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The Prodigal's Journey: Ideologies of Self and City in the Gothic Cathedral

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The Prodigal's Journey: Ideologies of Self and City in the Gothic Cathedral

By Gerald B. Guest

As the great Gothic cathedrals of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were constructed and adorned with complex programs of sculpture and glass, certain figures and certain stories took on unprecedented iconographic popularity. The parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15.11–32) was one such story. This tale of a young man's journey and his successive transformations became one of the most privileged visual narratives in France during the first half of the thirteenth century. It is the goal of this article to consider the likely reasons for this popularity and the narrative's relevance for medieval viewers. I will argue that the artists and clerics who designed these works of art refashioned the parable into a pointed commentary on contemporary urban life. The picture cycles in question assert that there were two economies at work in the medieval city, one spiritual, the other material. At a time when there were violent clashes over the building of Gothic cathedrals, the narrative cycles of the prodigal son allowed thirteenth-century clerics to figure the secular spaces of the medieval city as sites of deception and corruption and to contend that only through penitence and renunciation could one achieve salvation.¹ I will argue that interwoven with this ideology of place is a powerful model of Christian identity.²

THE STORY

As Wolfgang Kemp has noted, before the thirteenth century the parable of the prodigal son was comparatively rare in art.³ There are, for example, only a handful

For comments on this article I would like to thank Jonathan J. G. Alexander, Virginia Chieffo Raguin, Madeline H. Caviness, Anne E. Lester, and the two anonymous readers for *Speculum*. Research undertaken for this article was supported by a summer research fellowship from John Carroll University.

¹ Such a figuration may also have served to bolster the economic status of the cathedral in the medieval city. For a consideration of the clergy's role in urban economies at this time, see Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1978), pp. 99–112; and John W. Baldwin, *Masters, Princes, and Merchants: The Social Views of Peter the Chanter and His Circle*, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J., 1970), esp. 1:66–69, 135–36, and (on usury) 270–311.

² On notions of subjectivity and interiority, a useful starting point for medievalists is David Aers, "A Whisper in the Ear of Early-Modernists," in *Culture and History, 1350–1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities, and Writing*, ed. David Aers (Detroit, 1992), pp. 177–202.

³ See Wolfgang Kemp, *The Narratives of Gothic Stained Glass*, trans. Caroline Dobson Saltzweid (Cambridge, Eng., 1997), pp. 10–11. Kemp offers a structuralist method for understanding the narrative windows of the thirteenth century. The windows of the prodigal son considered in the present article also figure prominently in his text. My understanding of these artworks is not necessarily incompatible with his but is instead an attempt to offer a different way of reading Gothic visual

of Romanesque examples. A possible capital on the north portal at the Church of Saint-Lazare in Autun (to be discussed below) and illustrations in the Eadwine Psalter and Floreffe Bible are among the most notable survivals.⁴ A few early images also survive from the Byzantine world.⁵ After 1200, however, the popularity of the parable in art would continue to grow into the Renaissance and beyond.⁶ The major image cycles that survive from the thirteenth century are as follows:⁷

1. Chartres Cathedral, window 35 in the north transept, thirty scenes, ca. 1200–1210.⁸

narratives. For an important consideration of the narratological turn in stained-glass studies, see Madeline H. Caviness, “Biblical Stories in Windows: Were They Bibles for the Poor?” in *The Bible in the Middle Ages: Its Influence on Literature and Art*, ed. Bernard S. Levy, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 89 (Binghamton, N.Y., 1992), pp. 103–47.

⁴ On the prodigal son at Autun see Denis Grivot and George Zarnecki, *Gislebertus: Sculptor of Autun* (New York, 1981), pp. 147 and 173. In the Floreffe Bible the illustration of the prodigal son is found in volume 2, fol. 187r. On this image see Werner Telesko, “The Picture of the Crucifixion in the Floreffe Bible (London, BL, Add. MS 17738, F. 187r): Typology as an Expression of the History of Salvation,” *British Library Journal* 19 (1993), 105–9. For the Eadwine Psalter (Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R.17.1) see *The Eadwine Psalter: Text, Image, and Monastic Culture in Twelfth-Century Canterbury*, ed. Margaret Gibson, T. A. Heslop, and Richard W. Pfaff, Publications of the Modern Humanities Research Association 14 (London, 1992), p. 37, pl. 11 (the eight vignettes recounting the parable are now found in New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M.521, recto). The image here constitutes a cycle unto itself and contains many similarities to the Gothic cycles, suggesting that the ultimate roots of the imagery considered here may go back to the twelfth century or earlier.

⁵ There are images, for example, in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MSS gr. 74 (an eleventh-century Gospel book) and gr. 923 (the ninth-century *Sacra parallela*).

⁶ Episodes from the story were illustrated by such diverse artists as Dürer, Lucas van Leyden, Rembrandt, Rubens, Murillo, Benjamin West, Puvis de Chavannes, Rodin, Thomas Hart Benton, and Brancusi. On this tradition, useful starting points include Ellen G. D’Oench, *Prodigal Son Narratives, 1480–1980* (New Haven, Conn., 1995); and Kurt Kallensee, *Die Liebe des Vaters: Das Gleichnis vom verlorenen Sohn in der christlichen Dichtung und bildenden Kunst* (Berlin, 1960).

⁷ There are no significant cycles from outside of France at this time. The window numbering adopted here is that used by the Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi. As can be seen, the parable was especially popular in stained glass. In addition to the major thirteenth-century cycles there is a single scene dating to before 1235 at Lincoln Cathedral. The inscription on the panel “(HIC E)PVLAN(TUR) FILIO REVERSO” (They make a feast for the returned son) secures its identification. See Nigel Morgan, *The Medieval Painted Glass of Lincoln Cathedral*, Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi, Great Britain, Occasional Papers 3 (London, 1983), pp. 23, 30–31, and pl. 3. Virginia Raguin has kindly informed me that the prodigal son roundels in the Krannert Art Museum of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign are fakes. A panel in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, is also a fake. Two panels in the University of Rochester are also modern (see Meredith Parsons Lillich, *Stained Glass before 1700 in Upstate New York*, Corpus Vitrearum, United States of America, 2/1 [London, 2004], pp. 161–62).

⁸ For the prodigal son window at Chartres, I am adopting the dating of 1200–1210 recently proposed by Brigitte Kurmann-Schwarz and Peter Kurmann (in *Chartres: La cathédrale* [Saint-Leger-Vauban, 2001], p. 192). Key bibliography on the window includes Colette and Jean-Paul Deremble, *Vitraux de Chartres* (Paris, 2003), pp. 190–94; Colette Manhes-Deremble with Jean-Paul Deremble, *Les vitraux narratifs de la cathédrale de Chartres: Étude iconographique*, Corpus Vitrearum, France, Études 2 (Paris, 1993), pp. 25, 70, 159–63, and 348–49; Claudine Lautier, “Les peintres-verriers des bas-côtés de la nef de Chartres au début du XIIIe siècle,” *Bulletin monumental* 149 (1990), 7–45, at pp. 12, 36, and 39; Jean-Paul Deremble and Colette Manhes, *Les vitraux légendaires de Chartres: Des récits en images* (Paris, 1988), pp. 99, 106, 111, 116, and 121; Kemp, *Narratives*, pp. 10–14, 22–31, and 178–85; *Les vitraux du centre et des pays de la Loire*, Corpus Vitrearum, France, Recensement des Vitraux Anciens de la France 2 (Paris, 1981), p. 33; and Yves Delaporte and Étienne Houvet, *Les vitraux de la cathédrale de Chartres* (Chartres, 1926), pp. 381–83, fig. 47, and pls. cl–cliii.

2. Sens Cathedral, window 17 in the north ambulatory, twelve scenes, ca. 1207–15.⁹
3. Bourges Cathedral, window 5 in the north ambulatory, twenty scenes, ca. 1210–15.¹⁰
4. Poitiers Cathedral, window in the south transept, nineteen scenes, after 1210.¹¹
5. The two three-volume *Bibles moralisées* (Toledo, Cathedral Treasury, MS 3, and London, British Library, MS Harley 1527), nine and eight scenes (respectively), probably conceived in the late 1220s.¹²
6. Coutances Cathedral, central window in the Chapel of Saint-Louis, twelve scenes, after 1220.¹³
7. Auxerre Cathedral, window 12 in the south ambulatory, twenty-five scenes, ca. 1233–44.¹⁴
8. Auxerre Cathedral, sculpture on the west facade, fourteen scenes, ca. 1260–70.¹⁵

⁹ For the prodigal son window at Sens, see the following: Kemp, *Narratives*, pp. 98–101, 179, 181, and 202; *Les vitraux de Bourgogne, Franche-Comté, et Rhône-Alpes*, Corpus Vitrearum, France, Recensement des Vitraux Anciens de la France 3 (Paris, 1986), p. 179; Louis Grodecki, *Gothic Stained Glass, 1200–1300* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1985), pp. 86–90 and fig. 72; and Lucien Bégule, *La cathédrale de Sens, son architecture, son décor* (Lyons, 1929), pp. 50–51 and figs. 58–61.

¹⁰ On the prodigal son window at Bourges see François Thomas and Jean-Yves Ribault, *Où chercher la vie? La parabole du fils prodigue racontée par le vitrail de la cathédrale de Bourges* (Tours, 1995); *Les vitraux du centre*, p. 170; Kemp, *Narratives*, pp. 32–41; and Kurt Haselhorst, *Die hochgotischen Glasfenster der Kathedrale von Bourges: Studien zur Geschichte der Glasfensterkunst des 13. Jahrhunderts in den Kathedralen Frankreichs* (Munich, 1974), p. 48. The Bourges prodigal son window is the only surviving window of the parable to have donors.

¹¹ On the stained glass at Poitiers see Virginia Chieffo Raguin, “The Architectural and Glazing Context of Poitiers Cathedral: A Reassessment of Integration,” in *Artistic Integration in Gothic Buildings*, ed. Virginia Chieffo Raguin, Kathryn Brush, and Peter Draper (Toronto, 1995), pp. 167–94; Louis Grodecki, “Les vitraux de la cathédrale de Poitiers,” *Congrès archéologique de France* 109 (1951), 138–63; and Louis Grodecki, “A Stained Glass ‘Atelier’ of the Thirteenth Century: A Study of Windows in the Cathedrals of Bourges, Chartres and Poitiers,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 11 (1948), 87–111.

¹² The three-volume *Bibles moralisées* expand upon two earlier single-volume editions that do not contain the Gospels and thus do not feature the prodigal son narrative. For an introduction to the *Bible moralisée* as a genre, see John Lowden, *The Making of the Bibles moralisées*, 2 vols. (University Park, Pa., 2000). Facsimiles are available of both three-volume Bibles. For the Oxford-Paris-London Bible see Alexandre de Laborde, *La Bible moralisée illustrée conservée à Oxford, Paris et Londres* (Paris, 1911–27). For the Toledo Bible see *Biblia de San Luis* (Barcelona, 2000–2002).

¹³ The Chapel of Saint-Louis at Coutances is the westernmost chapel in the north ambulatory. On the cathedral's stained glass see Véronique Chaussé, *Les verrières de la cathédrale Notre-Dame de Coutances, Manche* (Caen, 1999); Michel Le Blond and Fabrice Masson, *Coutances: Un prêtre raconte sa cathédrale* (Paris, 1999); André Mussat, “La cathédrale Notre-Dame de Coutances,” *Congrès archéologique de France* 224 (1966), 9–50; Jean Lafond, “Le vitrail en Normandie de 1250 à 1300,” *Bulletin monumental* 111 (1953), 317–58; and Patrice Colmet Daage with Jean Lafond, *La cathédrale de Coutances* (Paris, 1933), pp. 82–99.

¹⁴ The prodigal son window at Auxerre has lost its first nine scenes. On the glass at Auxerre see *Les vitraux de Bourgogne*, pp. 111–27; Virginia Chieffo Raguin, *Stained Glass in Thirteenth-Century Burgundy* (Princeton, N.J., 1982); and Virginia Chieffo Raguin, “The Genesis Workshop of the Cathedral of Auxerre and Its Parisian Inspiration,” *Gesta* 13 (1974), 27–38.

¹⁵ See Virginia Chieffo Raguin, “Mid-Thirteenth Century Patronage at Auxerre and the Sculptural Program of the Cathedral,” *Studies in Iconography* 14 (1995), 131–51; Susan L. Smith, *The Power of Women: A Topos in Medieval Art and Literature* (Philadelphia, 1995), pp. 128–30; Ursula Quednau, *Die Westportale der Kathedrale von Auxerre*, Forschungen zur Kunstgeschichte und christlichen Archäologie 10 (Wiesbaden, 1979); Don Denny, “Some Narrative Subjects in the Portal Sculpture of Auxerre Cathedral,” *Speculum* 51 (1976), 23–34; Folke Nordström, *The Auxerre Reliefs: A Harbinger*

9. Clermont-Ferrand Cathedral, window in the axial chapel, ten scenes, ca. 1260–70.¹⁶

Given that the cycles in question range from a minimum of eight to a maximum of thirty episodes, it is not surprising to find a fair amount of narrative variety within the corpus. Yet there are often remarkable similarities, suggesting artistic exchanges and a shared understanding of the story. Each cycle, however, presents the story in a unique way. Although it is not possible to construct a genealogical stemma for these nine artworks, their similarities allow them to be considered as a group. A brief summary of the narratives will be useful in the analysis that follows; a more detailed listing of the contents of the cycles can be found below in the Appendix.

In each of the cycles, the story begins as in the biblical text with the younger son's demand for his inheritance. In the lengthier cycles, such as those at Chartres and Bourges, the family's wealth is evident. At Bourges the son wears purple robes and a fur-lined cape that flutters ostentatiously (Fig. 1, row 2). The father sits on a chair draped with a similar fur-lined fabric. At Chartres, Sens, and Bourges, the son receives his inheritance in the form of a gold cup (Fig. 2, row 1; Fig. 3, row 1; Fig. 1, row 3).¹⁷ At Chartres and Bourges, certain details such as the chest placed between the father and the prodigal, the gold vessel that the father holds, and the older son looking on from the fields in the adjacent scene suggest that the designers of the windows had access to some kind of shared model.¹⁸

His purse now filled, the prodigal begins his journey. At Chartres, Bourges, and in the sculpture at Auxerre, he is shown transformed into a chivalric ideal (Fig. 2, row 2; Fig. 1, rows 3–4). He travels in fine clothes, on horseback and with a groom leading the way. At Bourges and in the Auxerre sculpture, a falcon rests on his wrist. Arriving at a city, the prodigal exchanges his horse and his groom for the company of women (Fig. 2, rows 2–4; Fig. 3, row 2; Fig. 1, rows 4–5; Figs. 4–5). That prostitution contributed to the prodigal's bankruptcy is suggested in the biblical text ("But as soon as this thy son is come, who hath devoured his substance with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf," Luke 15.30); the picture cycles, however, transform that brief reference into one of the central aspects of the story. The journey, whose visual form had previously suggested the possibility of romance and adventure, now takes as its setting the less courtly realm of the city. At Chartres a walled structure indicates the urban setting (Fig. 2, row 2).

of the Renaissance in France during the Reign of Philip le Bel, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Figura, n.s., 13 (Uppsala, 1974), pp. 35–52; and Willibald Sauerländer, *Gothic Sculpture in France, 1140–1270*, trans. Janet Sondheimer (London, 1972), pp. 499–501. Raguin convincingly refutes Denny's argument that the iconography of the west facade was determined in part by the personal history of Jean de Chalons, count of Auxerre. She argues that the iconographic program was more likely created under the authority of Bishop Guy de Mello (r. 1247–69).

