ASCENT to LOVE

A Guide to Dante's Divine Comedy

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TO SHEFFIELD

Ecco chi crescera li nostri amori.
Paradiso 5.105

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

scent to Love is largely based on lectures that I have given in several settings. I first taught Dante several years ago to home school students in Birmingham, Alabama, as part of a course on medieval literature. For the past two years, I have taught the *Comedy* as part of my senior literature colloquium at New St. Andrews College. I have learned much from my students. During the summer of 2000, I lectured on Dante and medieval literature at a conference sponsored by the Covenant Classical School Association of Franklin, Tennessee. Thanks to George Grant and his cohorts for that invitation. Later in the summer, I presented much the same material at the Biblical Horizons conference in Niceville, Florida, at the request of James B. Jordan. Those two conferences forced me to formulate my thoughts about Dante in a compressed way, and I appreciate both opportunities. Doug Jones of Canon Press suggested that I write this book, and I am grateful, as usual, for his encouragement and generosity. Thanks are due, finally, to my son, Sheffield, who helped me get a head start by reformatting lecture notes into prose. During his last year of home schooling, I assigned the *Comedy* as part of Sheffield's reading in medieval literature, and, to put it mildly, Dante was not his favorite writer. When he learned that I was writing a book on Dante, he suggested the title *To Inferno and Beyond,* which I did not choose to use. Nonetheless, I hope he will not take my dedication of *Ascent to Love* to him as a

mean-spirited joke, for it is done in all sincerity and love, and in the hope that Sheffield will always be a lover of the Love that moves the sun and all the other stars.

I HAVE COME TO THE GARDEN

The Classics, the Bible, and Love in Medieval Literature

Though Edmund Spenser was a contemporary of Shakespeare, he had at least one foot firmly planted in another age. His great sprawling poem, *The Faerie Queene*, was written in part to honor Queen Elizabeth I, but the poem is as medieval as anything the middle ages produced. Near the middle of Book 1, Redcrosse, the knight who will mature to become Saint George, the patron saint of Britain, is defeated and taken to the dungeon of Orgoglio, a giant. King Arthur shows up to rescue the beleaguered knight, but then he leaves. Redcrosse and his lady, Una, find themselves in the Cave of Despair, where Redcrosse is tempted to suicide. Una intervenes to save him and takes him to the House of Holiness, a kind of rehab center for backslidden knights, where three women, Faith, Hope, and Charity, nurse him back to physical and moral health.

Then he can continue the quest interrupted by his encounter with Orgoglio. He makes his way to a castle, where he fights a three-day battle with a dragon. On the first day, Redcrosse falls, but he is revived by water from the well of life; on the second day, he falls again, but he refreshes himself with fruit from the tree of life; but on the third day, Redcrosse defeats the dragon, and the wedding of Redcrosse and Una follows. No sooner has the celebration taken place than Redcrosse, like a modern superhero, is called back for another quest, another opportunity to save the world.

This story is so utterly medieval that it almost seems a parody of medieval literature. The characters and situations are obviously

taken from medieval and Renaissance romance—the knights, the dragons, the ladies in distress, the escapes. In one fundamental way, however, Spenser parts company from medieval romance. To understand how radical Spenser is, however, we need to review some of the main features of Western medieval literature. Medieval literature takes its specific shape from the combination of three main factors: the pagan literature and stories of Greece, Rome, and Northern Europe; the Bible and interpretations of the Bible by the church fathers and medieval theologians; and the courtly love tradition that arose during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. When we have examined these, we shall be able to see the innovative direction of the *Faerie Queene.* We will also have the background to see how Dante's *Divine Comedy* is likewise both an heir to earlier medieval literature and at the same time something quite different.

Christendom and the Pagan Past

"Today," wrote the French playwright François Rabelais in his *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, "the old sciences are revived, knowledge is systematized, discipline re-established. The learned languages are restored: Greek, without which a man would be ashamed to consider himself educated; Hebrew, Chaldean, and Latin. Printing is now in use, an art so accurate and elegant that it betrays the divine inspiration of its discovery, which I have lived to witness. Alas! Conversely, I was not spared the horror of such diabolic works as gunpowder and artillery."[1]

Rabelais (1494–1553) was living through the latter part of the period known as the "Renaissance," and his character celebrates the achievements of his age with great optimism. For Rabelais and for many others, the Renaissance was the time when the lights were finally turned on, when the sun rose after a very long and very dark night.

