

THE FOUR DAUGHTERS OF GOD IN THE CASTELL OF PERSEVERANCE

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Springing from an extended interpretation of Psalm 84:11: *Misericordia et Veritas obviaverunt sibi; Iustitia et Pax osculatae sunt*, the allegory of the dispute and reconciliation of the Four Daughters of God enjoyed extraordinary popularity throughout the Middle Ages.¹ The story in its most unadorned state concerns a powerful king who had four daughters, a son, and a servant, who proves to be evil. Because of a misdemeanor, the servant is thrown into prison, whereupon the daughters gather to debate the prisoner's worth and his fate, whether he will be pardoned or condemned. In order to end the debate, reconcile the sisters, and respect the father's merciful nature, the son offers to accept the servant's crime and suffer his punishment. Through his gratuitous sacrifice, the son redeems the evil servant, unites the dissenting sisters, and joins the servant with the merciful king.

The allegory is Jewish rather than Christian in origin, making its first appearance not later than the tenth century in the *Midrash*.² The Christian adaptation of the allegory of the Four Daughters of God appears first in a commentary of Hugh of St. Victor in the early twelfth century. His version was responsible for spreading the allegory more widely, and he transferred the occasion of the dispute from the creation to the redemption of man.³ Later in the same century, the allegory was further elaborated in a sermon on the Annunciation by St. Bernard of Clairvaux.⁴ His interpretation of the debate furnished the basis for almost all of its subsequent development,⁵ his most important addition being the association of the sisters' reconciliation with the Incarnation and Atonement.⁶ Versions of the allegory which appeared in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, notably those in Robert Grosseteste's *Chasteau d'Amour*,⁷ in the *Cursor Mundi*,⁸ and in the English *Gesta Romanorum*,⁹ developed it as a medieval romance.

The various treatments of the tradition of the Four Daughters of God differ, incidentally or drastically, in every work in which the debate appears. However, despite the variations in development and presentation, the essential ideas and actions remain constant, and the germ of the debate, traditional. Its prev-

alence in both art and literature afforded to every man the opportunity to know the event, discern the moral imparted, and apply the situation to his own perpetual struggle between good and evil. The debate presents a didactic action which resolves man's struggle with good and evil; it clearly contrasts the symmetrical tension between love and pity, and justice and damnation; it advocates the moral that man must contain and nurture the heavenly virtues if he is to be united with God and granted salvation.

Obviously, the playwright of *The Castell of Perseverance* was familiar with the tradition of the debate of the Four Daughters of God, for he upheld the tradition rather scrupulously. In another sense, however, the playwright was innovative, for he extended his presentation of the dispute and reconciliation of the heavenly sisters. Very clearly a reason for the extensions and innovations was to emphasize the moral. The morality play was to stress to the audience the pitiful state of a man who is separated from God, to prompt every viewer to examine his conscience and consider his possible fate, and to urge each man to amend his life before death. The extended speeches by the daughters function in a catechistic sense, recalling for every man his scriptural knowledge and Catholic training concerning his place in the eschaton. The effect is a hornbook, where a lesson is conveyed by repeating key ideas, at times in different ways and for different purposes, but relating and pointing ultimately to a dominant moral and final purpose.

The unity which must exist between the sisters is the main idea presented in the tradition of the Four Daughters of God. The sisters represent the four virtues found in the godhead, Mercy, Peace, Truth, and Justice, and they must be unified if the tension between love and justice is to be alleviated and salvation is to come to man. Each daughter asserts the need for her plea to be granted, and in various pleas, the daughters argue logically, according to "resun and skil," and emotionally, with regard to their ages, virtues, and importance to God and His realm. Their arguments are supported by biblical notions, the laws of the Old and New Testaments, important events in the life of Christ, and the teachings of the Church.

The extensions are also used to fortify the structures of the morality play. They compensate and substitute for the scenes which normally appear in the tradition, but are omitted in *The Castell of Perseverance*. The appearance of the daughters normally functions as a prologue and epilogue to other actions which interrupt the allegory. The actions include man's death, his damnation for his offenses, his being taken to Hell, and, later, his redemption and release upon payment of a ransom, ordinarily Christ's Atonement. In *The Castell of Perseverance*, the allegory of the Four Daughters of God appears in the final scene, after the death and damnation of man, and after the Atonement. It is

presented as a single unit, uninterrupted by any action not pertaining directly to the debate, and in this scene, the sisters present the material normally included in other versions of the debate, but omitted in this morality play. The roles of the daughters are extended, and the information presented is given a different slant, because the events concerning man's death, damnation, and redemption are not presented to the audience directly, but, rather, they are presented objectively and in retrospect through the speeches of the four heavenly virtues.