¹⁶ The surviving prodigal son scenes can now be found in two adjacent lancets. On Clermont-Ferrand's stained glass see René Berger, "Les vitraux de la cathédrale Notre-Dame de Clermont," *L'Auvergne littéraire, artistique, et historique* 45 (1968), 2–40; and Henri Du Ranquet, *Les vitraux de la cathédrale de Clermont-Ferrand* (Clermont-Ferrand, 1932).

¹⁷ In the *Bible moralisée* the inheritance is shown as a money bag and dish of coins.

¹⁸ The Chartres window is perhaps the earlier of the two, but one cannot be certain.

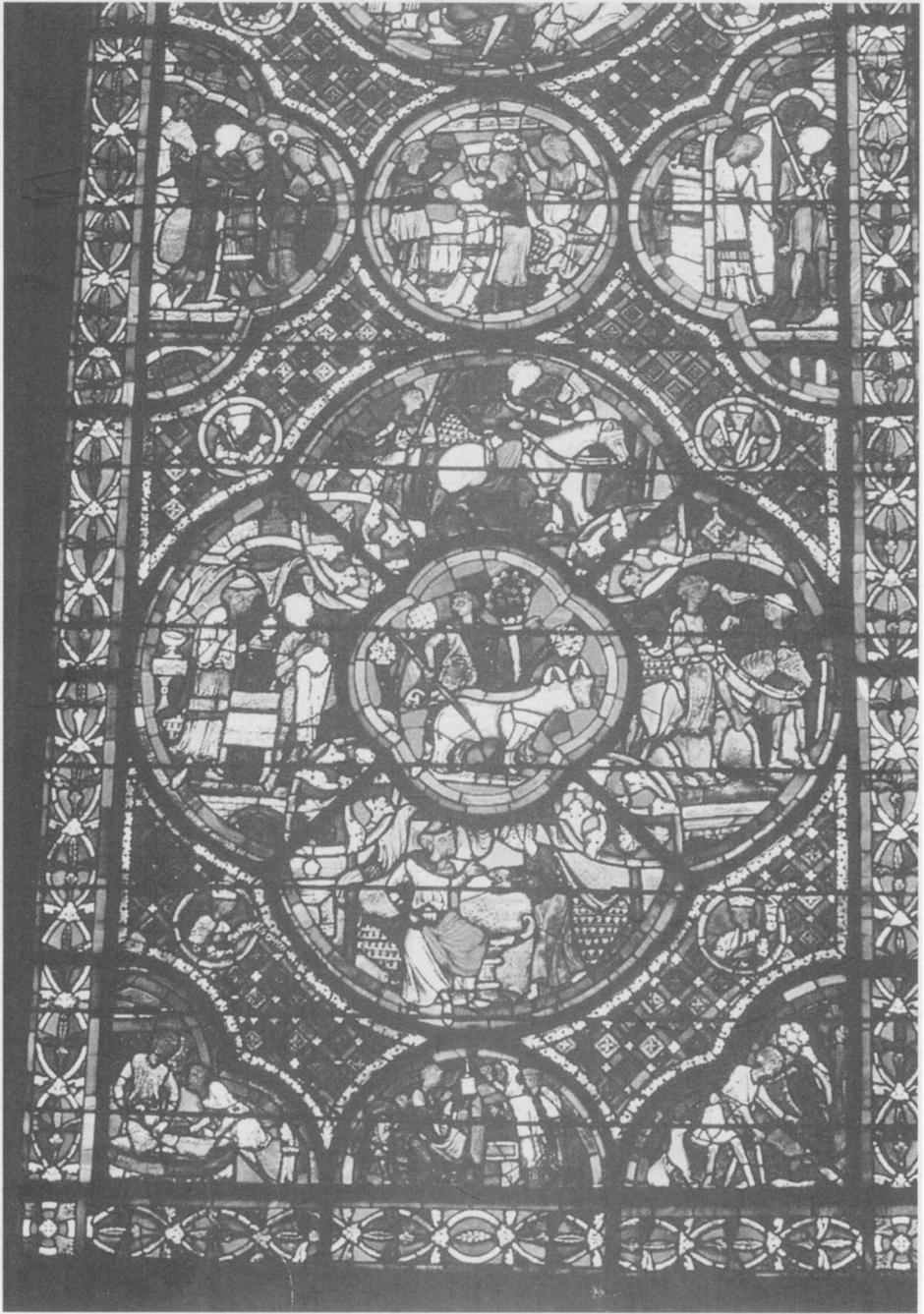


Fig. 1. Bourges Cathedral. The prodigal son window (lower half, rows 1–5, numbered from the bottom up). (Photograph: the author)

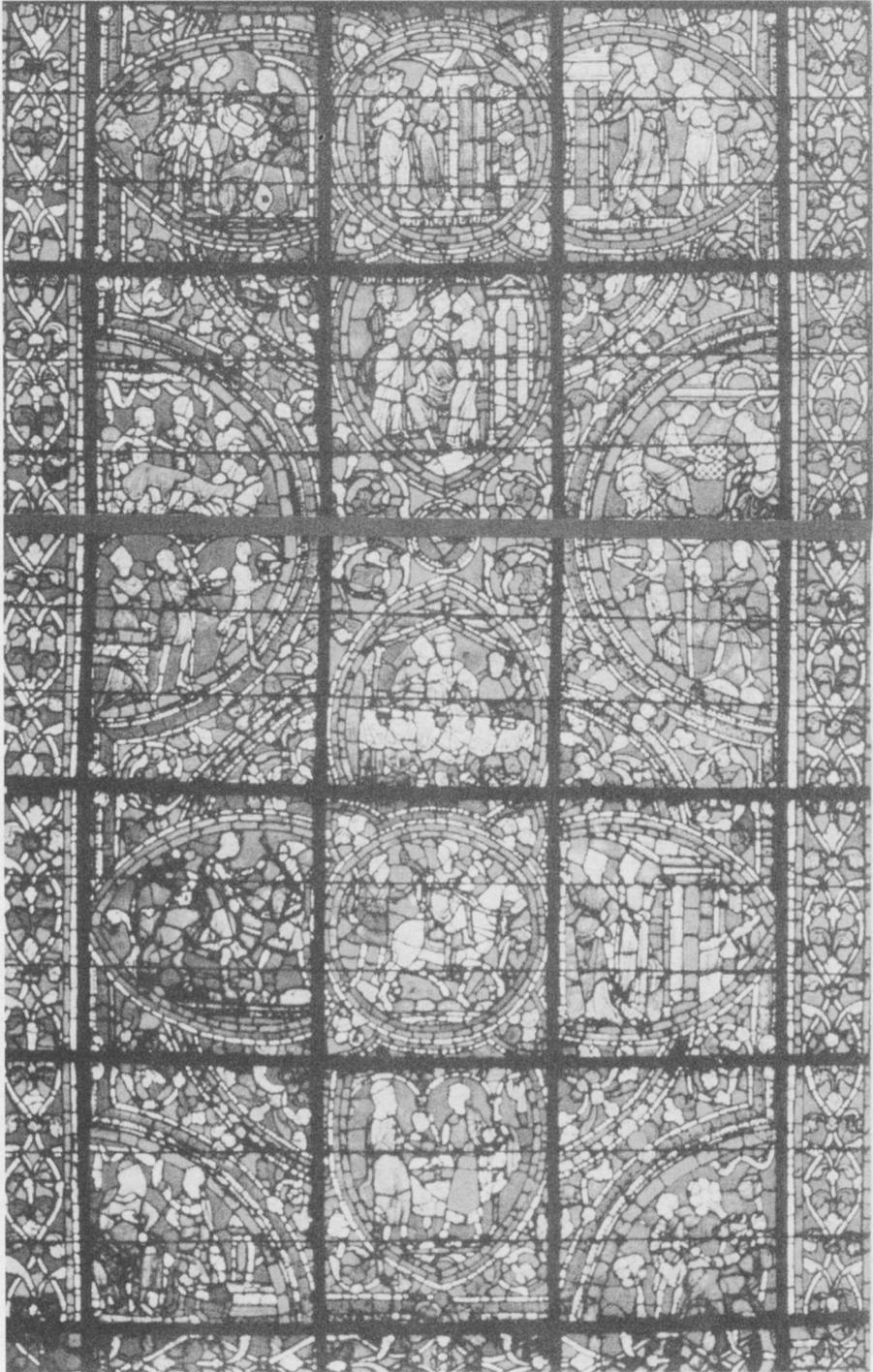


Fig. 2. Chartres Cathedral. The prodigal son window (lower half, rows 1–5). (Photograph: from Colette Manhes-Deremble with Jean-Paul Deremble, *Les vitraux narratifs de la cathédrale de Chartres: Étude iconographique*, Corpus Vitrearum, France, Études 2 [Paris, 1993]. Reproduced with permission)

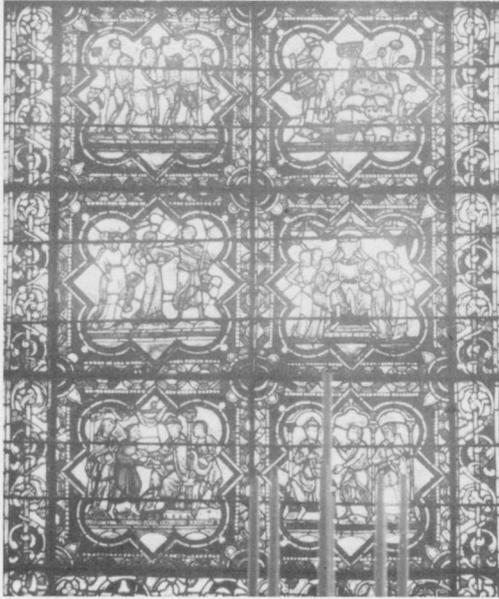


Fig. 3. Sens Cathedral. The prodigal son window (lower half, rows 1–3). (Photograph: Centre des monuments nationaux, Paris. Reproduced with permission)



Fig. 4. Auxerre Cathedral. Prodigal son reliefs; central door, west facade. (Photograph: Art Resource. Reproduced with permission)



Fig. 5. Auxerre Cathedral. The prodigal son being bathed in the brothel; central door, west facade. (Photograph: the author)

The prodigal is seen next inside a brothel, where he is feted as any wealthy, young man would be. At Chartres he is given a lavish banquet, whose depiction stretches across the entire width of the window (Fig. 2, row 3). The prodigal sits at center, flanked by two other figures, including a woman who kisses him; in the side panels servants carry serving vessels. An additional and unique scene in the Auxerre sculpture shows the prodigal being bathed in a tub surrounded by three women, one of whom plays a drum and perhaps sings (Fig. 5). In addition, nearly all of the thirteenth-century cycles show the prostitutes crowning the prodigal with a chaplet of flowers, as if he were their lord (Fig. 2, row 4; Fig. 3, row 2; Fig. 1, row 5).¹⁹ The widespread use of this scene, which has no correlative in the biblical text, again suggests that detailed models were circulating among artisans at this time.

After the celebrations in the brothel, several of the cycles feature tavern scenes. Sequences can be found in the early cycles at Chartres and Bourges as well as in the *Bible moralisée* and perhaps in the window at Poitiers (Fig. 2, row 4; Fig. 6, row 6; Fig. 7).²⁰ The biblical text, however, makes no reference to a tavern. At Bourges the prodigal is first shown leaving the brothel in a short tunic and hose, not the clothes worn upon his arrival (Fig. 1, row 5). At the tavern the situation deteriorates; he is shown wearing only drawers while playing dice and presumably losing more of his money. At Chartres the gambling is followed by a scene where the prodigal is stripped and beaten by two men and a woman (Fig. 2, row 5). In this same row follow two similar scenes of the half-naked prodigal's return to the brothel. In the second he is driven away with a club.²¹

From here, the picture cycles follow the biblical text more closely. As the Vulgate relates, the bankrupt prodigal is forced to find work and secures a job tending pigs for a landowner. At Chartres alone the prodigal is shown striking an oak tree to knock down acorns to feed the pigs (Fig. 8, row 6).²² At Chartres, Bourges, and in the Auxerre glass, he is shown in a separate scene, contemplating his station (Fig. 8, row 6; Fig. 6, row 7; Fig. 9, row 5). This is undoubtedly a representation of the moment in the biblical text when the prodigal "returns to himself" ("in se autem reversus," Luke 15.17). The narrative doubles back as the son resolves to return home to seek his father's forgiveness.

It is only in the Chartres window that the actual journeying is depicted (Fig. 8, row 7). The prodigal departs with only a walking stick, still dressed as a swineherd. He is then reunited with his father. At Chartres they stand opposite one another, but elsewhere there is an embrace as described in Luke 15.20 (Fig. 10,

¹⁹ The scene can be found at Chartres, Bourges, Sens, in the Auxerre sculpture, and at Clermont-Ferrand. It is not present in the windows at Auxerre, Poitiers, and Coutances; these windows are, however, heavily restored. The absence of the scene in the *Bibles moralisées* may be due to the parable's condensed presentation.

²⁰ It is only at Bourges that a wine barrel is shown, indicating for certain that the scene takes place at an inn or tavern.

²¹ The detail of the club is found at Chartres, Bourges, Clermont-Ferrand, and in the Auxerre sculpture.

²² This motif is also commonly used to illustrate November in labors of the months. See, for example, fig. I-10 in Bridget Ann Henisch, *The Medieval Calendar Year* (University Park, Pa., 1999).

