Religious aspects of the Middle English *Pearl* can be clarified by examining the Christian tradition at the time of the poem’s composition. To discover the *Pearl*-poet’s view of Christian values, one must uncover the practices of the church in England in the fourteenth century. I suggest that this can best be accomplished by a study of the liturgical milieu in which the author lived, for ‘the liturgy is at once the mirror of a culture and its culmination’. 1 A study of the liturgy for the feast of All Saints provides material for a thematic interpretation of the climax of the poem, for at this point the *Pearl*-poet employs readings from the Apocalypse that served as the epistles for All Saints’ Day and Eve. Furthermore, and perhaps more significantly, the very theme of this feast, which is the commemoration of all the myriads of saints who have died and been granted entrance into heaven, corresponds to that of the poem. The latter part of *Pearl* is indeed a magnificent celebration of the Pearl-maiden’s presence among the heavenly hosts.

The feast of All Saints has been linked most often to the poem *Patience* because the poet introduces the paraphrase of the Beatitudes (the Gospel reading for the feast) with the words: ‘I herde on a halyday, at a hyse masse’. 2 Johnson remarks that the Beatitudes, with their emphasis on the rewards in heaven for eight spiritual states, are appropriate ‘for the Feast of All Saints, a day commemorating the achievements of those who have progressed beyond the limitations of the human will’. 3 She has also shown that the feast of All Saints, the last day Gawain is at Camelot, is ‘an especially auspicious day for his preparations for what will be a test of inner chivalry’. 4 The *Pearl*-poet has appropriately chosen the feast for these two poems to emphasize the need for achievement and merit for those who will enter heaven. It

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4 Johnson, Ibid., 56.
is obvious that this Gospel reading will not do for the *Pearl*, where justification of the Pearl-maiden ‘by ry3t’ \(^5\) is stressed. Thus the author uses the Apocalypse readings for All Saints’ Day, but omits any mention of the Beatitudes.

The poet’s climactic use of the Apocalypse in the *Pearl* has often been compared and contrasted with Dante’s *Paradiso*.\(^6\) In her discussion of the vision of the Heavenly City in *Pearl*, Kean notes the author’s close following of the Revelation text with the result that it is presented ‘at a distance – almost as a lesson read in church’.\(^7\) As Bogdanos says, the poet, like Dante, ‘wants his poem read as an analogue to God’s Word’\(^8\). Unlike Dante’s, however, his heaven is not his own invention:

Instead, he borrows or, rather, daringly appropriates the anagogic telos of the Bible and makes it the dramatic denouement of his own private experience. He claims to have seen what John the Apostle saw. He claims to have actually encountered the sacred prototype of anagoge itself, the New Jerusalem.\(^9\)

The poet has indeed used biblical passages found in the lessons read at church for the climax of his poem. Rather than create a new vehicle to express his belief that his child is in heaven, he has adopted the same readings used on the liturgy of All Saints’ Day. The liturgy for this feast fits his intention admirably for

the purpose [of All Saints’ Day] was plainly to give every individual Christian opportunity to remember their own holy dead as still ‘living unto God’ in Paradise, still members of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, the Communion of Saints.\(^10\)

John Gatta has shown similarities between the poem and the liturgy of the mass, yet he warns us that is not what the poem is primarily about:

Most basically, it is the account of a father’s efforts to come to personal terms with his child’s early death. At the same time, its concerns extend to the narrator’s confrontation of his own mortality, his own spiritual life.\(^11\)

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\(^{5}\) E.V. Gordon (ed.), *Pearl* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1953), ll. 684, 696, 720. All further references to the text will be by line number in brackets following the citation in the text. References to the introduction will be by page number.


\(^{7}\) Kean, 211–12.

\(^{8}\) *Image of the ineffable*, 11.

\(^{9}\) Ibid.


The liturgy of the Feast of All Saints also assuages the grief that a father has in this situation and offers hope for those still living in the ‘doel-doungoun’ (1187) of earth.

The Feast of All Saints was observed in England on 1 November by the middle of the eighth century. 'Al halowen' is described as 'pis moost hy3e feste' by Lydgate. It was assigned the rank of greater double in the Sarum Use and had an important vigil and a procession. Originally, the Gospel reading of the Beatitudes was part of the feast honouring Mary and the Martyrs, and it is significant that this Gospel reading was transferred from Many Martyrs to All Saints' Day. The new November feast was promulgated to honour the many saints who were not martyrs, thus shifting emphasis away from death for Christ's sake as the singular method of achieving sainthood. Apostles, confessors and virgins joined the ranks of the martyrs in this feast.