In most versions of the tradition of the Four Daughters of God, their respective defenses concerning man's salvation are played only once, before the omnipotent judge; however, in *The Castell of Perseverance*, the daughters meet and argue man's fate among themselves before proceeding to God's throne for the formal and final judgment. The dramatic double exposure to the sisters' arguments creates suspense and anticipation, heightens the intensity inherent in the debate, and further emphasizes the lesson to be imparted to the audience. The primary declaration familiarizes the audience with the sisters' arguments; the second explains more fully what man should do to rectify his perilous situation. Then, the judgment of God, which follows the debate, provides an appropriate catharsis in which peace and accord are established between the daughters and God, and between the daughters and man.

Finally, the playwright most certainly extended his presentation of the tradition purely for entertainment. Masterfully, he created and conveyed the pathos and direness of man's possible damnation, while providing the audience the opportunity to laugh uneasily at various moments of grim, dismal humor as the daughters, while pleading before God, play with man's fate and scream hysterically at one another. Tradition and innovation, dark humor and pathos do come together for the playwright as he drives home the primary aim of the play and the solution to the sisters' and man's discord.

The debate of the four sisters, and their initial meeting in *The Castell of Perseverance*, begins after the death of Humanum Genus and after Bonus Angelus has conceded the loss of man's avaricious soul to Malus Angelus. As the soul is carried to Hell, it cries out for mercy. Having heard the cry, Mercy appeals to Justice to show compassion to man. Her argument is that the soul must have mercy by the same token which earlier joined the sisters—Christ's death. Through His death and sacrifice, Christ granted mercy and absolution to man by forgiving His tormentors; therefore, if any man cries for mercy, he must receive it. Justice answers that Christ's mercy pardons all man's misdeeds, but it must be gained through charity and humility. No man, she says, can live in sin throughout his life and at death beg for mercy by virtue of the cross. Because this soul followed sin and misdeed in his life, he deserves nothing

but the torment of Hell. There is no justice in unquestioned, freely given mercy; by reason and right, man should suffer Christ's vengeance.

Truth confirms the pronouncement of Justice: "Late hym his owyn dedis rewe!"¹⁰ Always present at man's death to weigh his good and evil deeds, she allows nothing to hurt any soul but its own foul sins. Because Humanum Genus died in covetous sin, his soul doomed itself to the pit of Hell. Unless man is judged by justice and truth, he will have no moral restraints, and judgment will be worthless. At this point, Peace protests the doom advocated by Truth and Justice. The basis of her argument is like that of Mercy: man should be pardoned because of and for the sake of Christ's sacrifice. She echoes an earlier statement made by Justice and Truth that the sisterly discord will become an irrevocable split if man is doomed to Hell. Peace concludes her speech and the preliminary debate of the sisters by offering the only feasible solution to the dispute: the four daughters must present their respective appeals before "þe hey Godhed" (l. 3218). God will then judge man and decide whether Truth and Justice, or Mercy and Peace will triumph.

At the end of the initial meeting of the Four Daughters of God, nothing in the argument has been resolved. The playwright, however, has utilized the short scene to introduce the traditional arguments and ideas which are further expanded in the following scene before God. He has established the dichotomy between love and pity, and justice and damnation, the discordant tone which becomes even more intense, and the theme of the play which has been stated or echoed by each of the daughters. The viewer has also been prepared for the second round of debates both by the material presented and by the feeling of suspense and anticipation.