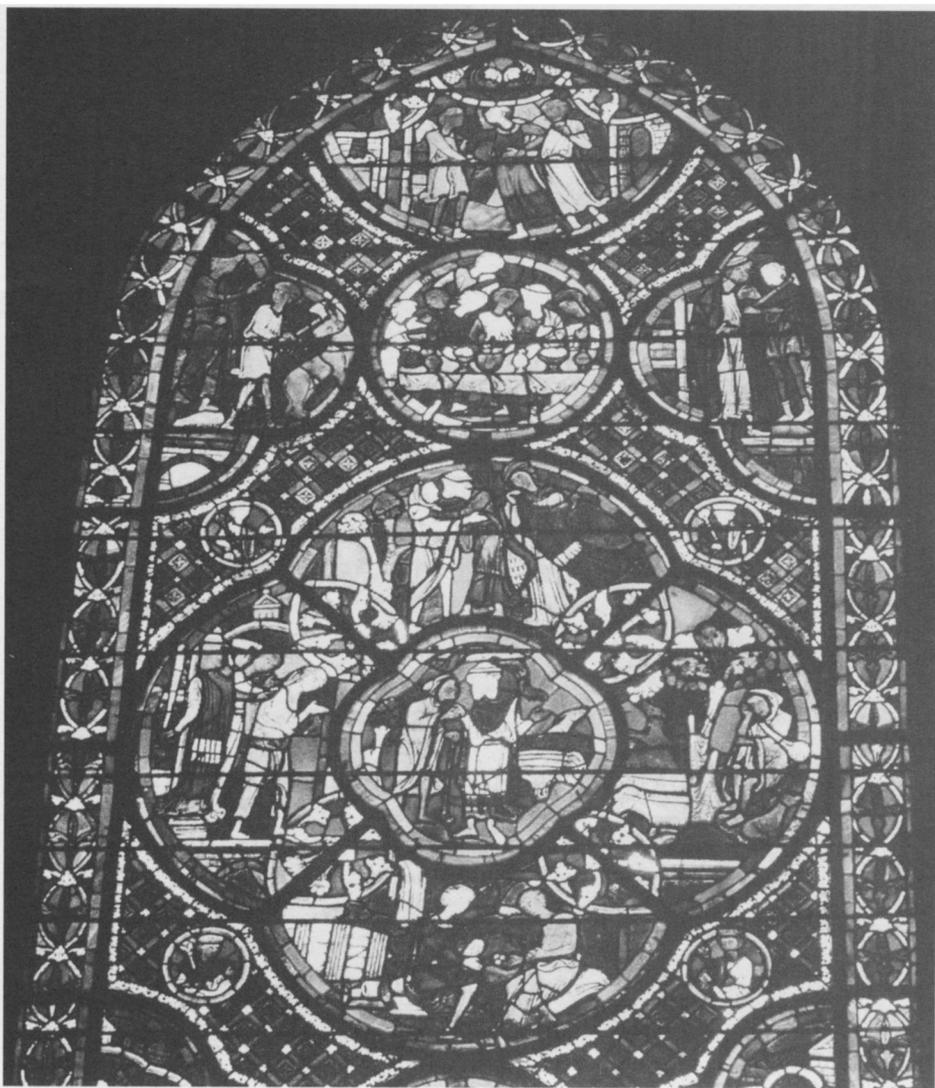


Fig. 6 (above). Bourges Cathedral. The prodigal son window (upper half, rows 6–10).
(Photograph: the author)



Fig. 7 (right). *Bible moralisée* (British Library, MS Harley 1527, fol. 34v, detail). The prodigal son in the tavern.
(Photograph: from Alexandre de Laborde, *La Bible moralisée illustrée conservée à Oxford, Paris et Londres* [Paris, 1911–27]. Reproduced by permission of the British Library)

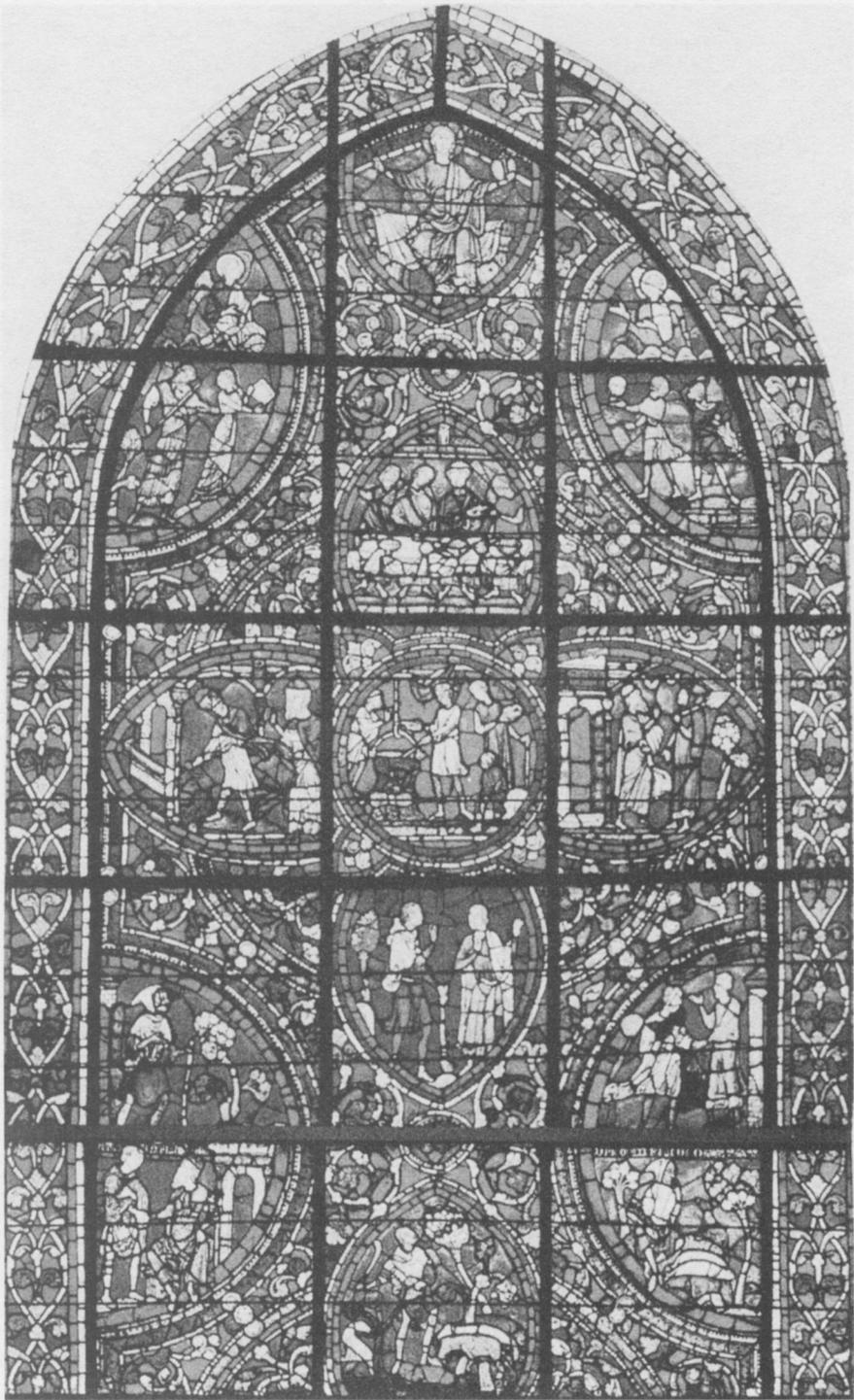


Fig. 8. Chartres Cathedral. The prodigal son window (upper half, rows 6–10).
(Photograph: as Fig. 2, above)

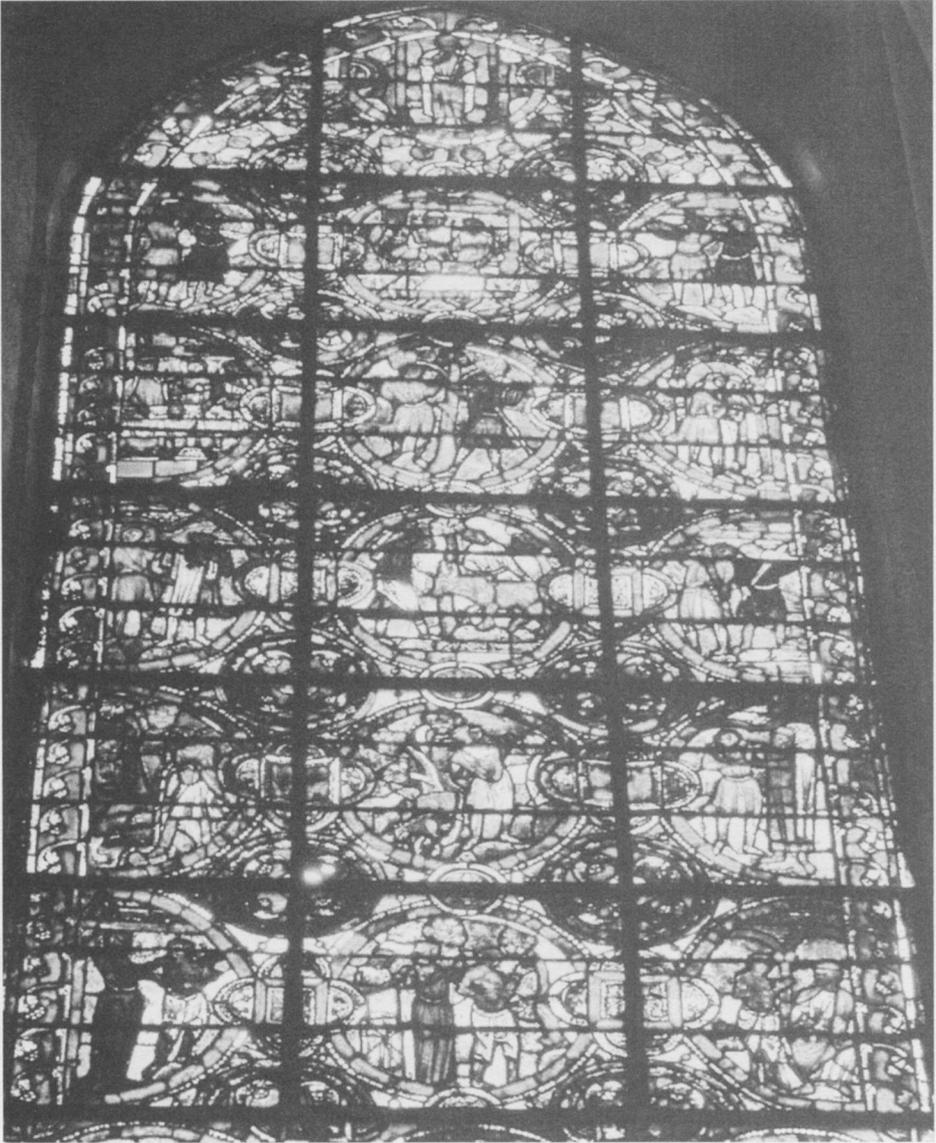


Fig. 9. Auxerre Cathedral. The prodigal son window (rows 4–9).
(Photograph: the author)

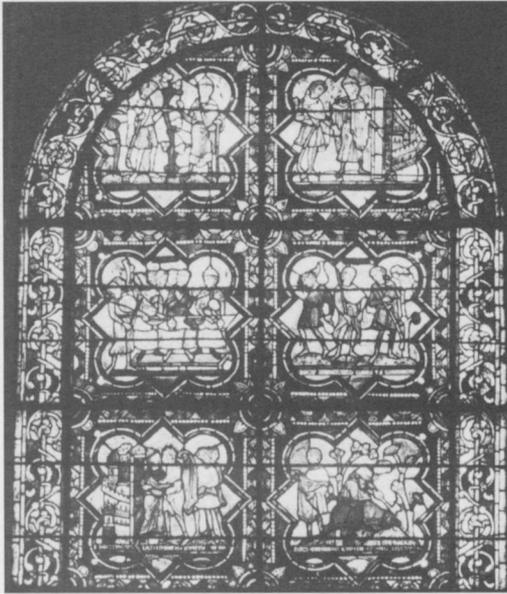


Fig. 10. Sens Cathedral. The prodigal son window (upper half, rows 4–6). (Photograph: as Fig. 3, above)

row 4; Fig. 6, row 8; Fig. 9, row 5).²³ The prodigal is then brought new clothes,²⁴ and the fatted calf is killed (Fig. 8, rows 7–8; Fig. 10, row 4; Fig. 6, rows 8–9; Fig. 9, row 6).²⁵ The wealth that the son had lost is, in a sense, restored to him in the form of clothes and food. The family celebrates (Fig. 8, row 9; Fig. 10, row 5; Fig. 6, row 9; Fig. 9, row 8).

The older brother, however, is resentful. In several of the windows the father is shown appeasing him during the banquet.²⁶ At Chartres this is shown before the actual meal takes place (Fig. 8, row 8). At Bourges the older son's protest is placed after the meal (Fig. 6, row 9). In the Sens and Auxerre windows, the recensions seem to follow the biblical text in which the older brother first speaks to a servant and then to his father (Fig. 10, rows 5–6; Fig. 9, row 7). Uniquely at Bourges, the window's final scene depicts the father bringing together his two sons in forgiveness (Fig. 6, row 10). The prodigal's journey has ended.

THE FRAME

As this brief summation indicates, the thirteenth-century prodigal son cycles offer a retelling of the parable that, for the most part, retains the basic plot of the

²³ At Bourges, both Auxerre cycles, Sens, and Clermont-Ferrand.

²⁴ See also Poitiers (scene 11), the *Bibles moralisées* (episode 5), and the Auxerre sculpture (scene 9). At Bourges it appears that a woman brings in the new clothing. Is this perhaps the prodigal's mother?

²⁵ See also Poitiers (scene 16), the *Bibles moralisées* (episode 6), the Auxerre sculpture (scene 10), and Clermont-Ferrand (scene 8).

²⁶ See also the final episode in the *Bible moralisée*.

biblical text while greatly amplifying the story with details and incidents not contained there. Taken as a whole, these picture cycles offer expansive reimaginings of the story. This amplification was done perhaps in part to fill the various spaces in question.²⁷ The longest of the cycles, the Chartres window, contains thirty distinct panels. However, amplification alone does not account for the complexity of this window. I will argue that much of the contemporary relevance of the parable is to be found in the way in which it was expanded with a specific focus on the prodigal's downfall in the city. The artists and clerics responsible for designing these cycles created powerful reinterpretations of the parable tailored to the rapidly changing world of northern France in the thirteenth century, a world of growing urbanization and division between city and countryside.

Before turning to the broader cultural meaning of the story, it will be useful to consider briefly some of the ways in which the different picture cycles were structured. Each offers a distinct frame for the narrative.²⁸

There does not seem to be a programmatic rationale for placing the Chartres window in the north transept; however, later in this paper I will suggest a possible liturgical explanation for its location there.²⁹ The window is divided into ten rows, each with three panels. The designer was careful to plan the cycle in harmony with this design; most of the rows offer unified narratological groupings.³⁰ Some rows, such as the banquet in the brothel, can be read as triptychs (Fig. 2, row 3). In addition, the central scenes form a narrative spine, anchoring the story.³¹ The designer also seemed to be interested in doublings or narrative recapitulations. The banquet at the brothel is paralleled later by the banquet at the father's house (Fig. 2, row 3, versus Fig. 8, row 9). The prodigal seems to lose his clothes while playing dice but is then shown being beaten and stripped (Fig. 2, rows 4–5). The journey as a whole can be diagrammed as follows (reading from bottom to top as in the window):

²⁷ On medieval notions of amplification as they relate to the production of stained-glass windows, see Alyce A. Jordan, *Visualizing Kingship in the Windows of the Sainte-Chapelle*, Publications of the International Center of Medieval Art 5 (Turnhout, 2002), pp. 9–14.

²⁸ In recent years scholars have staked out what might be called a new formalism in the study of stained-glass windows. Important attention has been focused on such areas as armature design, formal parallels between scenes, and the repetition of key themes. Beyond this, the field has also been influenced by the disciplines of structuralism and narratology. Key publications in this area include Kemp, *Narratives* (above, n. 3); Manhes-Deremble, *Les vitraux narratifs* (above, n. 8); Deremble and Manhes, *Les vitraux légendaires* (above, n. 8); Caviness, "Biblical Stories in Windows" (above, n. 3); and Wolfgang Kemp, "Les cris de Chartres: Rezeptionsästhetische und andere Überlegungen zu zwei Fenstern der Kathedrale von Chartres," in *Kunstgeschichte—aber wie?* ed. Clemens Fruh, Raphael Rosenberg, and Hans-Peter Rosinski (Berlin, 1989), pp. 189–220. It is my goal here to appropriate this discourse of structure and story but to pull it into the realm of the social to offer a critique of the ideology of the cycles in question.

²⁹ Most scholars have argued that there was not an overall program governing the iconography and placement of the windows. For an attempt at a programmatic reading of the glass, see Manhes-Deremble, *Les vitraux narratifs*, esp. pp. 37–73.

³⁰ For Kemp, the Chartres window "adheres to the idea of the linear sequence with faultless consistency" and "avoids any kind of enjambment of either form or content" (*Narratives*, p. 22). Each line can thus be thought of as an independent narrative building block.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

The Prodigal's Journey

God and angels (row 10)
 Home again (rows 8–9)
 The road (row 7)
 Tending the pigs (row 6)
 The city (rows 3–5)
 The road (row 2)
 Home (row 1).