The poet is interested in the special relationship between the Virgin Mary and all other virgins. The All Saints' Day liturgy gives special prominence to Mary. She is the subject of the second lesson for the day in the Sarum Breviary, while the virgins are relegated to the eighth. Kean has pointed out that the poem justifies placing the Pearl-maiden in a group that 'takes in, as its upper limit the Blessed Virgin as Mediatrix, and includes the virgin Saints'. There is no better feast to explain the relationship of Mary and virgins in Paradise than the Feast of All Saints. It will be shown below that the very questions that the Dreamer asks about the Maiden's position in heaven can be answered by a perusal of the Missal and Breviary, which contain the biblical texts, visual scenes and eschatological explanations which are also utilized by the author of Pearl.

The Sarum Missal stipulates Apoc. 5.6-13 as the epistle reading for the Vigil and Apoc. 7.2-12 for All Saints' Day. Both lessons begin with 'Ecce ego iohannes vidi' (Behold I, John, saw) to clarify

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12 C. Smith, 'All saints, feast of', New Catholic Encyclopaedia (New York, 1967), citing the Martyrology of St Bede, Patrologia Latina, 94, 1087.
16 Breviarium ad usum insignis ecclesiae Sarum, ed. Francis Procter and Christopher Wordsworth, 3 vols. (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1879-86), iii, cols. 965-67 and 974-75. All further references will be given by volume and column in brackets. Usually the nine readings on an important feast were read in ascending order of dignity, but All Saints' Day was an exception to this rule; see Christopher Wordsworth and Henry Littlehales, The old service books of the English church (London: Methuen, 1904), 130. On All Saints' Day, there is a descending order of importance from lessons one to eight. With the ninth lesson, the pattern returns to normal, i.e. the ninth reading and reader are the most important.
17 Kean, 132.
18 The Sarum Missal, ed. J. Wickham Legg (Oxford, 1916), 341-2. Further references will be given by page number in brackets.
that this was seen by John, for the Bible at these points only says ‘Et vidi’. This was a common convention in liturgical readings. The *Pearl*-poet also adds the name of the author in the poem: “‘I seghe,” says Johan’ (867). Although this introduces a passage from Apoc. 14, the lesson for the feast of the Holy Innocents, or Childermas, it must be noted here that the three epistles are similar: they all mention the Lamb, the throne, the four living creatures, the ancients and the great multitude signed with the name of the Father adoring the Lamb. That homilies, sermons and other liturgical writings for the feast of the Holy Innocents account for some of the details in *Pearl* has been demonstrated by Ian Bishop. 19 A stumbling block in comparing the poem to the liturgy of Childermas is of course the fact that the Pearl-maiden is not a martyr as are the Holy Innocents. Furthermore, though the child of the poem was under two years of age when she died, she did not share the sex of those male infants slaughtered by Herod. These obstacles do not exist in comparing the feast of All Saints to *Pearl*.

The *Sarum Breviary* takes these two readings from the Book of Revelation, expands upon them in the antiphons and lessons, and supplements them with new material depicting the bands of saints in heaven. A closer look at the Breviary text for the feast of All Saints will indicate the numerous correspondences with *Pearl*.

For Vespers the first antiphon reads: ‘Sancti Dei omnes qui estis consortes supernorum civium, intercedite pro nobis’ (iii, col. 959). (All of the saints of God, you who are co-heirs of the celestial city, intercede for us.) A sermon by St Augustine which serves as the ninth and final reading for the day reiterates the idea of the saints as co-heirs: ‘Non sumus hospites, sed cives sanctorum et domestici Dei: etiam illius heredes, coheredes autem Christi’ (iii, col. 976). (We are not guests, but citizens with the saints and the domestics of God: and even his heirs, and joint heirs with Christ.) Finally, the hymn ‘Christe Redemptor’ implores all the inhabitants of heaven to pray for the faithful and ‘Simul cum Sanctis omnibus/ Consortes Christi facite’ (iii, col. 979). (Together with all of the Saints/ Make us co-heirs of Christ.) In Stanza 35 of *Pearl* the maiden answers the Dreamer’s enquiry about the life she leads in her present state:

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I wat3 ful 3ong and tender of age,
Bot my Lorde be Lombe, pur3 hys godhede,
He toke myself to his maryage,
Corounde me quene in blysse to brede
In lenghe of daye3 bat euer schal wage;
And sesed in alle hys herytage
His lef is. I am holy hysse,
Hys prese, hys prys, and hys parage
Is rote and grounde of all my blysse. (412–20)
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The Pearl-maiden insists that she enjoys this special status in heaven through Christ's heritage and His lineage. This claim triggers the Dreamer's astonished query: 'Art thou be quene of heuene blwe?' (432). The reply maintains that Mary is indeed the empress of all the heavens: 'Of erytage set, non wyl ho chace' (443). Gordon's note to line 417 herytage points to Rom. 8.16-17 which 'is often referred to by writers on salvation by grace' (p. 60) and was undoubtedly the source for St Augustine's sermon in the Breviary. This title to grace is a 'titulus haereditatis' given by God when original sin is remitted in baptism.20 Thus this mention of heritage adumbrates section XI of the poem with its refrain: 'For be grace of God is grete inno3e' (624). St Augustine appends the citation of co-heirs from Romans to 'cives sanctorum et domestici Dei' (citizens with the saints, and the domestics of God) from Ephesians 2.19. The domestics of God, touched on in the chapter of Ephesians dealing with the efficacy of the grace of God over works as a means of salvation, correspond to the 'homly hyne' (1211) of the second-to-last line of Pearl. Just as the Breviary starts with the saints, the co-heirs in heaven, and ends with a hymn beseeching all the saints to grant those on earth joint inheritance with Christ, so the poem first shows that the Pearl-maiden has received her heritage in heaven and concludes with the prayer begging God to allow men to be 'his homly hyne'.

The second antiphon in the Sarum Breviary introduces a pervasive motif for the liturgy which is taken up by the Pearl-poet: 'O quam gloriosum est regnum in quo cum Christo gaudent omnes sancti, amicti stolis albis sequuntur Agnum quocunque ierit' (iii, col. 959). (O how glorious is the kingly reign in which all of the saints rejoice with Christ, clothed in white robes following the Lamb wheresoever he goeth.) The liturgical compiler of the Breviary has coupled the white robes of Apoc. 7.9, an All Saints' Day reading, with the procession of the Lamb of Apoc. 14.4, the epistle for Holy Innocents. The Pearl-poet also draws on these two passages for the description of the celestial procession:

Pis noble cite of ryche enpryse  
Wat3 sodanly ful wythouten sommoun,  
Of such vergyne3 in þe same gyse  
Pat wat3 my blysful anvnder croun:  
And coronde wern alle of þe same fasoun,  
Depaynt in perle3 and wede3 qwyte. (1097-1102)

The author and audience of Pearl could have seen a similar procession during the reading of lectio 8 in the Sarum Breviary, which is the lesson relating to the virgins. The rubrics after this lesson read:

Ista praecedens Lectio legatur ab uno Puerō, ut prædictum est: et interim procedant quinque Pueri de vestiario ordinatim in superpelliciis, capitis velatis amictibus albis, et cæros ardentibus in manibus tenentibus, ad gradum chori accedant. Finita Lectione, simul incipiant ad altare conversi Responsorium (iii. col. 975). (That preceding Lesson is to be read by one Boy, as it is being preached: and meanwhile five Boys proceed in order from the vestry in surplices, with heads veiled with white amices, and holding lighted candles in their hands, they ascend to the step of the choir. When the Lesson is finished, they begin altogether to repeat the Response at the altar.)

The thirteenth-century liturgical commentator William Durandus says the Response is to be sung before the altar of the Blessed Virgin Mary and that the five boys represent the five wise virgins. Bogdanos notes that the language preceding the procession in the poem produces "an incantory effect, which gives the poem an elusive liturgical quality, conditioning our responses for the forthcoming climactic ritual event in the New Jerusalem; and that 'the procession of the Lamb with his apocalyptic entourage is the triumphal point of this cosmic liturgy, and it comes to the dreamer with wondrous unexpect­edness." The vivid procession of All Saints’ Day would certainly impress itself upon those witnessing it at church, and perhaps the poet had these boys acting the part of virgins in mind when he described the orderliness of the procession in Pearl: 'mylde as maydene3 seme at mas' (1115).