Rabelais' view of the relation between the Renaissance and medieval world has been a popular one since his time, but recent

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[1] Quoted by P.M. Pasinetti in Maynard Mack, ed., *World Masterpieces* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974), 879.

studies have shown that the line between them is blurry at best.

The name "Renaissance" refers to the rebirth of classical learning, but many classical writings and stories were known during the middle ages.[2] From the other direction, it has become clear that the Renaissance was full of superstition and occult interest; it was not the age of cool reason that textbooks often claim.[3] If the medieval world had some knowledge of ancient literature, however, they treated it with some care. Recognizing its pagan origins, they attempted to fit it into their Christian faith; when this could not be done, they cheerfully attacked and rejected it.

Conrad of Hirsau, a German schoolmaster of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, produced a work known as the *Dialogue on the Authors*, in which a pupil and teacher discuss the works of major pagan authorities. Overall, Conrad operates on the premise that "whatever truth and right thinking has ever been found in anyone has come from Him who created man," and he finds truth and right thinking in many pagan writers. Conrad, however, could also be withering in his scorn. He commended the Roman poet and satirist Horace because he provides "guidelines laid down for writing," but other parts of Horace are not so edifying, because his writing "is concerned with vice." Similarly, Conrad recommends a few works of Ovid, but condemns him as "the inventor of a large part of idol-worship in the *Metamorphoses*." Quoting Romans 1:18–23, he insists that Ovid's work is idolatrous because it is concerned with "the transformation of substances" and obscures "the faculty of reason in man, whereby he is made in the image and likeness of God."[4]

[2] See C.S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1964] 1994).

[3] Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964); Ioan P. Couliano, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, trans. Margaret Cook (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); William Monter, *Ritual, Myth & Magic in Early Modern Europe* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1983). Though it covers a later period, Keith Thomas's classic study, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Scribner's, 1971), shows the persistence of magical beliefs and practices well past the beginning of the Renaissance.

[4] Quotations are from A.J. Minnis and A.B. Scott, eds., *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism, c. 1100–c.1375: The Commentary Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 56–58.

Though generally recognizing the sharp differences between pagan and Christian outlooks, medieval writers and commentators had different approaches to their classical and pagan inheritance. Though it is hardly an exhaustive classification, it is helpful to examine three of the ways that Christian writers dealt with the cultures of the past under the headings of "juxtaposition," "critique," and "incorporation."

Scholars debate whether *Beowulf* should be considered a Christian poem, but whether or not the characters are Christians, it is quite evident that the poet is. He writes of Cain, the Almighty, the Judge, the Creator. Within the story, the characters populate a heroic world that shares many customs and values with the world of Homer. When he is getting ready to dive into the water to fight Grendel's mother, Beowulf says, "As we must expect to leave our life on this earth, we must earn some renown, if we can, before death; daring is the thing for a fighting man to be remembered by"[5]—something that Achilles might have said in his most heroic moments. Later, the poet marvels at Beowulf's ferocity in battle: "A man must act so when he means in a fight to frame himself a long-lasting glory; it is not life he thinks of." Throughout the poem, pagan and Christian elements are side-by-side, juxtaposed, and the poet shows no recognition that there is a serious conflict between them.

A second option was to criticize the values and customs of ancient or Germanic heroes. Here the *Song of Roland*, the greatest of the *chasons de geste* ("songs of great deeds"), serves as an example. The poem tells of the battle of Roncevaux, a historical battle that occurred in 778 when Muslims attacked Charlemagne's army as he returned from a campaign against the Saracens in Northern Spain. Assisted by a Frankish traitor, Ganelon, the Muslims decimated the rear guard, which was under the command of Roland, Charlemagne's nephew and one of his Twelve Peers.