There is thus a basic symmetry to the narrative in its movement away from and then back to home.³² This structuration is meaningful. The first half of the narrative ends with the prodigal penniless in the city. The second half details his repentance, his journey home, and the forgiveness of the father. The city and the father's house stand as two contrasting narrative spaces, places of material and spiritual wealth, respectively.

In terms of details, the cycle closest to the Chartres window is the Bourges window. At Bourges the window is placed in the northern half of the ambulatory along with the parables of the good Samaritan and Dives and Lazarus. Together, these three windows might be said to offer lessons in virtuous behavior (or lack thereof) for the pious viewer. The narrative here is significantly reduced, containing only seventeen scenes. The armature, however, is more complex. In simple terms, the window's ten rows alternate consistently between groups of three scenes and single scenes. Because of this, scenes that would seem to go together are often separated. For example, the three scenes of the prodigal's departure from home and arrival in the city are dispersed over three rows (Fig. 1, rows 3–5), whereas at Chartres they constitute a single row. At Bourges there are some surprising repetitions, which may have been inserted for narrative clarity. Upon arriving in the city, the prodigal is seen embracing a prostitute in both scenes 8 and 9 (Fig. 1, rows 4–5). He is shown being crowned in scenes 9 and 10 (Fig. 1, row 5). Overall, it would seem that the tight narrative organization that one finds at Chartres is somewhat compromised at Bourges, perhaps because of the complexity of the latter window's armature. This feature may suggest that the Bourges window is a slightly later adaptation of the model used at Chartres, but that is far from certain.³³

At Sens the prodigal son window sits in the north ambulatory beside the window of the good Samaritan. The former contains twelve scenes, paired in six rows, each within a barbed quatrefoil. Compared with Chartres and Bourges, the narrative is remarkably condensed with each row roughly constituting a unit in the story. As at Chartres, the window is divided roughly in two with the lower half

³² Kemp speaks of its "ordered arithmetic" (*ibid.*, p. 29).

³³ Virtually all of the scenes at Chartres are present in the reduced narrative of Bourges with the exception of the striking final scene at the apex of the Bourges window depicting the father bringing the two sons together in an image of reconciliation. The two windows, however, are less close stylistically. The window at Chartres has been grouped generally with the windows of the nave, which was the first part of the church to be glazed. Nevertheless, Lautier has argued that the window itself cannot be linked stylistically to any one of the nave windows ("Les peintres-verriers" [above, n. 8], p. 36). The window at Bourges has been attributed to the so-called Master of the Relics of St. Stephen (see Grodecki, "A Stained Glass 'Atelier'" [above, n. 11], pp. 87–88). Grodecki argued that this shop was local to Bourges and without a great deal of influence beyond the city.

detailing the prodigal's journey away from home and the entire upper half dedicated to the events of his return, beginning with the father's embrace. This is the only window in the corpus with Latin captions for each episode and the unique scene of demons dragging the prodigal from the brothel (Fig. 3, row 3).³⁴ Although contemporary with the Chartres and Bourges windows, the Sens window stands apart in its iconography.³⁵ Whether it might predate either is not known.

Because of losses and restorations, it is problematic to discuss narrative structure in the windows at Poitiers, Coutances, Auxerre,³⁶ and Clermont-Ferrand. The scenes present in these four windows are for the most part familiar from the earlier windows at Chartres, Sens, and Bourges.

In the *Bibles moralisées* each biblical episode of the parable is paired with a commentary episode that glosses the former. Despite the brevity of this version of the parable, there are striking similarities with the stained-glass cycles. For example, after the prodigal receives his money, the second roundel in both exemplars shows him with the prostitutes while playing dice in the tavern (Fig. 7). In the next scene he is shown tending the pigs and contemplating his fate. The remaining roundels detail his return home and his reconciliation with his father; there is thus a special emphasis on penitence and closeness to God. Unlike the monumental cycles considered here, these books had a highly limited audience: they were made for the French royal family. Because my concern in this article is with the urban audience for the parable, I will have relatively little to say about these manuscripts.

Finally, there is an important sculpted version of the parable on the west facade of Auxerre Cathedral. Its presence there demonstrates the continued relevance of the parable in the second half of the thirteenth century, several decades after the creation of the cathedral's prodigal son window. The sculpted version is placed on the dado at the right of the cathedral's central doors (Figs. 4 and 11). The fourteen scenes are organized in two rows of seven, reading left to right and top to bottom. As we have seen with several of the windows, the visual structure stresses the two fundamental movements of the narrative, away from home and back toward home, with one row devoted to each. Each line ends with a celebra-

³⁴ See the Appendix below (after Bégule, *La cathédrale de Sens* [above, n. 9], pp. 50–51). Kemp (*Narratives*, pp. 99–100) argues that the window is more rooted in theology than the other windows under consideration here.

³⁵ There are, however, some possible stylistic connections between Chartres and Sens. Caviness notes similarities between the prodigal son at Sens and the Joseph window at Chartres; both feature an idealized classicism that may have originated at Sens (see Madeline Harrison Caviness, *The Early Stained Glass of Canterbury Cathedral, circa 1175–1220* [Princeton, N.J., 1977], p. 85). Chantal Bouchon and colleagues argue for similarities in style between the prodigal son at Sens and the thirteenth-century surround scenes of the Belle-Verrière at Chartres (Chantal Bouchon et al., "La 'Belle-Verrière' de Chartres," *Revue de l'art* 46 [1979], 16–24, at p. 22). They note a similar disposition of figures, isolated against a strong blue background.

³⁶ The window at Auxerre is closest to the Chartres prodigal son in terms of iconography. There is a double ejection (scenes 10–11) as at Chartres. The reclothing of the prodigal is given its own scene as at Chartres. There are musicians at the reconciliation feast, and the Auxerre window is divided into a triptych as at Chartres. Grodecki, however, noted that the figural style is unrelated to Chartres (*Gothic Stained Glass* [above, n. 9], p. 122). Raguin has suggested that the painters came from the Île-de-France around 1235 ("Auxerre," in *Dictionary of Art*, ed. Jane Turner, 34 vols. [New York, 1996], 2:846).

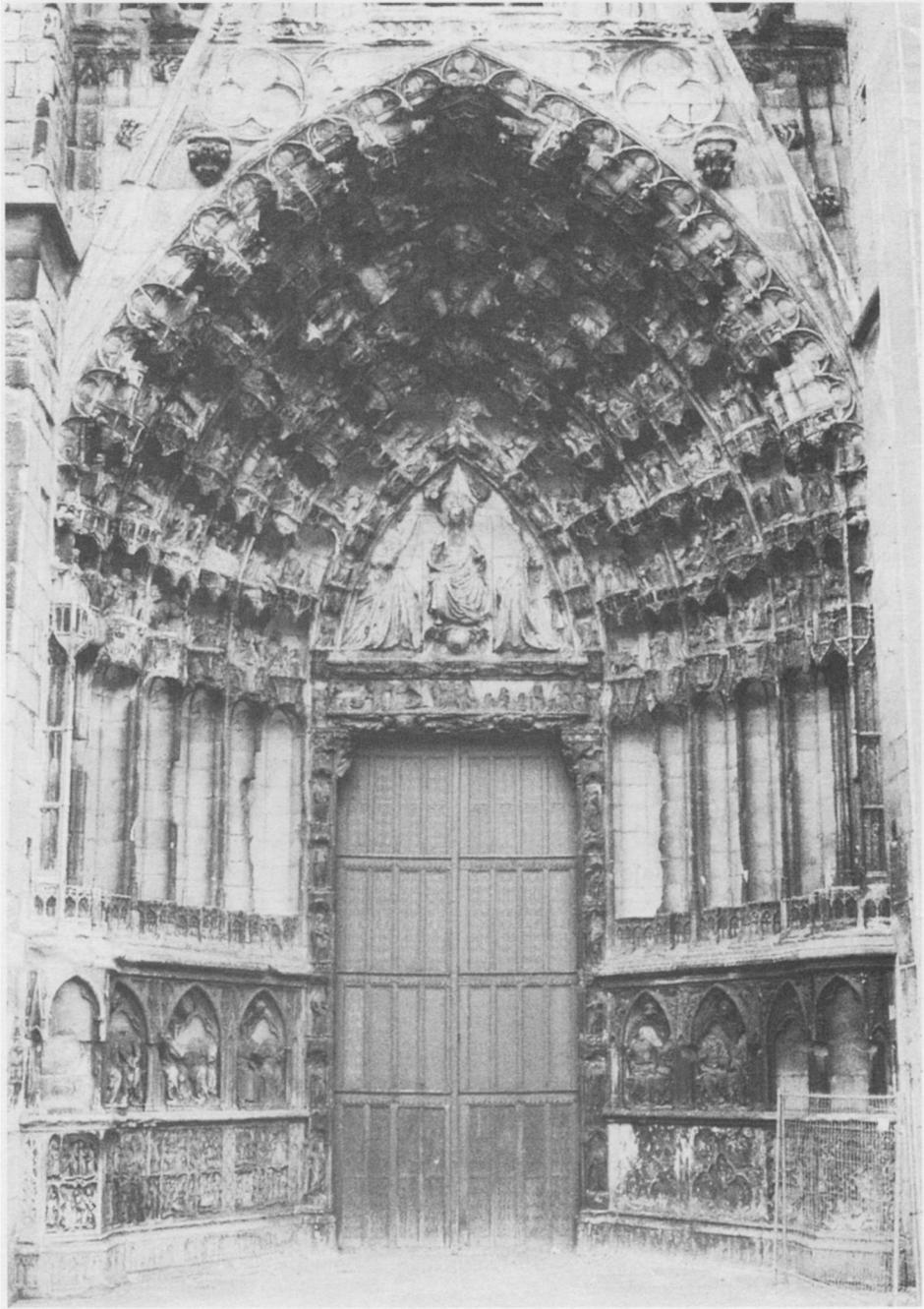


Fig. 11. Auxerre Cathedral. Central door, west facade.
(Photograph: the author)

tion, the first in the brothel and the second upon the son's return home. Beyond this, however, the narrative must be understood within the context of the cathedral's central portal, which boasts an elaborate iconographic program.³⁷ Over the doorway, the tympanum, lintel, and first archivolt depict the Last Judgment. The outer archivolts show scenes from the lives of the apostles. The column statues, now lost, once depicted the apostles as well. The doorposts show the wise and foolish virgins. A sibyl and prophets fill the arcuated openings below the empty column statue niches. By placing the parable beneath a Last Judgment, an important contrast is made between the earthly city of the parable and the heavenly city awaiting the elect. The parable's penitential character is also given special emphasis in this setting. As we shall see, throughout the Middle Ages the parable of the prodigal son was interpreted as a narrative of penance, an interpretation that will have important resonance for our understanding of these picture cycles.

In sum, it can be seen that each of the incarnations of the parable in thirteenth-century art constitutes a unique retelling. The number of scenes used, their arrangement, and their individual contents were adjusted for each new project. Certain themes, however, are stressed repeatedly. The prodigal's identity is seen to shift abruptly as he navigates the different spaces of the narrative. Once his purse is filled, he lives a life of showy superficiality; he throws himself headfirst into the pleasures of the city. With his crowning by the prostitutes, he sits metaphorically at the top of the social scale. But as fortune's wheel turns, he falls, and his fall is as dramatic as his rise. He is stripped and put on the same level as farm animals. His return home makes him rich again, but it is a spiritual wealth that he has gained. The two directions of his journey can now be seen to represent a spiritual death and rebirth: as the father says in Luke 15.24, "This my son was dead, and is come to life again: was lost, and is found." It is along those two axes and within their different spaces that the parable's relevance for medieval viewers resided.³⁸ It is to the character of that relevance that I now turn.

THE JOURNEY

In considering the meaning of the parable for its medieval viewers, it is necessary to begin with the journey undertaken by the prodigal. There are two reasons for this. First, the prodigal's identity is tied intimately to his journey; both his appearance and his very self are transformed repeatedly as he moves from place to place. Second, the works under consideration here need to be seen as part of a broader trend in art at this time, one that takes as its focus the journey of life. This theme is seen most often in windows devoted to the lives of the saints, which constitute the most popular subject for narrative stained glass at this time.³⁹ Beyond this interest in hagiography, however, there is a remarkable preoccupation

³⁷ See Quednau, *Die Westportale der Kathedrale von Auxerre* (above, n. 15).

³⁸ Rather surprisingly, Émile Mâle saw no deeper meanings here: "Nowhere . . . can any symbolic intention be found in these compositions" (*The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Dora Nussey [New York, 1958], p. 199).

³⁹ Deremble and Manhes, in *Les vitraux légendaires* (above, n. 8), pp. 73–112, offer a breakdown of the types of events most commonly represented in the saint's life journey.

with images of travel and journeying in the Gothic cathedral. After the prodigal son, the most popular parable in glass at this time is the good Samaritan, another story about a traveler.⁴⁰ Among Old Testament subjects, the life of the patriarch Joseph is perhaps most popular in narrative windows at this time; his unwilling journey into Egypt offered medieval viewers a lively tale of adventure, intrigue, and just reward.⁴¹ Among the saints' lives depicted in thirteenth-century glass, apostles and confessors are regularly shown spreading Christianity throughout the world. Even the relics of saints are shown on journeys.⁴²

The format of the Gothic window was ideally suited to present the journey of life. Broken up into registers and scenes, these windows allowed viewers virtually to participate in the narratives' itineraries. One could not only take the journey with the window's protagonist but also break from the linearity of the story to compare scenes, events, figures, and motifs. This narrative mode triumphs over the more monastic programs at earlier sites, such as Saint-Denis and Canterbury, where complex programs of typology and theology turned windows into learned diagrams for the production of spiritual truths.⁴³ The journey windows of the thirteenth century offer something different, what Wolfgang Kemp has called vernacular narrative; this art is rooted in the everyday experiences of the medieval viewer.⁴⁴ It asks viewers to consider the place of the protagonist in the world, across space and time, as the wayfarer progresses through this life and toward the hoped-for reward of heaven. In this sense, I would like to read the prodigal's journey in thirteenth-century art as the pilgrimage of life. In order to do so, some fundamental ideas require exposition. They will, I believe, help to explain the popularity of the prodigal son in the art of the thirteenth century.

The notion of the *peregrinatio vitae* has often been noted as one of the governing ideas of Western Christian thought.⁴⁵ It postulates that for the Christian soul the world is a place of exile, the site of a painful separation from God. The Latin words *peregrinus* and *peregrinatio* suggest foreignness, estrangement, and alienation. A pilgrim is thus not only a journeyer but also a stranger. Estrangement is, in fact, the pilgrim's very mode of being. It is, however, an estrangement that in theory ends in death with the soul's reuniting with God. These ideas were established early in Christian thought, receiving their seminal formation in the New

⁴⁰ See Colette Manhes and Jean-Paul Deremble, *Le vitrail du bon samaritain: Chartres, Sens, Bourges* (Paris, 1986).

⁴¹ Caviness, "Biblical Stories in Windows" (above, n. 3), pp. 128–47.

⁴² The story of the relics of St. Stephen is depicted at the cathedrals of Chartres, Bourges, Rouen, Châlons-en-Champagne, and Auxerre.

⁴³ Despite the triumph of narrative in stained glass of this period, there was a continuing interest in typological windows. See Christopher G. Hughes, "Visual Typology in Early Gothic Art, 1140–1240" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2000), pp. 104–59. He considers the prodigal son window at Bourges on pp. 144–58.