Lesson eight glosses the parable of the five wise and five foolish virgins. Why is this account not included in Pearl? The explanation parallels that given for the author’s exclusion of the Beatitudes: both texts emphasize merit, whereas the poet requires examples of salvation gained through the gift of God. According to the lesson, the five wise virgins signify the five-fold continence from the allurements of the flesh, the torches they carry are their works, and the oil is the joy of good works. In medieval iconography the wise and foolish virgins were depicted in scenes of the Last Judgement: the wise to the right of the Judge, the foolish to the left, the former walking towards an open door, the latter towards a closed – 'a vivid picture of the saved and the lost.' Mâle contrasts two representations which portray salvation by grace and merit respectively:

At Amiens where the artist would teach that salvation is gained through the merits of Christ and that men’s so-called virtues are but the gift of His grace, the Agnus Dei is in

21 William Durandus, bishop of Mende, Rationale divinorum officiorum (Naples, 1859), Book 3, col. 975.
22 Image of the ineffable, 128-9.
23 Sarum Breviary, iii, cols. 974-75. See also Emile Mâle, The Gothic image: religious art in France of the thirteenth century, trans. from the 3rd ed. by Dora Nussey (1913; rpt. London, 1961), 198-9 who says that the five wise virgins represent the five senses of the soul, the oil symbolizes charity, and the five foolish virgins represent the five forms of the lust of the flesh.
24 Mâle, Gothic image, 388.
one scale and the ignoble head of a reprobate in the other. At Bourges another idea finds expression; man’s salvation depends on his vigilance. The lamp of the Wise Virgins is in one scale and a hideous figure with enormous ears in the other. At Bourges the artist is almost Pelagian, at Amiens almost Jansenist.  

The Pearl-poet, however, rejects the symbol of the wise virgins in favour of the symbol of the Lamb and whiteness, for his virgin-maiden ‘lyfed not two yer in oure þede’ and could ‘neuer God nau|)er plese ne pray’ (483–84).

At this point it is appropriate to consider the use of the colour white in the liturgy for All Saints’ Day. The five boys representing the virgins were clothed in white as well as the boy who read the lesson. On the other hand, the vestments worn at this festival were varied. Durandus states that white is used on feasts of confessors and virgins who are not martyrs because they are pure and innocent. He cites two passages from St John’s Apocalypse to substantiate this: ‘Et ambulabunt mecum in albis: virgines enim sunt, he sequuntur Agnum, quocumque ierit’ (3.18.2). (And they will walk with me in white: for they are virgins, these follow the Lamb withersoever he goeth.) The first phrase could be from Apoc. 4.4, a description of the ancients dressed in white (as indicated in the note), but was more likely based on a verse from the epistle reading for All Saints’ Day. Apoc. 7.9. Its conjunction with Apoc. 14.4 would thus be identical with the second antiphon for Vespers which was discussed above (page 145 of this text). Furthermore, since there was some confusion about whether to wear white or red on this feast (as it was originally the feast of Mary and the Martyrs), Durandus addresses the problem in his commentary:

For this reason there be some who use red vestments in the Commemoration of All Saints, but others use white, as doth the Roman Church, for that not only on that day, but concerning it, the Church saith that the Saints, as according to John in the Apocalypse, will stand BEFORE THE LAMB, CLOTHED WITH WHITE ROBES, AND PALMS IN THEIR HANDS! The Bride saith also in the Canticles, MY BELOVED IS WHITE AND RUDDY; THE CHIEFEST AMONG TEN THOUSAND; that is. He is white, in His Confessors and Virgins, and red, in His Martyrs and Apostles, for these are the roses, those the lilies of the valley.  

The problem of which vestments to wear was solved in England by mingling the colours for the feast. Some places recommended the most

25 Ibid., 377. Our author was neither Pelagian nor Jansenist. See Wellek, ‘Pearl: an interpretation’, passim, for a history of the arguments about the author’s ‘heresy’.
26 Christopher Wordsworth, in Notes on medieval services in England (London: Thomas Baker, 1898), 17, says the five in their amices looked ‘like nuns’ In the time of Lantranc (d. 1089) two children (infantes) sing the responsory in albs and two similarly attired (similiter in albis) sing the tract; see Decreta Lanfranci, the monastic constitutions of Lanfranc, trans David Knowles (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1951), 64.
splendid vestments, others every colour mingled and still others white and red mingled. In Lichfield various colours were used while in Exeter all colours, but especially red and white, were suggested for use.28 This variety in attire is accounted for by the different classes of saints who were honoured on this occasion. However, there is no doubt that white was considered appropriate for a virgin non-martyr. Vestments for the feast of the Holy Innocents caused a similar problem, but this time the choice of colour was between red and black. Red was the colour of vestments for the feasts of martyrs (Durandus 3. 18. 4). Pope Innocent III discussed the dilemma saying

that some argue for black and others for red. Those who argue for black stress the sadness in the mother’s loss of their children; those who argue for red concentrate on the martyrdom aspect of the feast.29