Truth begins the debate proper by arguing the importance of truth in God's realm: it is the basis of all faith, hope, and power. If man is not judged according to truth, God's power will be questioned and will diminish. To fortify her argument, the sister expounds upon man's offenses which clearly expose his unworthy state and should warrant his damnation. Logically, Truth states that Anima should not be saved for he desecrated God's commandments and never turned away from "fals covetise." Therefore, by virtue of her status as God's daughter and because of man's wickedness, the soul must be damned, regardless of its dying plea for mercy. If, however, the sinful soul is pardoned, Truth, as God's daughter and as a virtue, will be shamed and rendered powerless; therefore, man must be damned and punished for the situation he has created:

þou he cried mercy, *moriendo*
Nimis tarde penitendo

Talem mortem reprehendo.
 Lete hym drynke as he brewyth!
 (ll. 3271–3274)

The basis of her argument has become not a plea for truth, but a demand for retribution. In her statement, Truth presents the traditional “drink of death.” The drink is associated with the mixture of vinegar and gall which Christ was given at His death; and because it was given to the Lord when He died, the drink is a symbol of man’s damnation and salvation. It is associated with damnation because it was given by the Jews who, traditionally in league with Satan, caused the death of Christ. As a symbol of salvation, the drink represents Christ’s sacrifice, and, in His acceptance of the death, the fact that Hell and death were destroyed at the Crucifixion.

In using the drink in her argument, Truth maintains that mankind should suffer the pains of death befitting the sinful, godless life he led. She denounces the gratuitous bestowing of mercy; if every sinner was granted grace upon request, the quality of life which men lead would degenerate and the requirements for living a good life would be disregarded. Truth concludes by beseeching God to damn mankind for his sins, rather than forsake truth. As man has forsaken God, so he should be forsaken:

As he hathe browne and bake,
 Trewthe wyl bat he drynke.
 Late mankynde have dew dystresse
 In helle fere to be brent!
 (ll. 3299–3309)

Mercy follows and presents her argument, asking God that mercy not be lost in man’s judgment. This basis of her plea is the notion of *felix culpa*, the fortunate fall of man. She states that the heavenly virtue of mercy is most important because it was given freely to man through the Incarnation and Atonement. As God showed His power and love by descending from Heaven “Incarnat . . . in blod and bone” (l. 3333), so should the love of God forgive the contrite sinner and bring him out of Hell. The purpose of God’s coming to man was to provide salvation following the sin of Adam. Had Adam not suffered the fall and broken God’s commands, Christ would not have been conceived and born. He would not have suffered the Passion nor atoned for man’s sins. However, Christ thirsted after the souls of men and drank the drink of death, as was God’s will. In His death, the Son mercifully provided salvation and redemption:

Aqua baptismatis et sanguis redempcionis.

be wtyr of Baptoum,

be blod of redempcioun,

bat fro bin herte ran down,

Est causa salvacionis.

(ll. 3361–3365)

In addition to the notion of *felix culpa*, Mercy uses other instances of God's freely given mercy to strengthen her plea. The most important displays of Mercy are the Incarnation and the Atonement; through these acts of God and the example of Christ, man was to learn the virtues of humility, charity, and obedience. By humbling Himself and making the ultimate sacrifice to attain salvation for sinners, God incomparably granted His mercy. Like Truth, Mercy also refers to the drink of death in her speech; however, it is now used not to advocate retribution, but as an example of salvation and Christ's acceptance of death for man's sins. As another instance of mercy given to a sinful man, the sister briefly recounts the story of Longinus, the blind knight healed by the blood of Christ after piercing the Lord's side with his lance. The tradition of Longinus never appears directly associated with the tradition of the Four Daughters of God, but is here cited as an example of mercy, freely given, unsolicited, and undeserved.

Vehemently, Justice denounces the pleas of Mercy and states that a righteous lord should support a righteous judgment. Similar to the arguments propounded by Truth, Justice too advocates retribution, but her stance is based upon legality, man's being damned by right and reason. However, her legal implications involve not only man, but God as well, for

Iff þou mans kynde Fro peyne aquite,

þou dost ageyns þyne owyn processe.

(ll. 3384–3385)

Like Truth, she urges God to damn mankind in order to save His laws and punish mankind for his sin and wickedness, for he repeatedly denied God's laws and bound himself to the devil. Justice cites as man's first transgression the disobedience to and disregard of Church laws. Justice adamantly demands that the sinner be doomed to Hell for repudiating his creation and Creator, and for disavowing the Incarnation and Atonement. Finally, Justice condemns man for making such an insignificant effort to reconcile himself to God at the moment of his death:

Ouyr late he callyd confescion;

Ouer-lyte was his contricion;

He made neuere satisfaccion;

Dampne hym to helle be-lyve!