⁴⁴ See Kemp, *Narratives*, pp. 115–28.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Siegfried Wenzel, "The Pilgrimage of Life as a Late Medieval Genre," *Mediaeval Studies* 35 (1973), 370–88; Gerhart B. Ladner, "Homo viator: Mediaeval Ideas on Alienation and Order," *Speculum* 42 (1967), 233–59; Dee Dyas, *Pilgrimage in Medieval English Literature, 700–1500* (Woodbridge, Eng., 2001), pp. 12–36; and F. C. Gardiner, *The Pilgrimage of Desire: A Study of Theme and Genre in Medieval Literature* (Leiden, 1971).

Testament. In the Epistle to the Hebrews it is argued that the most devout figures from the Old Testament (Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Sara) recognized the exile in which they lived: "All these died according to faith, not having received the promises but beholding them afar off and saluting them and confessing that they are pilgrims and strangers on the earth. For they that say these things do signify that they seek a country" (Heb. 11.13–14). Notions of estrangement, exile, and journeying are stressed at other points in the Epistles as well.⁴⁶ It is from these seeds that an exegetical tradition grew in which these ideas were interwoven with a particularly Christian subjectivity.

After the authors of the Epistles, it is Augustine who is the most important theorist of the Christian *peregrinatio vitae*. His thinking on the subject is elaborated most clearly in the *City of God*. As is well known, the notion of a city of God is contrasted in Augustine's great work with the earthly city, which rejects God. He speaks of "the one the heavenly city, which sojourns on earth, the other the earthly, which gapes after earthly joys, and grovels in them as if they were the only joys."⁴⁷ According to Augustine the city of God exists both in heaven and on earth, where it is populated by the faithful. The earthly city of God is a city in transit; it journeys toward its heavenly reward. Its citizens live a life of exile. Their existence is marked by both suffering and hope: ". . . the citizens of the holy city of God, who live according to God in the pilgrimage of this life, both fear and desire, and grieve and rejoice. . . . They fear eternal punishment, they desire eternal life; they grieve because they themselves groan within themselves, waiting for the adoption, the redemption of their body; they rejoice in hope, because there 'shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.'⁴⁸

Other influential exegetes also wrote of the exile of earthly life. Gregory the Great discusses it in his *Moralia in Job*: "Who is 'the people' who travel in exile in this world, unless [it is] those who, while hastening toward the destiny of the elect, know that they have a fatherland in the celestial; and the more this people hopes to find all that is its own, the more it considers all that passes away to be alien?"⁴⁹ And "Ever since the human race was expelled from the joys of paradise

⁴⁶ For example, Heb. 13.14, 1 Peter 2.11, Eph. 2.9, and 2 Cor. 5. On this theme, see William G. Johnsson, "The Pilgrimage Motif in the Book of Hebrews," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97 (1978), 239–51.

⁴⁷ Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, trans. G. E. McCracken et al., Loeb Classical Library, 7 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1957–72), 15.15, 4:496–97: "unam caelestem in terris peregrinantem, alteram terrenam terrenis, tamquam sola sint, gaudiis inhiantem vel inhaerentem. . . ." For a useful excerpting of Augustine's thinking on the two cities, see R. W. Dyson, ed., *The Pilgrim City: Social and Political Ideas in the Writings of St. Augustine of Hippo* (Woodbridge, Eng., 2001), pp. 32–38.

⁴⁸ *De civitate Dei* 14.9, 4:304–7: ". . . cives sanctae civitatis Dei in huius vitae peregrinatione secundum Deum viventes metuunt cupiuntque, dolent gaudentque. . . . Metuunt poenam aeternam, cupiunt vitam aeternam. Dolent in re quia ipsi in semet ipsis adhuc ingemescunt adoptionem expectantes, redemptionem corporis sui; gaudent in spe, quia fiet sermo, qui scriptus est: Absorta est mors in victoriam."

⁴⁹ "Quis autem in hoc mundo peregrinatur populus, nisi qui ad sortem electorum currens, habere se patriam novit in coelestibus; et tanto magis se illic sperat invenire propria, quanto hic cuncta quae praetereunt esse a se deputat aliena?" (PL 76:63 and quoted by Gardiner, *Pilgrimage of Desire*, p. 15).

and came into the pilgrimage of this present life, it has borne a heart blinded to spiritual understanding.”⁵⁰

That these notions informed the understanding of the prodigal son narrative during the central Middle Ages is demonstrated by the so-called *First Parable* of Bernard of Clairvaux.⁵¹ This text offers an allegorized revision of the biblical parable by interpreting the prodigal's journey as the spiritual struggle of the human soul in its earthly exile. In Bernard's retelling, the protagonist is described as the son of a king who leaves paradise for a life of wandering and self-indulgence. When the young hero of the story at last decides to seek his father's forgiveness, his journey homeward is cast as a *psychomachia*. A series of virtues emerge to lead the lost son home and to aid him in his battle against the vices, who attempt to hinder his progress.

It cannot be known for certain whether any of the above texts influenced the clerical patrons who assisted in the creation of the thirteenth-century prodigal son cycles. Nevertheless, their combined ethos permeates the imagery. Gregory the Great speaks of the exile as having a “heart blinded to spiritual understanding.” As we shall see, the picture cycles in question illustrate this via the prodigal's revels in the brothel and in the tavern. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says of the just that “if they had been mindful of that from whence they came out, they had, doubtless, time to return” (Heb. 11.15). This focused internal disposition is reflected in the prodigal's contemplation of his station while tending the pigs and in his subsequent journey home. Augustine speaks of the just waiting for the “redemption of their body.” This is made visible in the scenes of the prodigal's re-dressing by his father at the tale's end. Bernard describes the prodigal at his low point as being “covered with the prison dirt of sin and held fast by the bonds and chains of evil habit.”⁵² This perhaps explains the unique scene at Sens in which the prodigal is shackled and held by demons. None of this, however, explains why prodigal son cycles suddenly became popular at the start of the thirteenth century. For that, we must consider in greater detail the prodigal's exile.

THE CITY

In northern France in the first half of the thirteenth century, major changes were taking place in the social fabric of cities.⁵³ While the region's Gothic cathedrals

⁵⁰ “Postquam a paradisi gaudiis expulsum est genus humanum, in istam peregrinationem vitae praesentis veniens, caecum cor a spirituali intellectu habet” (from the prologue to Gregory's *Expositio super Cantica canticorum*, PL 79:471–73, and quoted by Gardiner, *Pilgrimage of Desire*, p. 32).

⁵¹ See PL 183:757–61. For an English translation, see Maureen M. O'Brien, ed. and trans., *Bernard of Clairvaux: The Parables and the Sentences*, Cistercian Fathers Series 55 (Kalamazoo, Mich., 2000), pp. 18–26. O'Brien characterizes the audience for Bernard's *Parables* as perhaps those at “a very early stage of monastic instruction” (p. 12).

⁵² O'Brien, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, pp. 19–20.

⁵³ On the complex topic of the medieval city, useful recent starting points include David Nicholas, *Urban Europe, 1100–1700* (New York, 2003); Keith D. Lilley, *Urban Life in the Middle Ages, 1000–1450* (New York, 2002); Alain Saint-Denis, “L'apparition d'une identité urbaine dans les villes de commune de France du Nord aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles,” in *Shaping Urban Identity in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Marc Boone and Peter Stabel (Garant, 2000), pp. 65–87; André Chédeville, Jacques Le

were being constructed, townspeople sought autonomy through communal charters while members of the aristocracy sought greater access to and control of urban profits. Cathedral chapters struggled to maintain both their economic status and their spiritual authority. The mendicant orders emerged in this period and offered townspeople an alternative spirituality, one rivaling that of the cathedral.⁵⁴ The popularity of prodigal son narratives at this time may stem in part from a desire by cathedral canons to escape the growing competition and instability of the city for a site of spiritual transcendence, figured symbolically as the father's house.

In this sense, my reading of the parable has points of contact with the work of Jane Welch Williams, who offered an important reinterpretation of the donor imagery in the stained glass at Chartres.⁵⁵ She argued that the windows' corporate donor imagery (depicting bakers, shoemakers, butchers, etc.) should be interpreted, not as communal support for the cathedral by local guilds, but rather as an ideological intervention by the cathedral's clergy. In her reading, it is the clergy who controlled the donor imagery, manipulating it to figure the cathedral as both a dominant and a unifying force within the town, bringing together diverse groups and individuals at a time of violence and competing commercial interests.⁵⁶

The prodigal son cycles under consideration here offer a related but different vision, one in which the material economy of the town is renounced in favor of spiritual rebirth. In order to narrate this rebirth, the secular spaces of the town must be figured as places of spiritual exile and death. The windows thus become a pointed commentary on the world of the medieval city, the very locale of the Gothic cathedral. The prodigal's journey takes him from the father's house, which on some level can be read as the city of God, to an earthly city of brothels and taverns.⁵⁷ The designers of these cycles emphasized this part of the story. At Char-

Goff, and Jacques Rossiaud, *La ville en France au moyen âge: Des Carolingiens à la Renaissance*, Histoire de la France Urbaine 2, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1998); and David Nicholas, *The Growth of the Medieval City: From Late Antiquity to the Early Fourteenth Century* (London, 1997). For the ways in which medieval clergy responded, in moral and theological terms, to the growth of cities, a useful starting point is Baldwin, *Masters, Princes, and Merchants* (above, n. 1).

⁵⁴ See, for example, Little, *Religious Poverty* (above, n. 1), pp. 146–69, as well as Jacques Le Goff, "Ordres mendiants et urbanisation dans la France médiévale," *Annales* 25 (1970), 924–46.

⁵⁵ Jane Welch Williams, *Bread, Wine and Money: The Windows of the Trades at Chartres Cathedral* (Chicago, 1993).

⁵⁶ Although her work is perhaps overly zealous in its search for ideological influences on the iconography at Chartres, it remains useful for its reorienting of stained-glass studies away from the formal and the stylistic toward the social.

⁵⁷ The bibliography on prostitution in the Middle Ages is extensive. As points of entry, see Ruth Mazo Karras, "Prostitution in Medieval Europe," in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities 1696 (New York, 1996), pp. 243–60; Jacques Rossiaud, *Medieval Prostitution*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (New York, 1988); and Leah Lydia Otis, *Prostitution in Medieval Society: The History of an Urban Institution in Languedoc* (Chicago, 1985). Kemp (*Narratives* [above, n. 3], pp. 178–85) speculated that the prodigal son window at Chartres might have been donated by the town's prostitutes; this, however, seems unlikely. For medieval taverns, useful starting points include Hans Conrad Peyer, *Von der Gastfreundschaft zum Gasthaus: Studien zur Gastlichkeit im Mittelalter*, Schriften der MGH 31 (Hannover, 1987); Hans Conrad Peyer, ed., *Gastfreundschaft, Taverne und Gasthaus im Mittelalter*, Schriften des Historischen Kollegs, Kolloquien 3 (Munich, 1983); and Noël Coulet, "Inns and Taverns," in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. Joseph R. Strayer, 13 vols. (New York, 1982–89), 6:468–77. On the tavern

tres, Bourges, and in the Auxerre sculpture, the prodigal's debauchery takes up approximately one-third of each cycle.⁵⁸ I would argue that this structuration is key to understanding these artworks. For medieval exegetes, the prodigal's tending of the pigs in the countryside was the low point of the story (to be discussed more below). Since the way in which he lost his money is barely discussed in the biblical text, exegetes had little to say about this earlier chapter of the prodigal's life. The designers of the thirteenth-century cycles thus rewrote the narrative, placing the city at the heart of the story.

This figuration of the city as a site of material corruption can also be found in thirteenth-century texts.⁵⁹ An especially relevant example comes from the *Miracles of Notre-Dame de Chartres*, an anonymous Latin text composed at the cathedral early in the century, around the same time as the creation of the prodigal son window there, perhaps ca. 1210.⁶⁰ The twentieth miracle in the collection tells the story of two pilgrims, one with a vision problem and one who was mute. The half-blind man, it is related, wished to work as a minstrel but was unable to secure a position, perhaps because of his disability, perhaps because of his deceptive character. In contrast the mute, who had a deformed tongue, was blessed with clear sight and a devout spirit. Selfishly seeking a miracle, the half-blind man suggests to the mute that they go to Chartres to beseech the Virgin for a cure. Upon arriving in the city, the mute goes directly to the cathedral to pray, while the blind man, seduced by the allure of the town, goes instead to a tavern to sample the local wines. Not surprisingly, the mute is healed while praying in the cathedral. The half-blind man, hearing about his companion's good fortune, rushes to the cathedral where he weeps false tears. His prayers go unanswered.

What this miracle story argues, from an obviously clerical point of view, is that

as a literary conceit in the Middle Ages, see Andrew Cowell, *At Play in the Tavern: Signs, Coins, and Bodies in the Middle Ages* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1999); Jean Dufournet, "Variations sur un motif—la taverne dans le théâtre arrageois du XIIIe siècle," in *Hommage à Jean-Charles Payen. Farai chansoneta novele: Essais sur la liberté créatrice au moyen âge* (Caen, 1989), pp. 161–74; and David Raybin, "The Court and the Tavern: Bourgeois Discourse in *Li jeus de Saint Nicolas*," *Viator* 19 (1988), 177–92. On the connection between taverns and brothels, see Ruth Mazo Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England* (New York, 1996), pp. 70–73.

⁵⁸ At Chartres there are ten scenes; at Bourges, seven; in the Auxerre sculpture, five. At Sens it is downplayed; there are only two scenes. Preservation makes an accurate accounting of the other cycles problematic. Overall, the tavern episode is markedly less popular than the brothel scenes. Virtually all of the cycles contain the latter, often depicted in several scenes, but the single scene of the gambling in the tavern appears only at Chartres, Bourges, Poitiers, and in the *Bible moralisée*.

⁵⁹ See, for example, Cowell, *At Play in the Tavern*; Michel Zink, *The Invention of Literary Subjectivity*, trans. Davis Sices (Baltimore, 1999), pp. 15–16; and Nancy Regalado, "Two Poets of the Medieval City," *Yale French Studies* 32 (1964), 12–23.

⁶⁰ The collection of Chartrian miracles seems to have been compiled while the cathedral was being rebuilt. For the text see Pierre Kunstmann, ed., *Miracles de Notre-Dame de Chartres* (Ottawa, 1973). For a study of the miracle considered here, see Michel Zink, "Muet à la lettre: Le vingtième *Miracle de Notre-Dame de Chartres* de Jean Le Marchant," in *Miscellanea mediaevalia: Mélanges offerts à Philippe Ménard*, ed. J. Claude Faucon, Alain Labbé, and Danielle Quéruel, Nouvelle Bibliothèque du Moyen Âge 46, 2 vols. (Paris, 1998), pp. 1509–17. Other recent studies of the collection include Dawn Marie Hayes, *Body and Sacred Place in Medieval Europe, 1100–1389*, *Studies in Medieval History and Culture* 18 (New York, 2003), chap. 2; and Pierre Kunstmann, "Sur l'auteur et la date du livre des Miracles de Notre-Dame de Chartres," *Romance Notes* 13 (1971), 344–50.

there were two economies at work in thirteenth-century Chartres (this argument can be applied generally to the other cathedral cities under consideration here). These two economies are the spiritual economy of the church and the growing market economy of the town. Recent research by a number of scholars has demonstrated that these two economies were hardly distinct.⁶¹ In the complex world of the medieval city, the spiritual economy of the great cathedrals was very much invested in the commercial interests of the town. At its heart, this miracle tale works to maintain a false binary opposing these two economies. A similar strategy is at work in the monumental cycles of the prodigal son. For medieval exegetes the father's house represented (among other things) the church. The monumental cycles of the parable thus structure the narrative as a choice between the city of God and the earthly city. There is also, as we shall see, a related binary at work here, contrasting the showy superficiality of city life with the internal spiritual understanding acquired by the prodigal after leaving the disorienting spaces of the city.