The contrast of the colours used on All Saints and Holy Innocents is yet another reason for proposing the former feast as especially relevant to Pearl. The poet has naturally paraphrased the Apocalypse, the reading for the feast, and utilized the white clothing associated with it and with virgins, so that ‘white is almost the burden of the poet’s description of the maiden’s robe, her kirtle and all her vesture, her crown, and the pearls that bedeck her’.30

The ninth and final reading in the Breviary, which explicates the happiness of the city of heaven, is the most important one. It was read by the highest member of the clergy present at the church.31 This lesson is most significant in a comparison with Pearl as it contains numerous themes identical to those of the poem. First, in describing the celestial city, Augustine, the author of this lesson, not only enumerates lack of poverty, sorrow, sickness and death; but also the lack of anger, pride and envy. In that place ‘nemo irascitur, nemo invedet ... nulla honoris pulsat aut potestatis ambitio’ (iii, col. 976). (no one is angry, no one envies ... no desire of honour or power disturbs.) The lesson then portrays the positive character of the New Jerusalem:

Nulla erit tunc usquam discordia: sed cuncta consona, cuncta convenientia: quia omnium sanctorum una concordia, pax certa et laetitia continua (iii, col. 976).

29 Alfred C. Rush, ‘The colors of red and black in the liturgy of the dead’, Kyriakon: Festschrift Johannes Quasten, 2, ed. Patrick Granfield and Josef A. Jungmann (Münster: Aschendorff, 1970), 698–708, who cites De sacro altaris, Patrologia Latina, 217.802 AB. See also Hope and Atchley, English liturgical colours, 154, who say red vestments were used in England on this feast.
31 Durandus says the lesson is to be read by the bishop or dean (‘et sic fit descensus per personas in legendo usque ad pueros’) (and so there is a descending order through individual people in the reading right down to the boys) but ‘semper nonam Lectionam majoris est legere’ (7.34.7) (the ninth lesson is always to be read by the greater [one]).
(Then there will not be discord in any way: but everything is harmonious, everything is in agreement: the single-minded unity of all the saints brings established peace and permanent rejoicing. Everything is tranquil and at rest.)

At the beginning of the Pearl-maiden’s description of her ‘blysful lyf’ (409), she commends the change in the Dreamer’s tone of speech in the land where he now walks, for ‘Masterful mod and hyȝe pryde,/ I hete þe, arn heterly hatred here’ (401–02). She explains that Mary is queen, although everyone else who arrives there is king or queen as well, ‘And neuer o^er schal depryue’ (449). The fact that the Mother of God is empress over all of them ‘dyspleseʒ non of oure gyng’ (455). The Maiden then paraphrases St Paul’s mystical body of Christ by way of explication:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Penne loke what hate oper any gawle} \\
\text{Is tached oper tyȝed by lymmeʒ bytwyste.} \\
\text{By heued hatʒ nauper greme ne gryste,} \\
\text{On arme oper fynger, þaʒ þou ber byʒe.} \\
\text{So fare we alle wyth luf and lyste} \\
\text{To kyng and quene by cortaysye.}
\end{align*}
\]

What the Pearl-maiden has directly explained through words is finally shown to the Dreamer through action in the procession of the maidens. Spearing remarks that the Dreamer can now see for himself that they are not jostling for position, as an earthly procession might, and he innocently notes this surprising fact: ‘Paʒ þay wern fele, no pres in plyt’ (1114).32

