.

40. For a history of metaphors used for sin in the Judeo-Christian tradition, see Gary A. Anderson, *Sin, A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

41. Schmiechen, *Saving Power*, 38–45, 103–19. Two economic models of salvation that have been popular in the Latter-day Saint community in the early twenty-first century are Boyd K. Packard’s parable of the debtor and Stephen Robinson’s parable of the bicycle. Boyd K. Packard, “The Mediator,” *Ensign*, May 1977, 54–55, reprinted in *Gospel Principles* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2009), 63–65; Stephen Robinson, *Believing Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 30–34. In these models, salvation is turned into an object of great value and high price. The amount of money that salvation is worth signifies that it is a desired and scarce commodity that mankind cannot afford. A generous benefactor who represents Christ loans or gives mankind enough money to purchase salvation or satisfy the debt of sin to escape punishment. Human expectations about economic transactions reify salva-

Despite the widespread use of economic metaphors of salvation, the soteriological implications of the economic institutions can be problematic. Human economies define relationships by lack or need and are mediated agonistically and contractually; the logic is governed by scarcity of resources with subsequent debt and commutative justice.<sup>42</sup> Like the *Pearl*-poet, Daniel M. Bell Jr.—a Christian ethicist, professor of theology, and Lutheran minister—argues that using ossified economic metaphors for salvation may potentially hinder spiritual enlightenment. Bell imagines

a forgiveness that is aneconomic precisely in its exceeding the horizon of economy—surpassing every debt, defying every contract, exploding every calculus of equivalence, desert, and retribution foisted upon us by the poverty of economy—and renewing life in its true modality of gift, donation, and unending generosity, whereby human relations become peaceable as they participate in the proliferation of noncontractual, which is to say, covenantal bonds of love.<sup>43</sup>

*Pearl* and Bell demonstrate that metaphoric models produce insight most effectively when humans continuously engage in the cyclical process of modeling metaphors with generative and pedagogical functions and resist the temptation to halt the process. This is the invitation of the parable of the laborers.

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tion in these models. Yet salvation is not an object—it is a state of being or maybe even a particular type of relationship with God—and it cannot be purchased.

42. Daniel M. Bell Jr., “Forgiveness and the End of Economy,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 20/3 (2007): 325–44, especially pages 326–28. See also R. Dennis Potter, “Did Christ Pay for Our Sins?” *Dialogue* 32/4 (1999): 73–86.

43. Bell, “Forgiveness,” 337. On page 333, Bell explains: “Rightly understood, the atonement is not a matter of economic reckoning, but ontological union [with God]. As such, it displays the plenitude of divine charity, of God’s forgiveness, of God’s giving and giving again. (The root of the meaning of forgiveness is ‘to give excessively’) God has always given to humanity in the form of love, and when humanity rejected that gift, God forgave, gave again in the form of love incarnate, which is the Son (thus, the difference between an economic, contractual relation, which has a clear beginning and end, and God’s eternal covenantal commitment).”

The tension in this parable reveals that divine action is not limited by human expectations of how economic relationships should work and function. The end of the parable ultimately explodes the teleology of the metaphorical model when the payment to the laborers defies human expectations of merit-based compensation. The parable invites us to search beyond the ossified metaphorical models of human economy to generate new metaphors to understand soteriological relations—that is, relations involved in the process of salvation. Seekers of spiritual truth need soteriological metaphors, or models about God’s saving action, yet they must balance the insights gained with the self-awareness that their embodied or social experiences employed in metaphorical source domains may circumscribe their spiritual perception.

*Miranda Wilcox is assistant professor in the Department of English at Brigham Young University.*