The medieval city's combination of allure and deceit also lies at the heart of the earthy, picaresque drama *Courtois d'Arras*, which like the monumental cycles considered here reimagines the prodigal's journey in contemporary terms.⁶² The work was probably written in Arras and has been dated to the first quarter of the thirteenth century, again perhaps around 1210. It is thus impossible to give temporal priority to either the play or the artworks under consideration here. We cannot know if the author of *Courtois* had ever seen a prodigal son picture cycle or if any of the artists or designers of the artworks in question ever saw the play. Yet there clearly is an overlap; there exist a remarkable number of similarities between the play and the artworks discussed here.⁶³

In the play the nameless son is called "Courtois," because he sees himself as resembling a hero of romance. What the play makes patently clear is that Courtois's self-image is a delusion; his actions are neither courtly nor chivalric. Instead, his story is driven by foolishness, naïveté, and a lack of self-understanding. As one of the prostitutes in the play points out, Courtois fancies himself a Gawain but is really just a laborer (lines 246–48).⁶⁴ This self-deception finds an analogue in the scenes of the prodigal's departure, where he travels in fine clothes, on horseback,

⁶¹ Such, for example, is the argument of Williams, *Bread, Wine and Money*.

⁶² The work survives in four manuscripts (three from the thirteenth century and one from the fourteenth). For editions of the French text, see *Courtois d'Arras: (L'enfant prodigue)*, ed. Jean Dufournet, GF-Flammarion 813 (Paris, 1995); and *Courtois d'Arras: Jeu du XIIIe siècle*, ed. Edmond Faral (Paris, 1961). For the text in English see *Medieval French Plays*, trans. Richard Axton and John Stevens (Oxford, 1971), pp. 137–64. For important studies see most recently Carol Symes, "The Appearance of Early Vernacular Plays: Forms, Functions, and the Future of Medieval Theater," *Speculum* 77 (2002), 778–831; Cowell, *At Play in the Tavern*, pp. 126–55; and Pascale Dumont, "La perception de l'espace et du temps dans *Courtois d'Arras* et dans la *Moralité de l'enfant prodigue par personnages*," in *Arras au moyen âge: Histoire et littérature*, ed. Marie-Madeleine Castellani and Jean-Pierre Martin (Arras, 1994), pp. 175–95.

⁶³ Both Kemp (*Narratives*, pp. 116–22 and 186–90) and C. Jean Campbell ("Courting, Harlotry and the Art of Gothic Ivory Carving," *Gesta* 34 [1995], 11–19) have studied the play in relation to medieval images of the prodigal son.

⁶⁴ "Ore, pute, de l'enivrer, / car nous avons trové Gavain! / Ba! il fait le cortois villain!" (Faral ed., p. 9).

and with a groom—exactly as if he were a chivalric hero (Fig. 2, row 2; Fig. 1, row 4). It is an identity that will soon be taken from him.

In the play Courtois's father warns him of the possible dangers he may encounter on his journey, but the son does not listen.⁶⁵ It is the tavern that embodies these dangers in the play.⁶⁶ The local potboy tells Courtois that the tavern is a place where "fools and wise men" gather to drink (line 107).⁶⁷ But how is Courtois to tell the difference? It is here that he meets the two prostitutes, Mancevaire and Pourette, who will engineer his fall. They are mistresses of deception, brazenly promising not to trick him (line 217) and then pawning him to the tavern keeper to pay their tab while they run off with Courtois's purse (lines 320–33).⁶⁸ Within the window at Chartres, the prostitutes' deception may have also been on the designers' minds. These women are dressed in the same fashion as some of the biblical and saintly women in the cathedral's other windows and sculptures (Fig. 2, row 2). The dress of the prostitutes, however, is noticeably tighter in its fit.⁶⁹ This may allude simultaneously to their lasciviousness and their affluence.

In the end Courtois does not lose simply his money but his very identity. It begins with his clothes. The taverner confiscates his cloak, jacket, and breeches (lines 371–80), leaving him with what must be only his drawers, which is precisely how the prodigal appears in virtually all of the cycles under consideration here (Fig. 2, row 4; Fig. 3, row 3; Fig. 6, row 6).⁷⁰ As in the biblical text, Courtois takes up the life of a herder, where he laments his fallen state, forgotten and cast off by God (line 541).⁷¹ Repentant and chastened by deprivation, he returns to the family home, where his father articulates the wisdom gained: "Your wrongdoing doesn't matter two points / Since you have come to know yourself" (lines 621–22).⁷²

The text of *Courtois d'Arras* throws important light on the prodigal son cycles of the thirteenth century, but it raises an important question concerning tone. What are the play's religious intentions? Is the piece a call to penitence similar to the biblical text and arguably the artworks under consideration here? Certainly, this theme is present. For much of the play, Courtois occupies a position that might be termed liminal—he is unable to negotiate the deceptive spaces of the city, yet he has no desire to return home. It is only through repentance that he escapes this double bind. After returning home, his father reminds him and us of the moral of the story: "Almighty God . . . / Has greater joy about one sinner / Who turns, repenting, back to him, / Than over the other ninety-nine" (a paraphrase of Luke 15.7). In the play's final line the father turns to both actors and

⁶⁵ ". . . s'est li siecles fel et repoins!" (line 73, *ibid.*, p. 3).

⁶⁶ In this sense the tavern can be read as standing in for the medieval city as a whole.

⁶⁷ "Chaiens boivent et fol et sage . . ." (Faral ed., p. 4).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 8 and 12.

⁶⁹ This was pointed out to me by Madeline Caviness. At Bourges the prostitutes wear yellow and stripes, signs of their disrespectable nature. On yellow and striped clothing see Ruth Mellinkoff, *Outcasts: Signs of Otherness in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages*, California Studies in the History of Art 32, 2 vols. (Berkeley, Calif., 1993), 1:20–25 and 35–56.

⁷⁰ Faral ed., pp. 13–14.

⁷¹ "Bien m'oblie Dieu et adosse" (*ibid.*, p. 19).

⁷² "Ton meffait ne pris un nois, de puis que tu te reconnois . . ." (*ibid.*, p. 22).

audience saying, "Let us sing *Te Deum laudamus*." The play thus finishes by inscribing itself within a sacred milieu.

Yet the play is also emphatically heteroglossic (to adopt a term coined by Mikhail Bakhtin).⁷³ It allows the multiple voices of the city to speak forcefully and prominently. An urban viewer of the play might very well have identified with the prostitutes and the tavern keeper, who are presented as savvy businesspeople. Carol Symes has suggested that this "openness" might account for the play's survival and relative popularity.⁷⁴ The imagery under consideration here attempts to mute the voices of the city that surround the cathedral. Nevertheless, their traces remain. They can be found in the pleasures of the city—its spaces, its fashions, its people. These are eventually rejected by the prodigal, but it might be argued that they linger—in the new clothes that he receives and in the feast that celebrates his return to the father. A properly medieval typological reading would regard this as an inversion. The materiality of the father's house represents spiritual not economic wealth. Yet such a binary is far from stable in images such as these. In an effort to consider further the clerical mind-set behind these works of art, I would like to consider two more optics for understanding the parable in art—exegesis and liturgy.

EXEGESIS

Despite the diverse imagery of the prodigal son cycles studied here, a common factor unites them. They all were almost certainly created by artists working in collaboration with members of the clergy. In planning these works, the latter may very well have turned to biblical exegesis as an aid to understanding the narrative. Thus it is important to consider how the parable was understood by thirteenth-century clerics and how that understanding might have shaped the creation of the artworks under investigation here.

In a broad sense, late-antique and medieval theologians were fairly consistent in their allegorizing of the parable.⁷⁵ The father is generally taken to represent God; the son's journey is thus seen as a journey away from and eventually back to God. The landowner who hires the son to tend his pigs is regularly said to represent the devil; for exegetes, this part of the story tends to symbolize the son's maximum distance from the father. The fatted calf slaughtered upon the son's return represents the sacrifice of Christ, and the celebratory meal is the Eucharist.

⁷³ See his "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, Tex., 1981), pp. 259–422.

⁷⁴ Symes, "Early Vernacular Plays," p. 819.

⁷⁵ For a guide to the sources, see Stephen L. Wailes, *Medieval Allegories of Jesus' Parables*, Publications of the UCLA Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies 23 (Berkeley, Calif., 1987), pp. 236–45. On the early exegesis of the parable, see Leslie W. Barnard, "To Allegorize or Not to Allegorize?" *Studia theologica* 36 (1982), 1–10; Madeleine Grace, "The Prodigal Son as Perceived in the Early Church," *Diakonia* 32 (1999), 101–10; J. Duncan M. Derrett, "The Parable of the Prodigal Son: Patristic Allegories and Jewish Midrashim," *Studia patristica* 10 (1970), 219–24; and Philip Rousseau, "Christian Culture and the Swine's Husks: Jerome, Augustine, and Paulinus," in *The Limits of Ancient Christianity: Essays on Late Antique Thought and Culture in Honor of R. A. Markus*, ed. William E. Klingshirn and Mark Vessey (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1999), pp. 172–87.

A medieval cleric sitting down with an artist to plan a picture cycle of the prodigal son could have learned this much by consulting what was arguably the most important reference work for biblical exegetes in the central Middle Ages, the *Glossa ordinaria*.⁷⁶

Compiled in France in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, the *Glossa ordinaria* quickly became an indispensable guide to biblical interpretation, synthesizing many key points of understanding extending back to the early church fathers. The gloss for Luke 15 interweaves what can be considered the two most prominent interpretations of the parable—the penitential reading of the story and what might be called the Gentile-Jew allegory.⁷⁷ The penitential reading of the prodigal son is fairly straightforward. It grows from the biblical text and Christ's remark that there is joy in heaven even over the repentance of a single sinner (Luke 15.7). The historical allegory imposes an additional level of meaning onto the text. It argues that the prodigal son represents the Gentiles and that the older brother represents the Jews. This venerable gloss goes back to at least Tertullian and essentially argues that although the Jewish people remained consistently closer to God, the Gentiles ultimately were the favored ones.⁷⁸ Although they strayed, their conversion, represented by the prodigal's repentance and return, ultimately puts them ahead of the Jews. The *Glossa ordinaria* invokes this notion in its discussion of verses 25–30 of the parable.

In reading the parable penitentially, exegetes from the early Christian period onward argued that the prodigal's journey should be understood not so much in physical terms but spiritually, as the soul's journey away from and back to God.⁷⁹ Jerome notes that “it is not by spatial distances but through affection that we either are with God or depart from Him.”⁸⁰ Ambrose, writing at almost the same time, states that the prodigal is separated from the father not by space but by his actions and desires, as the excesses of the world pull him farther from home.⁸¹ Following such authorities as Jerome and Bede, the *Glossa ordinaria* for Luke 15.13 argues that the inheritance given to the prodigal represents the free will given by God to humanity and that with it the prodigal chooses to live a life rooted in ostentation and exteriority, relinquishing any interest in the spiritual or interior

⁷⁶ The PL edition of the *Glossa ordinaria* is convenient but lacks the interlinear gloss (for the gloss of the prodigal son see PL 114:311–14). For a more complete edition of the text see Karlfried Froehlich and Margaret T. Gibson, *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria: Facsimile Reprint of the Editio Princeps Adolph Rusch of Strassburg 1480/81*, 4 vols. (Turnhout, 1992).

⁷⁷ Wailes, *Medieval Allegories*, pp. 238–39.

⁷⁸ Tertullian, *On Purity* 8–9 (PL 2:1046–51).

⁷⁹ It is in this sense that the parable plays a key role in Augustine's *Confessions*. See Jill Robbins, *Prodigal Son/Elder Brother: Interpretation and Alterity in Augustine, Petrarch, Kafka, Levinas* (Chicago, 1991), pp. 21–48 and 71–79; and Leo C. Ferrari, “The Theme of the Prodigal Son in Augustine's *Confessions*,” *Recherches augustiniennes* 12 (1977), 105–18.

⁸⁰ See *The Letters of St. Jerome*, trans. Charles Christopher Mierow (New York, 1963), p. 114. For the Latin, see PL 22:383.

⁸¹ Ambrose, *Traité sur l'Évangile de S. Luc*, ed. Gabriel Tissot (Paris, 1956–58), p. 89: “Quid enim longinquius quam a se recedere, nec regionibus, sed moribus separari, studiis discretum esse non terris, et quasi interfuso luxuriae saecularis aestu diuortia habere factorum? Etenim qui se a Christo separat exul est patriae, ciuis est mundi.”

realm.⁸² There is a strong probability, to my mind, that here theology has influenced art. In the picture cycles the son's dwelling in exterior matters begins the moment he leaves home wearing his new wardrobe, with his horse and servant (see, for example, Fig. 2, row 2; and Fig. 1, row 3). It is only when he is literally stripped of these elegant exterior trappings that the stage is set for his turn toward the internal.⁸³ In this sense the prodigal is lucky to escape the city, for as the *Glossa* asserts, pleasure is never satisfied; it always seeks more.⁸⁴ There is thus a theological justification for the expansive treatment of the son's debauchery in the cycles. He exhausts both his purse and his very self in his drawn-out pursuit of pleasure.

In this sense, the prodigal's "return to himself" in verse 17 can be read as a turn toward the interior and a rejection of the exterior life that had exhausted his inheritance. This inward turn is seen at Chartres, Bourges, and in the Auxerre glass in the image of the prodigal sitting in contemplation while tending the pigs (Fig. 8, row 6; Fig. 6, row 7; Fig. 9, row 5). For exegetes, the prodigal's awakening and return constituted an act of confession, a recognition of his sins and a humble petition for forgiveness. This is mentioned in the *Glossa ordinaria* but goes back at least as far as Ambrose.⁸⁵ Upon his return the son is kissed by the father and dressed in splendid new clothes (Fig. 8, row 7; Fig. 10, row 4; Fig. 6, row 8; Fig. 9, rows 5–6). Jerome compares this kiss to John's leaning against Christ's bosom at the Last Supper.⁸⁶ If the tending of the swine marked the nadir of the journey for exegetes, this embrace might be said to stand, in theological terms, as its climax. It is not surprising then that the scene is found repeatedly in the thirteenth century.

⁸² From the *Glossa ordinaria*: "Non multo post institutionem humani generis, placuit animae liberum arbitrium ferre secum, quasi quamdam potentiam naturae suae, et deserere eum a quo condita est, confidens viribus suis. Et has vires tanto citius consumat quanto datorem deserit. Haec est prodiga vita, quae amat fundere et spatiari in pompis exterioribus, relinquens eum qui sibi est interior" (PL 114:311–12). This would appear to derive from Bede's gloss on Luke (see PL 92:522; and Bede, *In Lucae Evangelium expositio*; *In Marci Evangelium expositio*, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL 120 [Turnhout, 1960], pp. 287–95). For Jerome, see *Letters of St. Jerome*, p. 114: "That is, he gave them free choice, he gave their hearts' desire, that each might live, not in accordance with God's command, but to please himself; that is not out of necessity, but by free will, in order that virtue might have its place, so that, like God, we have the privilege of doing what we wish, differing in this from all the other animals. . . ." For the Latin, see PL 22:383. On the broader question of interiority in the Middle Ages, see n. 2 above as well as Lee Patterson, "On the Margin: Postmodernism, Ironic History, and Medieval Studies," *Speculum* 65 (1990), 99–100. Beyond this, it is historians of medieval literature who have contributed most to investigations of subjectivity in the period. See, for example, Jeffrey J. Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, *Medieval Cultures* 35 (Minneapolis, 2003); Donald Maddox, *Fictions of Identity in Medieval France*, *Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature* 43 (Cambridge, Eng., 2000); and Sarah Kay, *Subjectivity in Troubadour Poetry* (Cambridge, Eng., 1990).