A second theme common to the Sarum Breviary and the poem immediately follows the Breviary account of the harmony in heaven. The ninth reading represents heaven in terms of light, utilizing Apoc. 21.23–37 and 22.5:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Jugis splendor, non iste qui nunc est: sed tanto clarior quanto felicior, quia civitas ut} \\
\text{legitur illa non egebit lumine solis, sed Dominus omnipotens illuminabit eam, et} \\
\text{lucerna ejus est Agnus. Ubi fulgebunt sancti ut stellæ in perpetuas aeternitates: et sicut} \\
\text{splendor firmamenti qui erudiunt multos. Quapropter nox ibi nulla, nullæ tenebræ,} \\
\text{concursus nubium nullus (iii. col. 976).} \\
\text{(There is perennial brilliance, not that which is at present: the brighter it is, the} \\
\text{happier it is, because that city, as it is read, will not need the light of the sun, but the} \\
\text{Lord Almighty will illuminate it, and his lamp is the Lamb. When in that place the} \\
\text{saints will shine like the stars for ever and ever: and just as the brilliance of the heavens} \\
\text{which enlightens many men. Wherefore there is no night there, no darkness, no} \\
\text{running together of clouds.)}
\end{align*}
\]

Section XVIII of Pearl, with its sun and moon refrain, describes the heavenly light in similar terms:

Of sunne ne mone had þay no nede;
Pe self God wat3 her lombe-ly3t,
Pe Lombe her lantyrne, wythouten drede;
Þur3 hym blysned þe bor3 al bry3t. (1045–48)

The author of the poem expounds on the splendour and brilliance of the celestial city just as Augustine does. Kean remarks that:

the treatment of the source [the Apocalypse] becomes more and more free as the section advances. The details taken from it, too, are all skillfully orientated towards the idea of the sun and moon, so that the half-verse (Rev. 21.23), ‘And the city hath no need of the sun, nor of the moon to shine upon it,’ comes to dominate the whole passage, and prepares for the climax in which the Virgin Host and the Lamb are brought together at the beginning of the next section. ³³

The Dreamer employs the terms ‘lemed’ (1043), ‘blysned’, ‘bryt’ (1048), ‘cler’ (1050), ‘schym’ (1077), and ‘glymme’ (1088) echoing the various words for brightness and light that Augustine uses in the lesson: ‘splendor’, ‘clarior’, ‘lumine’ and ‘fulgebunt’. The third common theme concerns washing the robes in the blood of the Lamb. The Breviary states that only those ‘qui . . . laverunt stolas suas in sanquine Agni’ (iii, col. 977 and Apoc. 7.14) (who . . . wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb) are chosen for the heavenly kingdom. In Pearl the maiden is called to be the spouse of the Lamb: ‘Cum hyder to me, my lemman swete,/ For mote ne spot is non in þe’ (763–64). This is intermingled with the phrase from Revelation and its reiteration in the ninth lesson: ‘In hys blod he wesch my wede on dese’ (766). There is a slight but significant change in the poem from the biblical and liturgical sources. The lesson from the Breviary speaks of ‘digni’, those who are worthy, and the biblical text designates those clothed in white robes as ‘Hi sunt qui venerunt de tribulatione magna et laverunt stolas suas et dealbaverunt eas in sanguine Agni’ (Apoc. 7.14). (These are they who are come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb.) The saints have earned their robes and have washed their robes themselves; the Maiden, on the other hand, is passive, as her garment is cleansed by the Lamb. Again the emphasis is on the grace of God rather than individual merit.

How can one who died so young on earth enjoy the sight of the throne of the Lamb? Augustine considers it accepted dogma, whereas there is a polemical discussion on this point in the poem, and more vociferous argument among the critics. The Pearl-maiden tells the Dreamer (and us):

Pow wost wel when þy perle con shed, ³³ Kean, 218.
I wat3 ful 3ong and tender of age,
Bot my Lorde pe Lombe purʒ hys godhede,
He toke myself to hys maryage. (411–14)

Wellek demonstrates that it ‘is entirely in accordance with the teaching of the church, for which the conferment of heavenly grace always meant a complete regeneration, a becoming similar to God’. He cites Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei* xxii. 30 as a source for patristical views on the state of those in heaven. This particular passage does *not* speak of the age of those in heaven, but in lesson 9 of the Breviary Augustine explicitly says: ‘Non est senectus ibi, nec senectutis miseria: dum omnes occurrunt in virum perfectum, in mensuram ætatis plenitudinis Christi’ (iii, col. 977). (There is no old age there, nor misery of old age: while all appear in perfect manhood, in the size of the age of the fullness of Christ.) Vincent of Beauvais elaborates on this idea:

Whether they died as children or as old people they will be born again at the perfect age of thirty years. All men must resemble their divine Example who at that age triumphed over death.