(ll. 3427–3430)

The emphasis upon right and reason is again presented by Justice as she recapitulates why mankind should be damned. She exclaims that the righteousness of God will be prostituted and the power of Truth and Justice will be destroyed unless Anima is deemed "aftyр his deserviture" (l. 3441). She concludes by swearing vengeance upon man: "*Laetabitur justus cum viderit vindictam*" (l. 3443).¹¹

At the cry of vengeance, the tension among the daughters and between love and justice culminates. Thus far, three sisters, Mercy, Truth, and Justice, have presented their cases for and against man with comparable ardor; the symmetry and dichotomy of thought are undeniable as the sisters clash: Mercy again stresses that man must be redeemed for she will not be denied by a God whose "mercy is without begynnynge and schal be withoutyn endynge" (ll. 3466–3467). Truth attacks Mercy's plea and denounces her defense by Scripture as being inappropriate because the sinful man denied the teachings of the Gospels. He showed no mercy to less fortunate men in his life; therefore, he is undeserving of mercy; by "resun and skil," man should suffer the torment he deserves.

The short, intense speeches of Mercy and Truth which immediately precede the plea of Peace are found in no other version of the allegory. In *The Castell of Perseverance*, the interruption in the tradition serves as a dramatic device used to intensify the already present discord by heightening the anticipation and bringing the play to an emotional peak before Peace presents her speech and the solution to the heated debate. Even before the intrusion by Mercy, the discord between the sisters was becoming graver and not likely to be settled peacefully. With the hysterical outbursts of Mercy, castigating Justice and lamenting the possible fate of mercy, the dispute reaches the state of irreconcilable discord. With no end to the discord, salvation and peace would be unattainable, and mankind would indeed be damned. Another function of the short, but intense, break is to make each member of the medieval audience examine his conscience, recognize his sins, and realize how perilous is the state of each man when faced with the possibility of damnation.

When Peace begins to plead for man before God, the tone of the play changes because she displays the desirable virtues of humility and charity. Her stance is quite different from Truth's demand for retribution and Justice's

mandate for legal propriety, for her primary interest is to attain mercy for mankind and establish peace among the daughters. To God, she states that man should be restored to grace since he was created at Lucifer's fall to restore the tenth order in heaven and to console God in His loss, and, most of all, because God loves man above all creatures. She then turns to her sisters and points out the futility of their pleadings. If they remain steadfast in their judgments, the discord will never end and nothing will be done for any man. Therefore, her counsel is that the sisters come together in accord: "*Misericordia et Veritas obviaverunt sibi; Iustitia et Pax osculatae sunt.*" She encourages her sisters to turn from vengeance and become man's friends, for the heavenly bliss which God desires will only be achieved if they unite themselves to God and man.

The speech of Peace is perhaps the most traditional speech in the allegory of The Four Daughters of God in *The Castell of Perseverance*. It provides the antithesis for the preceding speeches of Truth, Mercy, and Justice; it instills a peaceful, consoling tone, for her plea presents the most viable, acceptable solution, both to the daughters and to God. Her statements dispel the hostility and discord as she pleads for unity rather than demands retribution and damnation. A notable exception to traditional treatment of the allegory is found in the placement of Psalm 84:11. Normally, the verse is presented as the conclusion to her speech, and to the debate itself. In *The Castell of Perseverance*, the scripture is introduced early in Peace's plea. However, regardless of its position, the citation of the Psalm always appears as the basis of Peace's speech, and as the solution to the daughters' discord and the dilemma of mankind.

The final variation of the allegory occurs in the ensuing scene, which presents the descent of the daughters into Hell. Traditionally, the son of the king ends the strife and descends to Hell to atone for the prisoner. However, in *The Castell of Perseverance*, God and the Son have been presented as only one character, and the Son *per se* never appears in this version of the debate. With such a relevant omission, the figure of God in the play relegates to the daughters the task of descending to Hell, destroying the power of the devil, and bringing the redeemed sinner to the throne of God.

Tradition and innovation come together in *The Castell of Perseverance* as the four heavenly virtues argue about the fate of man. The symmetrical tension which pervades the play culminates in the hysterical outbursts of the sisters as they plead before God their claims for love and pity and damnation and justice. The playwright used the dispute and reconciliation of the Four Daughters of God to accent the intense dichotomy which exists among the sisters and separates man from God. He directed his efforts toward the audience as he

prompted each man to examine his conscience, recognize his sins, and realize the seriousness of his alienation from God and his possible damnation. All the elements in *The Castell of Perseverance*, traditional and innovative, reach a dramatic peak at the end of the morality as the debate of the Four Daughters of God affirms the condition that the sisters must be in agreement for the king's realm to continue and that man must be in accord with God, with himself, and with other men if salvation is to be attained.