⁸³ On the prodigal's clothes, see Kemp, *Narratives* (above, n. 3), pp. 186–99.

⁸⁴ *Glossa ordinaria* to verse 14: "Quia nihil satis est prodigae voluptati, quia voluptas semper habet famem sui; merito ergo eget, qui thesaurus sapientiae, divitiarumque coelestium altitudinem reliquit" (PL 114:312). This notion goes back at least to Ambrose: "Merito ergo iste egere coepit, qui thesaurus sapientiae et scientiae dei diuitiarumque caelestium altitudinem dereliquit. Egere ergo ideo coepit et famem pati, quia nihil prodigae satis est uoluptati. Semper famem patitur sui qui alimentis perpetuis nescit inpleri. . . ." (*Traité sur l'Évangile de S. Luc*, p. 90; see also PL 15:1757).

⁸⁵ For the *Glossa ordinaria* at verse 18, see PL 114:312. For Ambrose, see *Traité sur l'Évangile de S. Luc*, p. 93; and PL 15:1760.

⁸⁶ *Letters of St. Jerome*, p. 120; PL 22:387.

LITURGY

By this point it would seem fair to conclude that the prodigal son was in some sense an everyman for theologians, poets, and artists in the later Middle Ages and that, ultimately, his story was about the importance of penitence. The forgiveness that the son receives was, at least for some in the Middle Ages, directly linked to his turn toward the interior. As the father in *Courtois d'Arras* tells his son, "Your wrongdoing doesn't matter two points / Since you have come to know yourself." I would like to argue in this final section that in addition to the media of art and drama, the prodigal's journey was also made relevant to medieval Christians through liturgy. By turning to the parable's liturgical context, it can be seen how the linked notions of penitence and interiority were injected into the social fabric of the medieval city.

Liturgically speaking, the parable should be understood as a Lenten story. This linkage works on several levels. Most literally, the text of the parable was read during Lent, specifically on its third Saturday.⁸⁷ At matins the parable is coupled with an excerpt from Bede's gloss on Luke.⁸⁸ The Bede excerpt repeats the Gospel assertion that "there shall be joy before the angels of God upon one sinner doing penance" (Luke 15.10). In the Mass for that day, the parable is coupled with a reading from the story of another younger son, Jacob, and his winning of the blessing from his father Isaac (Gen. 27.6–40).⁸⁹

Beyond this one day, however, Lent is the penitential season par excellence. The parable is thus especially appropriate to this time of year. Medieval theologians, commenting on the liturgy, referred to Lent as the *tempus deviationis*, the time of deviation.⁹⁰ In the *Golden Legend* Jacobus de Voragine notes that the season corresponds allegorically to winter and to night in humanity's turning from the right way.⁹¹ This notion of a *tempus deviationis* also seems an especially apt designation for the prodigal's journey. I want to argue that the prodigal's journey can be read as paralleling the spiritual journey undertaken by some medieval Christians during Lent. Liturgical manuscripts created in northern France during the thirteenth cen-

⁸⁷ See *Missale Romanum* (New York, 1949), pp. 57–62 (for Ash Wednesday), pp. 89–92 (for the reading of the prodigal son during Lent), and pp. 158–64 (for Maundy Thursday); *Breviarium Romanum*, 4 vols. (New York, 1941), 1:766–68 (for Ash Wednesday), 2:454–56 (for the reading of the prodigal son during Lent), and 2:536–61 (for Maundy Thursday).

⁸⁸ The excerpt reads, "Murmurantibus de peccatorum susceptione scribis et Pharisaeis tres ex ordine parabolas salvator posuit duabus primis de quibus disputatum est quantum ipse cum angelis de paenitentium salute gaudeat insinuans tertia uero quae sequitur non suum tantummodo suorumque gaudium demonstrans sed et inuidientium murmur reprehendens" (Bede, *In Lucae Evangelium expositio*, ed. Hurst, p. 287).

⁸⁹ For a textual comparison of the two stories, see Kenneth Bailey, "Jacob and the Prodigal Son: A New Identity Story. A Comparison between the Parable of the Prodigal Son and Gen. 27–35," *Theological Review* 18 (1977), 54–72.

⁹⁰ For a discussion of the season of Lent, see Mary C. Mansfield, *The Humiliation of Sinners: Public Penance in Thirteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1995), pp. 130–47; and Laura Holden Hollengreen, "Living Testimony: Exemplary Old Testament Narratives on the North Transept Façade of Chartres Cathedral" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1998), pp. 313–23.

⁹¹ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J., 1993), 1:3.

tury, as well as before and after, describe a ritual of public penance that began with the ejection of penitents from the church on Ash Wednesday and concluded with their reincorporation into the body of the church on Maundy Thursday.⁹² The rite, according to these texts, had to be overseen by a bishop and was thus likely performed at cathedrals, possibly the same cathedrals where the picture cycles of the prodigal son survive. Liturgical manuscripts from Sens, Chartres, and Auxerre document the ritual.⁹³ The ritual may also have been performed at Coutances as the cathedral was a suffragan of Rouen, where the ritual was performed.⁹⁴ To my mind, the medieval penitent's ejection from and subsequent return to the church during Lent roughly parallels the prodigal's journey with its wandering in the world and ultimate return to the father's house. Both the ritual in question and the picture cycles studied here set up a binary in which a worldly space of exile and corruption is opposed to a spiritual space of forgiveness and renewal.

The Lenten ritual proceeded as follows. The office of matins on Ash Wednesday began with a reading derived from Matt. 6.16–21 (“And when you fast, be not as the hypocrites, sad. For they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast . . .”). The biblical text was also supplemented by a section from Augustine's homily on Christ's Sermon on the Mount. The Augustine excerpt begins: “It is clear from these precepts that all our efforts should be directed toward achieving internal joy, lest in seeking an external reward we may be so conformed to the spirit of the world, that we disregard the promise of that happiness which is the more substantial and lasting because it is interior.”⁹⁵ The sermon goes on to chide men for excessive attention to the body, to dress, and to display. Although it surely is not, this text could almost be read as a gloss on the prodigal's journey.

Later that morning the expulsion of the penitents would take place. At some point after terce, those seeking forgiveness were instructed to prostrate themselves before the entrance to the cathedral and wait for the bishop. They were instructed to come barefoot and wearing sackcloth. After being received by the clergy, the penitents were then introduced into the church where a sermon was preached and

⁹² The ritual is documented as early as Regino of Prüm's *De synodalibus causis* of ca. 906; it was then diffused throughout western Europe in the Romano-German Pontifical of the tenth century (see Hollengreen, “Living Testimony,” pp. 323–44; and O. K. Werckmeister, “The Lintel Fragment Representing Eve from Saint-Lazare, Autun,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 35 [1972], 17–18). Eudes Rigaud (d. 1274), archbishop of Rouen, speaks of performing the ritual on repeated occasions (see Mansfield, *Humiliation of Sinners*, p. 97).

⁹³ For Sens and Chartres, see Mansfield, *Humiliation of Sinners*, pp. 299–303; for Auxerre, see V. Leroquais, *Les pontificaux manuscrits des bibliothèques publiques de France*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1937), 1:45–49.

⁹⁴ For Rouen, see n. 92 above. Leroquais, in *Pontificaux*, lists no surviving pontificals for Bourges and Clermont-Ferrand. Mansfield (*Humiliation of Sinners*, p. 243) found no liturgical evidence for the ritual's being celebrated at Poitiers.

⁹⁵ See, for example, Paris, BnF, MS lat. 1297 (a Chartrian breviary of the fourteenth century). The text, on fol. 189r, reads, “Manifestum est enim hiis preceptis omnem nostram intentionem in interiora gaudia dirigi: ne foris querentes mercedem, huic seculo conformemur, et amittamus promissionem tantum solidioris atque firmioris quanto interioris beatitudinis, qua nos elegit Deus conformes fieri imaginis filii dei.” For the original text see PL 34:1287.

the Penitential Psalms were chanted.⁹⁶ The penitents were then blessed with holy water, given ashes, and dressed in hair shirts. Then, like Adam, they were ejected from the “paradise” of the church as the bishop closed its doors.⁹⁷

The penitents' exile ended on Maundy Thursday, when they were reintroduced into the body of the church. In the liturgical texts the bishop is instructed to wait before the doors of the cathedral to receive them. When they arrive, the penitents were instructed to prostrate themselves repeatedly before him, while an archdeacon made a speech on their behalf. The Penitential Psalms were then recited, as they were on Ash Wednesday. Finally, like the prodigal son, after having emerged from the hostilities of the world (“ab infesta seculi tempestate emersi”), the penitents were brought back into the bosom of the church (“gremio ecclesie”), escaping from darkness into light (“de tenebris ad lumen”).⁹⁸ Services for Maundy Thursday then continued. The penitents, like the prodigal son, once dead but now reborn, might have enjoyed a feast, the celebration of Christ's Last Supper.

This notion of moving from darkness to light may help explain the placement of the prodigal son window in the north transept at Chartres.⁹⁹ As Yves Delaporte noted, Bishop Nicholas de Thou's work of 1580, *Maniere d'adminstrer les saincts sacraments de l'eglise*, states that the bishop received the penitents on Maundy Thursday on the steps of the north portal.¹⁰⁰ Nicholas also has the bishop utter that familiar passage from the parable “that there is more joy in heaven over one sinner repenting” (fols. 221v–222r). Although the evidence in this case is somewhat slight, it would seem that there was a tradition of using the north portal of churches for penitential rites. O. K. Werckmeister has suggested this for the Church of Saint-Lazare at Autun.¹⁰¹ Interestingly enough, there is a carved capital

⁹⁶ For the incipits to the texts used at Chartres, see Yves Delaporte, *L'ordinaire chartrain du XIIIe siècle: Publié d'après le manuscrit original*, Société archéologique d'Eure-et-Loir, Mémoires 19 (Chartres, 1953), pp. 97–98.

⁹⁷ See, for example, Paris, BnF, MS lat. 934, fol. 64r (a twelfth-century pontifical for Sens): “. . . sicut adam proiectus est de paradiso. Ita et ipsa ab ecclesia pro peccatis abiciuntur.” This same text was used at Chartres (see Paris, BnF, MS lat. 945, fol. 127r–v). While this was happening, the clergy chanted the response “In sudore vultus tui,” which is derived from Gen. 3–4 (“In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread said the Lord to Adam. When thou shalt till the earth, it shall not yield to thee its fruit but thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee”).

⁹⁸ See, for example, Paris, BnF, MSS lat. 934, fol. 68r, and lat. 945, fol. 133v.

⁹⁹ The window is currently the only narrative window at aisle level in the north transept. There was once a life of St. Lawrence next to it that is now lost. See Delaporte and Houvet, *Vitraux de la cathédrale de Chartres* (above, n. 8), pp. 377–80.

¹⁰⁰ Delaporte, *Ordinaire*, p. 46; Hollengreen, “Living Testimony,” p. 338; and Bishop Nicholas de Thou, *Maniere d'adminstrer les saincts sacraments de l'eglise* (Paris, 1580), fol. 219v. It would seem that no earlier text makes mention of the north porch's being used for this ritual.

¹⁰¹ Werckmeister, “Lintel Fragment,” pp. 15–23. Werckmeister argues that this understanding of the north side of a church comes from an allegorical interpretation of the north porch of the Jewish temple court after Ezek. 40.20 (see his p. 20). For further thoughts on the portal's penitential iconography, see Linda Seidel, *Legends in Limestone: Lazarus, Gislebertus, and the Cathedral of Autun* (Chicago, 1999), pp. 103–7. On the sculpture in general, see Grivot and Zarnecki, *Gislebertus* (above, n. 4). The idea of the north side of a church as the side of darkness (versus the south side as the side of light) is discussed by Peter K. Klein in “Quelques remarques sur l'iconologie de la tour-porche de Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire,” *Les cahiers de Saint-Michel de Cuxa* 14 (1983), n.p. In addition to the prodigal son, the figure of Job is used in penitential contexts on the walls of Gothic cathedrals. He is set into

on the church's north entrance that may depict the prodigal son being re-dressed by his father upon his return. It is the only Romanesque carving of the parable that I know.

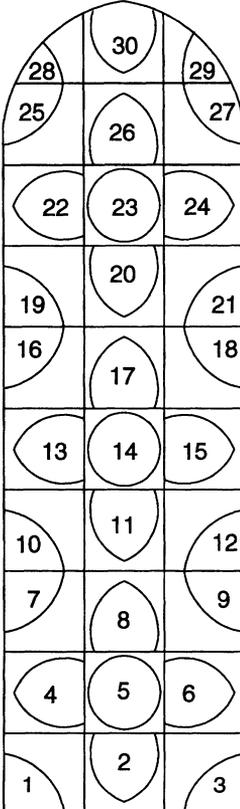
In attempting to explain the popularity of the prodigal son in thirteenth-century art, I have argued that the parable offers a powerful ideological map of the medieval world at this time. The picture cycles in question rewrite the parable across a series of binaries that transform the story into a pointed commentary on life in northern France at this time. The worldly is opposed to the spiritual, exterior ostentation to interior devotion. The images connect the individual and the rapidly changing world of the thirteenth century, a world in which the traditional authority of the cathedral chapter was under assault.¹⁰² These artworks argue that the ground for the prodigal's salvation is a turn toward the interior, away from an earthly city whose spaces have the potential to rob the unsuspecting pilgrim of his very identity. Like the Lenten penitent, the prodigal must reject the dangerous spaces of the city and seek solace in the father's house, the cathedral itself. Intertwined with this worldview is a model of subjectivity that argues that as the son is transformed again and again on his journey, it is only when he turns to the father that he is truly himself.

tympans in the north portals at Chartres (close to the prodigal son window) and at Reims. See Ingrid Westerhoff, "Hiob in der französischen Kathedralskulptur," *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 50 (1989), 39–68; and Samuel L. Terrien, *The Iconography of Job through the Centuries: Artists as Biblical Interpreters* (University Park, Pa., 1996), pp. 73–80. On Job at Reims, see Barbara Abou-El-Haj, "The Urban Setting for Late Medieval Church Building: Reims and Its Cathedral between 1210 and 1240," *Art History* 11 (1988), 25–28. On Job at Chartres, see Hollengreen, "Living Testimony," pp. 72–84; Martin Buchsel, "Das Hiob-Salomo-Portal: Stilistische Typologie–typologischer Stil," in *Studien zur Geschichte der europäischen Skulptur im 12./13. Jahrhundert*, ed. Herbert Beck, Kerstin Hengevoss-Dürkop, and Georg Kamp, 2 vols. (Frankfurt, 1994), pp. 413–29; and Adolf Katzenellenbogen, *The Sculptural Programs of Chartres Cathedral: Christ–Mary–Ecclesia* (Baltimore, 1959), pp. 67–74 and 95–97. Job is also one of the marginal figures in the prodigal son sculptural cycle at Auxerre (Quednau, *Die Westportale der Kathedrale von Auxerre* [above, n. 15], p. 101), and scenes from a Job cycle are found in the window next to the prodigal son window at Poitiers (see Grodecki, "Les vitraux de la cathédrale de Poitiers" [above, n. 11]). The other great story of penitence popular in art at this time is that of Theophilus; see Michael W. Cothren, "The Iconography of Theophilus Windows in the First Half of the Thirteenth Century," *Speculum* 59 (1984), 308–41.