The idea was taken literally by artists in the Middle Ages. The *Pearl*-poet also depicts the Maiden as an adult, one of the several heavenly manifestations which confuse the Dreamer. Gordon maintains that theories relevant to the form and age of the risen body do not concern us here because ‘this is an apparition of a spirit, a soul not yet reunited with its body after the resurrection’ (xvii). However, Bishop points out that as it is necessary for her to assume a ‘visionary body’ in order to manifest herself to the dreamer, it is appropriate that this body should have the appearance of the one which, according to the highest patristic authority, she will assume after the General Resurrection.

The *Pearl*-poet presents the Maiden as one of the virgins of the Apocalypse in the form she will have after the Last Judgement as described by Augustine in the final lesson.

The lesson continues with a description of the heavenly host with whom all these joys of heaven are to be shared. The angels, saints, patriarchs, apostles and martyrs, described in terms of light, shining and luminescence, are followed by ‘virginum quoque chorus candentia serra gestantes’ (iii, col. 977) (and also the shining of the bands of virgins wearing garlands). Section IV of the poem contains a detailed

34 *Pearl: an interpretation*, 18.
35 Ibid., 31–2, n. 77
36 Male, *Gothic image*, 374–5 who cites *Speculum historiale*, cxiii. He states that it was generally admitted in the Middle Ages that Christ was thirty-three but several doctors shared Augustine’s view that he was 30 because the ark was 30 cubits high!
37 Male, *Gothic image*, 375.
38 *Pearl in its setting*, 101.
description of the crowned Pearl-maiden, with a refrain juxtaposing 'precios perle3' and 'py3t':

A py3t coroune 3et wer ṣat gyrle
Of marjorys and non oper ston,
Hi3e pynakled and cler quyṭ perle,
Wyt flurted flowere3 perfet vpon. (205–08)

Gollancz comments that

in the Apocalypse it is the Elders that have on their heads the crowns of gold, but the coronation of the Virgin as empress of heaven, and of the brides as queens, forms a very integral part of medieval homiletic literature as of medieval art.³⁹

He goes on to show the allegorical influence of the Song of Songs on the Apocalypse in relation to the poem. The Virgin Mary is here again conjoined with the virgin saints honoured on the feast of All Saints. Augustine’s lesson definitely includes the virgins as crowned with garlands, that is flowers, and the Maiden wears a crown of pearls which is ornamented to resemble flowers. In Herbert of Losinga’s sermon for the day of All Saints crowns are given to the virgins:

Hac in civitate felicissima. conjugati terdenis. et continentes coronantur. lx. sertis et qui virginitatem conservant. centesimi fructus accipiunt retributionem. (In this most blissful city the married are crowned with thirty, the continent with sixty garlands, and they who maintain virginity receive in retribution fruit an hundred-fold.)⁴⁰

Line 1186 of the Pearl’s Epilogue, ‘Pat ṣou so styke3 in garlande gay’ has generated numerous discussions about the crown of pearls and a possible reference to one here. Jacobus de Voragine’s Legenda Aurea reiterates the Breviary reference to the garland, but definitely states that it is a crown and not flowers: ‘Ipsae namque virgines coronam aureolam habebunt’.⁴¹ (For the virgins will have the golden crown.) The evidence from the All Saints’ liturgy indicates that the virgin bands were crowned with garlands or crowns, but that does not negate the possibility of reading line 1186 as the Maiden set within a garland similar to Dante’s ghirlanda of encircling souls in the Paradiso (X.92). Both interpretations set the Maiden among the virgin saints in heaven.

Finally, the ninth reading for the day exhorts Christians to follow in the saviour’s footsteps that they may join the ranks of the blessed:

Christus semetipsum tradidit: ut acquireret te regnum Deo Patri. Ita et tu teipsum da, ut sis regnum ejus: ac non regnet peccatum in mortali tuo corpore, sed Spiritus in acquisitionem vitae (iii, col. 977-78).

³⁹ Pearl, xxi.
⁴¹ Ed. Th. Graesse, 3rd ed. (1845; Bratislava: Koebner, 1890), 726.
(Christ gave himself up: so that He might obtain the kingdom of God the Father for you. And so you give yourself, so that you might become his kingdom: and let not sin reign in your mortal body, but let the spirit reign in it so you might obtain life.)