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NOTES

1. Ralph A. Klinefelter, "The Four Daughters of God: A New Version," *JEGP* 52 (1953), 90.

2. Hope Traver, *The Four Daughters of God: A Study of the Versions of this Allegory with especial references to those in Latin, French, and English*, Bryn Mawr College Monographs, Monograph Series, 6 (Philadelphia: Bryn Mawr College Monographs, 1907), p. 7.

3. Hugh of St. Victor, *Opera Hugonis de. St. Victore, Miscellanea, Lib. II, Annotationes in quosdam Psalmos David, Cap. LXVIII*, in *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina, CLXXVII*, edited by Jacques Paul Migne (Paris: Editions Garnier Frères, 1958), 621-625. See also Traver, p. 7.

4. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, *In Festo Annunciationis Beatae Virginis, Psalm 84:10, 11*, in *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina, CLXXXIII*, edited by Jacques Paul Migne (Paris: Editions Garnier Frères, 1958), 383-390. See also Klinefelter, 90.

5. Traver, p. 7.

6. Sister Mary Immaculate, "The Four Daughters of God in the *Gesta Romanorum* and the *Court of Sapience*," *PLMA*, 57 (1942), 955.

7. Robert Grosseteste, *Chasteau D'Amour to which are added 'Le Vie de Sainte Marie Egyptienne' and an English Version of the Chasteau D'Amour*, edited by M. Cooke Publications of the Caxton Society, no. 15 (New York: Burt Franklin, 1967).

8. Richard Morris, ed., *Cursor Mundi*, Early English Text Society, no. 59 (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 548-549.

9. Sidney J. H. Herrtage, ed., *The Early English Versions of the Gesta Romanorum*, Early English Text Society, Extra Series, no. 33 (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 132–135. See also W. W. Skeat's, *The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman in Three Parallel Texts together with Richard the Redeless by William Langland*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1886); the allegory of the Four Daughters of God occurs in Passus XVIII of the B-text and Passus XXI of the C-text. Also, K. S. Block, ed., *Ludus Coventriae or The Plaie called Corpus Christi*, Early English Text Society, Extra Series, no. 120 (London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1922), pp. 97–104. The episode of the Four Daughters of God appears in "The Parliament of Heaven" in *Ludus Coventriae*.

10. F. J. Furnival and Alfred W. Pollard, eds., *The Macro Plays: Mankind, Wisdom, The Castle of Perseverance*, Early English Text Society, Extra Series, no. 91 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Limited, 1904), p. 171, l. 3181. All quotations from *The Castle of Perseverance* are from this text.

11. Psalms 57:11, of the Vulgate.

NOTES

1. Ralph A. Kinkeldey, "The Four Daughters of God: A New Version," *LEOF* 22 (1953): 30.
2. *Howe* traces the four daughters of God: A Study of the Versions of this Allegory with special reference to those in Latin, French, and English. Bryn Mawr College Monograph Series 6 (Philadelphia: Bryn Mawr College Monographs, 1907), p. 7.
3. Hugh of St. Victor, *Opera Hugonis de St. Victor*, Miscellanea, Lib. II. *Annales in quibus Fides David Cap. LXVIII*, in *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, CLXXVII, edited by Jacques Paul Migne (Paris: Editions Garnier Frères, 1928), 651–652. See also *Howe*, p. 7.
4. *Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, in Fests Anmerkungen*, *Bibliotheca Variora* 24:10, 11, in *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, CLXXVIII, edited by Jacques Paul Migne (Paris: Editions Garnier Frères, 1928), 383–392. See also Kinkeldey, 30.
5. *Howe*, p. 7.
6. Sister Mary Innocentia, "The Four Daughters of God in the Gesta Romanorum and the Court of Sodom," *PLMA* 27 (1942): 422.
7. Robert Grosseteste, *Chrystian D. Anew in which our sould is to be saved*, in *St. Robert Grosseteste, Chrystian D. Anew in which our sould is to be saved*, and an English version of the *Chrystian D. Anew*, edited by M. R. James (London: The Camden Society, no. 13 [New York: Dover Publications, 1947]).
8. Richard Morris, ed., *Cursor Interius*, Early English Text Society, no. 29 (London: Oxford University Press, 1906), pp. 248–249.