¹⁰² This is precisely the model of ideology outlined by Louis Althusser in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York, 1971), pp. 127–86. On Althusser's relative neglect by medievalists, see Peter Haidu, "Althusser Anonymous in the Middle Ages," *Exemplaria* 7 (1995), 55–74.

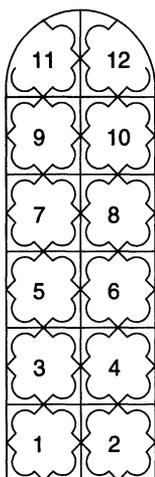
APPENDIX

1. The Prodigal Son Window at Chartres



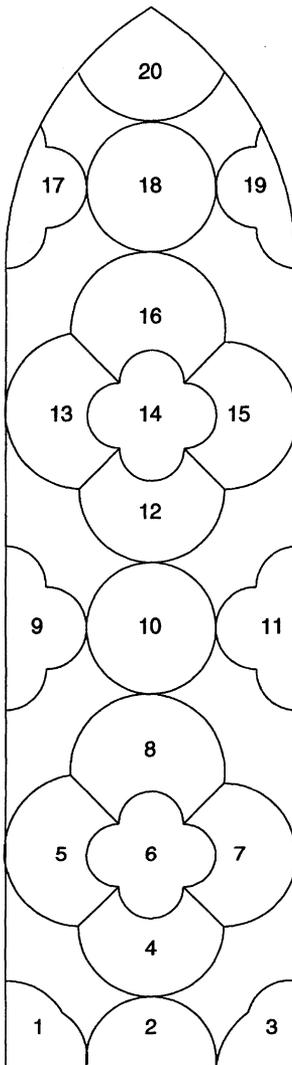
1. The prodigal demands his share of the inheritance from his father.
2. The father gives his son a vase.
3. The elder son, working in the fields, looks on.
4. The younger son departs on horseback with a servant.
5. The servant leaves him.
6. Two prostitutes await him.
7. Servants prepare a meal.
8. The prodigal is feasted.
9. Servants prepare a meal.
10. A prostitute and a man approach the prodigal in bed.
11. He is crowned with flowers by two of the prostitutes.
12. He plays dice in a tavern.
13. He is beaten and stripped.
14. He returns to the brothel.
15. He is ejected.
16. He seeks work from a man.
17. He tends the pigs.
18. He reflects.
19. He journeys home.
20. He presents himself before his father.
21. A servant brings him new clothes.
22. The father has the fatted calf killed.
23. A feast is prepared.
24. The older son protests before the father.
25. Musicians play.
26. The family feasts.
27. Servants bring food.
28. Angel.
29. Angel.
30. Christ in majesty.

2. The Prodigal Son Window at Sens (with Inscriptions)



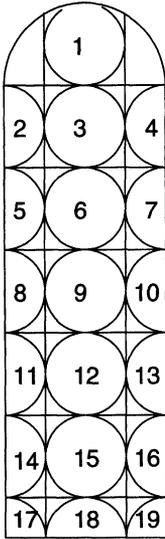
1. "Pater unicuique filiorum divisit substantiam." The father divides the inheritance between his two sons.
2. "Pater da michi portionem substantie que me contingit." The younger son, standing with his brother, demands his inheritance.
3. "Hic prodigus vadit cum tribus meretricibus." Three prostitutes greet the prodigal.
4. "Hic coronatur a meretricibus." Six figures crown the prodigal with flowers.
5. "Hic ducitur a demonibus vinctus cathenis." The prodigal is held in chains by three demons.
6. "Hic frater prodigi [*sic*] custodi porcos." The prodigal tends the pigs.
7. "Hic osculatur pater filium suum." Father and son embrace.
8. "Hic interficitur vitulus saginatus." The fatted calf is killed; a servant holds a tunic.
9. "Hic epulantur cum gaudio." A banquet and musicians.
10. "Hic frater prodigi loquitur cum servo." The older son inquires as to what is happening.
11. "Hic pater loquitur de filio." The father speaks to the older son.
12. "Hic intrat domum filius." The father leads the older son by the hand into the house.

3. The Prodigal Son Window at Bourges



1. The donors: two tanners with a pelt.
2. The donors: a tanner in his shop with customers.
3. The donors: a tanner cleans a pelt.
4. The prodigal claims his inheritance from his father.
5. The father gives him a gold cup.
6. The older son looks on from the fields.
7. The younger son departs on horseback with a servant.
8. A prostitute embraces the prodigal.
9. The prodigal is kissed by one prostitute, while another dances.
10. He is crowned.
11. The prodigal is ejected from the brothel.
12. He plays dice in the tavern.
13. Two women, one with a club, eject the prodigal.
14. He agrees to work for a landowner.
15. He tends the pigs and reflects.
16. His father kisses him, and a servant brings new clothes.
17. The father has a servant kill the fatted calf.
18. The festive meal.
19. The older son protests before the father.
20. The father reunites the two sons, bringing their hands together.

4. The Prodigal Son Window at Poitiers



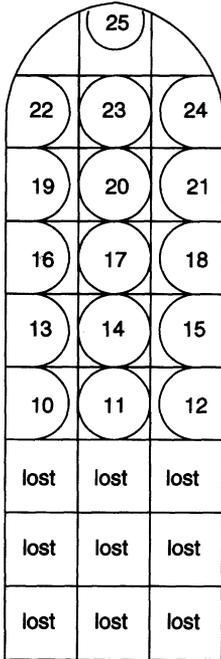
1. The prodigal receives his inheritance from his father. A servant and the older brother look on.
2. The prodigal begins his journey.
3. The prodigal playing dice in the tavern.
4. Two figures standing.
5. The prodigal and the landowner converse.
6. The prodigal tends the pigs.
7. The prodigal reflects.
8. The prodigal?
9. The prodigal and a woman with a servant. Scene from earlier in the story?
10. The prodigal is evicted.
11. The prodigal is re-dressed.
12. The festive meal.
13. A servant carries food.
14. A musician.
15. The festive meal. The father between his two sons.
16. The killing of the fatted calf.
17. A figure welcomes the prodigal. Scene from earlier in the story?
18. Two men and a woman.
19. A single figure.

5. The Prodigal Son Window at Coutances

11	12
9	10
7	8
5	6
3	4
1	2

1. The prodigal claims his share.
2. (Restored). Having received his inheritance, the prodigal departs while his father looks on.
3. (Heavily restored). He is met by a prostitute.
4. The prodigal in bed. A prostitute standing beside him holds a gold vessel.
5. (Modern). A prostitute stands holding a piece of gold before the prodigal.
6. (Heavily restored). The prodigal's brother in the fields tending cows? Perhaps originally scene 10.
7. The prodigal is ejected by a prostitute.
- 8-10. (Modern).
11. (Restored). The festive meal.
12. Two servants.

6. The Prodigal Son Window at Auxerre



(The first three rows are destroyed.)

10. The prodigal in the brothel.

11. He is ejected from the brothel.

12. He seeks work from a landowner.

13. He tends the pigs.

14. He contemplates his situation.

15. He returns home and is embraced by his father.

16. He is dressed in new clothes.

17. The fatted calf is killed.

18. Musicians play.

19. The festive meal.

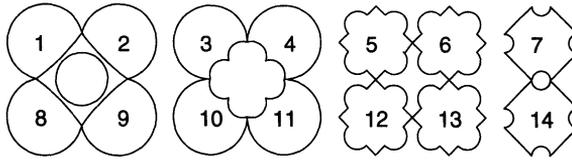
20. The older brother speaks to a servant.

21. The father appeases the older brother.

22–24. The festive meal.

25. Single figure—the prodigal?

7. The Prodigal Son at Auxerre:
Sculpture on the West Facade

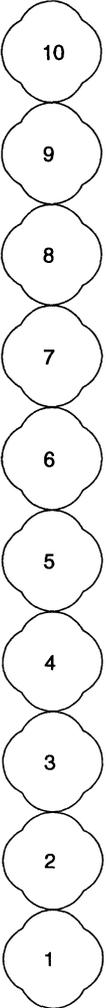


Top row:

1. The prodigal son receives his inheritance from his father.
2. The prodigal rides with a groom.
3. The prodigal, still riding, is greeted by two prostitutes.
4. The prodigal is crowned by two prostitutes.
5. The prodigal feasts with the prostitutes.
6. The prodigal is bathed in a tub and serenaded by the prostitutes.
7. Two prostitutes eject the prodigal.

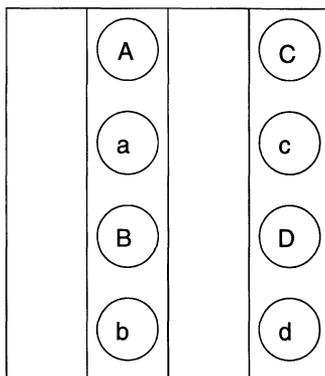
Bottom row:

8. The prodigal tends the pigs.
9. The father embraces the prodigal; servants bring new clothing.
10. The fatted calf is killed; servants prepare the meal.
11. Musicians and a dancer.
12. Servants carry food.
13. The festive meal.
14. A servant informs the older brother of the prodigal's return.

*The Prodigal's Journey*8. The Prodigal Son Window at Clermont-Ferrand
(Scenes Restored to Order)

1. (Modern). The father gives the son his inheritance.
2. A prostitute greets the prodigal on horseback.
3. Two prostitutes crown the prodigal.
4. Two prostitutes eject the prodigal from the brothel.
5. (Modern). The prodigal seeks work.
6. The prodigal tends the pigs.
7. (Modern). The prodigal is welcomed home by his father.
8. Two servants kill the fatted calf.
9. Two minstrels play.
10. Censing angel.

9. The Prodigal Son in the *Bible moralisée*:
Toledo, Cathedral Treasury, MS 3, fols. 34r–36r



34r

- D. Homo quidam habuit duos filios & dixit adolescentior patri suo: pater da mihi substantie portionem que me contingit et diuisit illis pater et adolescentior peregre profectus est in regionem longincam [sic].
- d. Hoc significat quod populus gentilis bona naturalia que Dominus ei dederat ad regionem longincam [sic] ydolatrie conuertit et dissipant [sic] substantiam suam uiuendo luxuriose.

35v

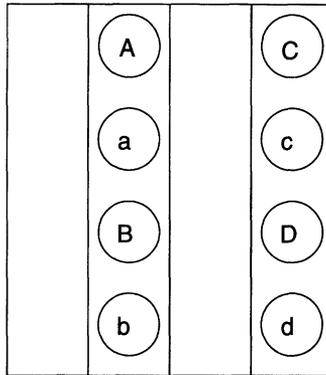
- A. Et dissipauit substantiam suam uiuendo luxuriose.
- a. Hoc significat quod populus gentilis expendit bona sua in carnalibus desideriis.
- B. Et postquam omnia consumasset facta est fames ualida in regione illa & ipse cepit egere et abiit & adhesit uni ciuium regionis illius & misit illum in uillam suam ut pasceret porcos et cupiebat implere uentrem suum de siliquis quas porci manducabant & nemo illi dabat.
- b. Cibis iste diabolus significant, fames defectum cognitionum Dei quem gentilis populus habebat; silique porcorum carmina poetarum et dogmata philo[so]forum erroribus plena, quibus populus gentilis detinebatur.
- C. In se autem reuersus adolescens dixit: Quanti mercenarii in domo patris mei habundant panibus, ego autem hic fame pereo. Surgens autem uenit ad patrem suum dicens: pater, peccauit in celum & coram te. Cum autem adhuc longe esset uidit illum pater ipsius et misericordia motus occurrens cecidit super collum eius et osculatus est eum.
- c. Reuersio filii ad patrem conuersionem gentium ad fidem significant; occursus patris uniuersam misericordiam patris celestis per quam filium suum incarnari constituit.
- D. Dixit autem pater ad seruos suos: cito proferte stolam primam & induite illum & date anulum in manu eius & calciamentum in pedibus eius.
- d. Anulus fidem significat, prima stola innocentiam babtismalem, calciamenta doctrinam bonam sumptam de exemplis sanctorum.

36r

- A. Et adducite uitulum saginatum et occidite.
- a. Hoc significat quod pater celestis filium suum ad mortem tradidit pro redemptione generis humani.
- B. Et manducemus et epulemur quia filius meus mortuus erat et reuixit, perierat et inuentus est. Et ceperunt epulari habentes simphoniam et chorum.

- b. Conuiuium istud refectionem gratie Dei significat. Simphonia & cantus laudes quas ecclesia reddit deo de conuersione gentilium.
- C. Erat autem filius eius senior in agro et cum audisset quod factum est indignatus noluit introire.
- c. Hoc significat quod populus iudeorum moratur in littera legis et inuidet populo gentilium conuerso.
- D. Pater ergo illius egressus cepit rogare eum.
- d. Hoc significat quod in fine mundi conuertet dominus iudeos ad fidem.

10. The Prodigal Son in the *Bible moralisée*:
London, British Library, MS Harley 1527, Fols. 34v–36v



34v

- C. Homo quidam habuit duos filios et dixit adulescentior patri suo: Pater da mihi portionem substantiae que me contingit. Et diuisit illis substantiam adulescentior peregre profectus est in regionem longinquam.
- c. Hoc significat quod populus gentilis bona naturalia que Dominus ei dederat. Ad regionem longinquam ydolatrie conuertit.
- D. Et ibi dissipauit substantiam suam uiuendo luxuriose.
- d. Hoc significat quod populus gentilis expendit bona sua in carnalibus desideriis.

35r

- A. Et postquam omnia consumasset facta est fames ualida in regione illa & tempore cepit egere. Et abiit et adhesit uni ciuium regionis illius & misit eum in uillam suam ut pasceret porcos & cupiebat implere uentrem suum de siliquis quas porci manducabant & nemo illis dabat.
- a. Cuius iste diabolus significat, fames defectum cognitionis dei quem gentilis populus habebat, silique porcorum carmina poetarum & dogmata phariseorum erroribus plena in quibus gentilis populus detinebatur.
- B. Adolescens autem in se reuersus dixit: Quanti mercennarii in domo patris mei habundant panibus ego autem hic fame pereor & surgens uenit ad patrem suum dicens pater peccaui in celum & coram te etc. Quem uidens pater misericordia motus est & accurrens [*sic*] cecidit super collum eius & osculatur est eum.
- b. Reuersio filii ad patrem conuersionem gentium significant. Occursus patris in mensam misericordiam patris celestis per quam filium suum incarnari constituit.
- C. Dixit autem pater ad seruos suos: cito pro ferre stolam primam & induite illum & date anulum in manu eius & calciamenta in pedibus eius.

- c. Stola prima innocentiam baptismalem significat, anulus fidem, calciamenta doctrinam bonam sumptam de exemplis sanctorum.
- D. Et adducite uitulum saginatum et occidite.
- d. Hoc significat quod pater celestis filium suum ad mortem tradidit pro redemptione generis humani.

36v

- A. Et manducemus & epulemur quia hic filius meus mortuus fuerat & reuixit perierat & inuentus est & ceperunt epulari & gaudere habentes simphoniam & chorum.
- a. Conuiuium illud refectionem gratie dei significat. Symphonia & instrumenta musica laudes quas ecclesia deo reddit de conuersione gentilium.
- B. Erat autem filius eius senior in agro & cum uenisset et audisset quod factum est indignatus nolebat introire. Pater ergo illius egressus cepit rogare eum.
- b. Hoc significat quod populus iudeorum morant in littera legis & inuidet populo gentilium conuerso quod pater rogauit filium ut intraret significat quod in fine mundi conuertet Dominus iudeos ad fidem.