The feast of All Saints commemorates the joyous company of the saints in the heavenly paradise, yet the liturgy for this feast also directs attention to those on earth who desire to join that assembly after death. In Pearl, too, the Maiden first imparts the lesson of salvation to the Dreamer and then designates the path he must take in order to take his place with her and her companions:

Innoghe þer wax out of þat welle,
Blod and water of brode wounde.
Þe blod vus boȝt fro bale of helle
And deluyered vus of þe deth secounde;
Þe water is baptem, þe sone þe telle. (649–53)

If a mortal should sin, then ‘Þe gyltyf may contryssyoun hente/ And be þurȝ mercy to grace þryȝt’ (669–70). The person who is without sin is as the innocent, for ‘Þe ryȝtwys man schal se hys face’ (675). Thus the Pearl-maiden elucidates the meaning of the pearl of great price and exhorts the Dreamer to ‘forsake þe worlde wode/ And porchace þy perl þe maskelles’ (743–44). Pearl, like the liturgy for All Saints, reminds us that ‘Þe Lombe þe sakerfyse’ (1064) has redeemed humankind, saving the innocent child and just Christian, making them worthy to enter the New Jerusalem. The words of the antiphon at Lauds taken from Apocalypse 5.9–10 imports the same message: ‘Redemisti nos, Domine Deus, in sanguine tuo ex omni tribu et lingua et populo et natione: et fecisti nos Deo nostro regnum’ (iii, 978 and 980). (And Thou hast redeemed us, Lord God, in thy blood, out of every tribe, and tongue and people, and nation, and made us to our God, a kingdom.) Christ’s saving death has not only redeemed the Maiden but the Dreamer as well.

The importance of the material gathered here is that it is not scattered in different works, commenting on different events, but is found in the liturgy relating to one feast – All Saints. Just as the compilers of the liturgy for the day saw the importance of biblical, patristic and medieval texts and hymns for their theme, so the Pearl-poet could have seen that parts of this liturgy admirably fit his own topic. It is because his lost Pearl delights in the Lamb with all the saints that he can be happy on earth:

If hit be ueray and soth sermoun
Þat þou so stykeȝ in garlande gay,
So wel is me in þys doel-doungoun.
Þat þou arȝ to þat Prynsȝ paye. (1185–88)

The feast not only honours saints, who through their own merits have gained a place next to the Lamb, but it specifically honours baptized
children who died before reaching the age of reason. The opening of
the sermon for ‘All Hallows’ in the *Speculum Sacerdotale* enumerates
those commemorated in this feast:

In siche a day, my syres, 3e schul haue the feste of alle halloween, *scilicet*, of Seynt
Marie the Virgine, of aungeles, patriarkes, prophetis, apostles, euaungelistis, mar-
tires, confessoures, virgines, and eke alle oper seyntis and chosyn children that ben
fro pe lowe lyf of this erpeliche worlde inhied in-to the ioyeful blisse of heuene.42

Baptism was the key which opened the door of heaven to the ‘chosyn’
child. All Saints is the only feast which singles out innocent, baptized
children and celebrates their attainment of the joyful bliss of heaven, a
striking contrast to the feast of the Holy Innocents, which com-
memorates the martyrdom of male infants.

The author of the poem presents us with a paradox: how can the
Narrator be happy if he still must abide in ‘rys doel-doungoun’, an
earthy prison full of sorrow? The Church presented an explanation for
this mystery – the apparent finality of death is not the end but the
beginning of eternal delight and mirth in the heavenly Jerusalem. The
answer the poem supplies for this paradox is the Dreamer’s vision of
his ‘lyttel quene’ (1147). In the climactic procession of Section XIX,
the epistle reading from the Vigil of All Saints is paraphrased. It is no
wonder that the sight of the white-vested virgins, the prostrate elders,
the legions of angels casting forth incense and the sound of the new
song so moves the beholder that he wishes to join in this heavenly
celebration: ‘Pat sy3t me gart to 3enk to wade/ For luf-longyng in gret
delyt’ (1151–52). Though he is dismayed and sorrowful that his
rashness has so suddenly terminated his vision, he is happy because he
has committed his Pearl to God. He has seen his innocent daughter
safe and secure with the Prince of heaven. All previous arguments and
discussions become insignificant in the face of this vision. The lost
Pearl has been found and set among the saints in eternal bliss. The
Dreamer is not cut off from his daughter, for he and all other
Christians may join the Community of Saints as well. The Narrator
thus asks God that he may become His household servant in his final
prayer: ‘He gef vus to be his homly hyne/ Ande precious perle3 vnto
his pay’ (1211–12). He, too, may join the retinue of saints following
the Lamb and be together in bliss with his Pearl.

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