At the heart of the poem is the debate between Roland and his friend, Oliver, who urges Roland to blow his trumpet to call

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[5] I am quoting the translation of Michael Alexander (London: Penguin, 1973).

reinforcements. Roland refuses until it is too late for Charlemagne, already far ahead, to help. The poem contrasts the foolish bravery of Roland with the wise prudence of Oliver. To be sure, Roland is no Achilles. More than anything, Achilles is out for personal glory, even if it means that he fights with his king and stands idly by watching his fellow warriors spill their blood before Hector's onslaught. A knight to the core, Roland knows he is a vassal, bound by oaths of loyalty to his king. Roland's glory is not so much the honor of personal achievement as the glory that he can bring to his lord. As he tells Oliver, "we must make a stand here for our king: one must endure hardships for one's lord and endure great heat and great cold, one must also lose hide and hair. Now let each see to it that he employ great blows, so that bad songs not be sung about us! I shall never be cited as a bad example."[6] Yet personal reputation is also important to Roland. He refuses to blow his horn because "in fair France my fame would suffer scorn." Calling for help would "cast dishonor on my house" and "on fair France bring ill renown." "Roland is fierce and Oliver is wise," says the poet, and Roland's heroic ferocity leads to utter disaster. Oliver rebukes his friend: "you got us into this mess. There is wise valour, and there is recklessness: Prudence is worth more than foolhardiness. Through your o'erweening you have destroyed the French." Though there is no indication that the poet of *Roland* knew anything of the classical world, the poem confronts head-on a key classical value—the hero's quest for personal honor.

Juxtaposition and critique are less common, however, than efforts to weave threads of Christian faith and the pagan past together into a single fabric. This method of "incorporation" could take one of two forms. On the one hand, Christian writers sometimes place their Christian stories within the larger framework of classical history or literature. The big story is the story of Troy or Greece or Rome, and the stories of the Christian world are chapters of that larger story. The delightful poem *Sir Gawaine and the Green Knight* is a tale of Arthur's court and of an Arthurian knight,

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[6] I am using the translation of Dorothy L. Sayers, reprinted in Maynard Mack, ed., *World Masterpieces* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974).

but it begins with a brief summary of the fall of Troy, Aeneas's journey to Italy, and the voyage of Aeneas's great-grandson, Felix Brutus, to Britain. The history of the Christian king Arthur thus continues a story that begins with the war on the windy plains of Troy, and Gawaine becomes a hero in the tradition of the Homeric heroes. Dante is doing something similar when he makes Virgil his guide through Hell and Purgatory, for he is presenting himself as a disciple and heir of the Roman poet. Moreover, as we shall see, at several points Dante compares himself to Aeneas, the hero of Virgil's epic.

In many cases, ancient heroes and events of classical history are placed within a Christian framework. At times this involves a shift from the emphasis of ancient literature to an emphasis more in keeping with Christian values.[7] During the middle ages, literary critics would introduce ancient texts with a summary of their contents and purpose; these introductory notes were known as *accessus ad auctores*. The *accessus* for the *Iliad* praises Homer for providing knowledge of the Trojan war and also because the "subject-matter is drawn from those who, as a result of an illicit union, caused the war." Homer's intention thus "is to dissuade anyone from such an illicit union, as a result of which he may incur the wrath of the gods, as did Paris, Helen, and the more courageous among their relatives who perished along with Troy in that war."[8] Though Homer certainly laments the waste of the Trojan War, no one reading the original poem would conclude that Homer meant it as a warning against adultery.

Medieval writers frequently resorted to ingenious allegorizations to incorporate pagan literature into a Christian worldview. An "allegorization" is a way of reading a story where the characters and events of the story are understood as symbols of ideas or moral principles. Augustine's interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan is a famous example of this method. According to Augustine, the man along the road represents the unsaved sinner; the

[7] Medieval treatments of Achilles provide a good example of this. For some details, see my *Heroes of the City of Man* (Moscow: Canon, 1999), 36–38.
    [8] In Minnis and Scott, eds., *Medieval Literary Criticism*, 17.

Good Samaritan symbolizes Christ; the inn to which the Samaritan takes the wounded man is the church; and so on with every detail of the story. Medieval writers employed a similar method when they interpreted classical texts. Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, rejected with horror by Conrad of Hirsau, was seen by others as a mine of sacred truth and Christian morality. During the fourteenth century, an anonymous author (perhaps Philippe de Virtry, bishop of Meaux) wrote a long poem called *Ovid Moralise*, and other writers composed allegories of Ovid that were used for instruction of monks and nuns.[9]

Even pagan gods were kept alive during the middle ages, often by using the theory known as Euhemerism. Named for Euhemerus, a Greek poet of the third century B.C., this theory taught that the gods of the myths were once men, and their exploits were the exploits of ancient kings who later came to be treated as gods. Euhemerism was a pre-Christian method of interpreting ancient myths and was popular among sophisticated pagans seeking a more rational theology than Greek and Roman mythology provided.

Euhemerism had obvious attractions for early Christian writers. Clement of Alexandria, Lactantius, Tertullian, Augustine, and others all claimed that pagans were bowing before ancient men. While demoting the gods of the Greeks and Romans, Euhemerism simultaneously made ancient deities safe enough to be incorporated into a Christian account of history. If the gods and goddesses were just men and women, after all, then they were as historical as Adam, Noah, and Abraham, and Christian historians treated pagan gods as real historical figures. Eusebius claimed that Baal was the first king of Assyria, and that he lived at the time of the war of the Titans. Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* attempts to place all the gods of the pagans in the various ages of history recounted in Scripture. The gods of Greece and Rome were often seen as sages

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[9] Jean Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and Its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art,* trans. Barbara F. Sessions (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1961), 92.

who bequeathed to history various arts and sciences. According to the *Historia Scholastica* (A.D. 1160) of Peter Comestor, dean of Notre Dame at Troyes and later chancellor at Notre Dame, Minerva invented liberal arts, and Isis taught Egyptians the alphabet.[10]

In this respect, Spenser is as medieval as they come. The *Fairie Queene* is full of classical allusions, but they are all worked into a story and a religious outlook that is explicitly Christian. Similarly, in his use of pagan literature, Dante definitely practices "incorporation." Though pagan gods do not appear in the *Comedy*, many classical heroes and characters do, including Achilles, Ulysses, and some of the giants who rebelled against Zeus. And these classical figures are side-by-side with biblical characters and people from Dante's own time.

Review Questions

1. Was the Renaissance a complete break with the medieval world? Why or why not?

2. In what three ways did Christian writers use the literature and legends of the pagan past?

3. How is the *Song of Roland* a critique of the ancient heroic ideal?

4. Why is it significant that *Sir Gawaine and the Green Knight* begins with the history of Troy?

5. What is allegorization? How was it used to interpret pagan literature?

6. What is Euhemerism?

The Book of Books

Though medieval writers used pagan and classical literature in various ways, the book that formed the foundation of medieval society was the Bible. From the time of Origen and Augustine,

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[10] For more, see ibid.

every area of study was important because it could shed light on the biblical text. Monasteries, centers of medieval intellectual and cultural life, were devoted to copying Scripture, copying commentaries on Scripture, chanting Scripture, commenting on Scripture, meditating on Scripture.

Medieval political life was likewise infused with Scripture. Few statements of political theory have had as much impact on the development of Western institutions as that of Pope Gelasius: "Two there are, August Emperor, by which this world is ruled on title of original and sovereign grant—the consecrated authority of the priesthood and the royal power."[11] Gelasius was emphasizing that God had established not only the state but the church as a ruler on earth, and he was claiming that the church had an equal role to play in the government of the world. Some of the most important political battles of the middle ages were struggles over the meaning of this principle. Strikingly, this fundamental political axiom occurs in the midst of the Pope's discussion of the typological connections between Melchizedek and Jesus. In other words, the whole balance of power between pope and emperor was founded on a piece of biblical interpretation. Political rituals, such as anointing and investiture, were also drawn from Scripture.[12] When Charlemagne was anointed by the Pope in 800, he not only became the reborn "Roman" Emperor but began to think of himself as a new David, ruling over a "new Israel."

Medieval writers interpreted the Bible through the grid of the "fourfold sense" of Scripture. Though not the first to discuss issues

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[11] Quoted in George Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis: The Present Failure and Future Promise of American Catholic Thought on War and Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). The Gelasian formula was as important to medieval political life as "All men are created equal" is in modern politics. For more on the Bible in medieval political theory, see Walter Ullmann, *A History of Political Thought: The Middle Ages* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1965); Ullmann, *Principles of Government and Politics in the Middle Ages* (London: Methuen, 1961).

[12] See the fascinating study of Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957); and Johan Chydenius, *Medieval Institutions and the Old Testament* (Societas Scientiarum Fennica, Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum, 37.2; Helsinki: Helsingfors, 1965).

of interpretation in this way, John Cassian gave classic expression to this method. The theory is that each story, event, person, or institution in Scripture can be interpreted in four different senses. The first is the literal or historical sense; interpreted in this way, a biblical text literally states who did what where. Especially in the Old Testament, events of history are symbolic of things that are yet to come. Thus, each event points to the work of Christ and the life of the church. There is also an "eschatological" dimension to every text of Scripture, pointing to the final consummation of all things in a new heavens and new earth. Finally, every text has an application to the individual Christian life. As it was summarized in a brief lyric:

> Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria,
> Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia.[13]

Which, roughly translated, means,

> The literal teaches past deeds, the allegorical what you are to believe,
> The moral [tropological] what you are to do, the anagogical what you hope to achieve.

Cassian offered the example of the city of Jerusalem. Interpreted historically or literally (*secundum historiam*), Jerusalem is the capital city of Israel from the time of David, the city in which Jesus was crucified. Allegorically, the historical city points ahead to the "new Jerusalem," the church (*secundum allegoriam*). Though the church is already the new Jerusalem, the church has not yet reached its final destination, and therefore passages about "Jerusalem" also point ahead to the heavenly city. This is called the "anagogical" sense (*secundum anagogiam*). Finally, tropologically, the history of Jerusalem can be understood as a model for the history of the soul (*secundum tropologiam*).[14] Just as David conquered Jerusalem

[13] Quoted by A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Scholar Press, 1984), 34.

[14] The classic work on medieval exegesis is the four-volume study of Henri de Lubac, *Exegese medievale*, now happily being published in English by Eerdmans under the title *Medieval Exegesis*. Volumes 1 and 2 have now been published. *Tolle, lege.*

and set up the Lord's throne there, so Jesus, His Son, conquers the inner city of the sinner and consecrates him as a saint, a holy one. Another classic and frequent example is the Song of Songs,[15] which can be interpreted in each of the four modes. Historically, it refers (so medievals often said) to the love between King Solomon and the daughter of Pharaoh. Allegorically, it refers to the love between Christ and His church. Anagogically, it is a poem about the resurrection and the final marriage supper of the lamb, and tropologically, it celebrates the soul's "marriage" with her beloved.

Without denying the historicity of any of the events recounted in Scripture, medieval writers also insisted that Scripture has a richness and fullness of meaning; not a bare record of historical events. Everything in Scripture points forward (horizontally, historically) and upward (as an image of heaven); it speaks not only of the universe as a whole, the macrocosm (allegorical/anagogical), but also of the human soul, the microcosm (tropological).

Medieval literature overflows with examples of this method of interpretation. William Langland's fourteenth-century work, *Piers the Plowman,* is a dream allegory similar to Dante and Milton in some ways, but more like *Pilgrim's Progress* in others. One example from this work will illustrate the influence not only of the Bible but of the Bible interpreted through the tradition of patristic exegesis. Defending the superiority of a life of holy poverty, Langland refers to the incident with Mary and Martha in Luke's gospel and concludes that Jesus "put poverty first and praised it the more highly." He goes on: "And as far as I can discover, all the wise men of the past have praised poverty, and said that, borne with patience, it is the best life—many times more blessed than riches. For although it is bitter to the taste, there comes sweetness afterwards; and just

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[15] Mary Dove points out that the very name, *Canticum canticorum*, points to its supremacy as *the* medieval "Book of Love" (Dove, "'Swiche Olde Lewed Wordes,': Books About Medieval Love, Medieval Books About Love, and the Medieval Book of Love," in Andrew Lynch and Philippa Maddern, eds., *Venus and Mars: Engendering Love and War in Medieval and Early Modern Europe (* Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1995), 21. See also E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990).

as a walnut has a bitter shell, but when the shell is removed there is a kernel of strengthening food, so it is with poverty and mortification when taken patiently. Poverty makes a man mindful of God, and gives him a strong desire to pray well and weep for his sins; and from these things Mercy arises, of which the kernel is Christ, who comforts and strengthens the soul."[16]

The "nut of poverty" image seems a quaint piece of allegory, but behind Langland is a long tradition of interpreting Song of Songs 6:11 ("I went down to the orchard of nut trees"). Earlier commentators on the Song of Songs focused on the hardness and bitterness of the nut's shell in contrast to the sweetness of the inside fruit. From this, commentators frequently moved to a meditation on the role of chastisement, which seems bitter but produces sweet fruit for those who endure it. Another line of interpretation linked the nut to Christ's two natures: The hard and unattractive shell is the human nature of Christ, within which is hidden the sweetness of divinity. Alternatively, the shell is interpreted as the sufferings of Christ, again as a veil for the divinity behind. Langland subtly merges the two senses within so that the shell becomes the symbol both of the hardness of life in poverty and a sign of Christ's sufferings. The implication is that enduring the hard shell of suffering is a way of taking up one's cross in union with Christ. The sweetness of poverty is thus not that it develops character in some general sense, but specifically that it deepens one's knowledge of Christ.

Langland was a cleric writing a spiritual allegory, but even "secular" writers of the middle ages, such as Chaucer, were thoroughly at home in the world of biblical imagery. According to one scholar's tally, "there are more than eighty explicit references to Paul and his Epistles in *The Canterbury Tales* and numerous extensions of Pauline imagery and spiritual concerns."[17] The "Wife of Bath's Tale" is full of allusions to Paul's discussion of marriage and

[16] I am using the translation of J.F. Goodridge (New York: Penguin, 1966).

[17] Russell A. Peck, "Biblical Interpretation: St. Paul and *The Canterbury Tales*," in David Lyle Jeffrey, ed., *Chaucer and Scriptural Tradition* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1984).

celibacy in 1 Corinthians 7.[18] In her case, this quotation is highly ironic; the whole passage in 1 Corinthians is an exhortation to self-control, but the woman who quotes the passage has had five husbands and is quite free sexually. Chaucer's biblical quotations are sometimes partial, but deliberately so. In the *"Summoner's Tale,"* Friar John quotes half the beatitude "Blessed are the poor in spirit" but does not mention the second half, which promises that the reward for the poor in spirit is the kingdom of heaven. Such a partial quotation is self-serving for the greedy John, who wants his rewards here and now, not in heaven.[19]

In the "General Prologue," Chaucer describes his summoner (a constable who summons accused persons to court) as a man who loves "garlic, onions, leeks." This refers to Israel in the wilderness complaining that they no longer ate the leeks and garlics of Egypt (Num. 11:5). In a sermon on this text, Gregory the Great, bishop of Rome in the sixth century, expounded the Numbers passage by pointing out that leeks and onions cause tears. Such tears, however, are not the result of true repentance, but represent merely the sorrows of the world; they are tears shed by people who refuse to leave the leeks and onions of Egypt behind. Ironically, Gregory goes on to say, they refuse the good food of manna in favor of food that aggravates their condition, and thus they end up striving to get the food that causes them pain. In this brief allusion to the Summoner's diet, Chaucer has offered an important clue to the man's character.

Chaucer's bawdy tales include many allusions to the Song of Songs, but mostly as parodies of the biblical poem. In the "Miller's Tale," the lover Absolon comes to the window of Alisoun, pining in love for her:

> Where are you, honeycomb, sweet Alisoun?
> My sweetest cinnamon, my pretty chick?
> Awake and speak to me, sweetheart, awake!

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[18] For details, see Lawrence Besserman, *Chaucer's Biblical Poetics* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 106.

[19] See the discussion in ibid., 101.