

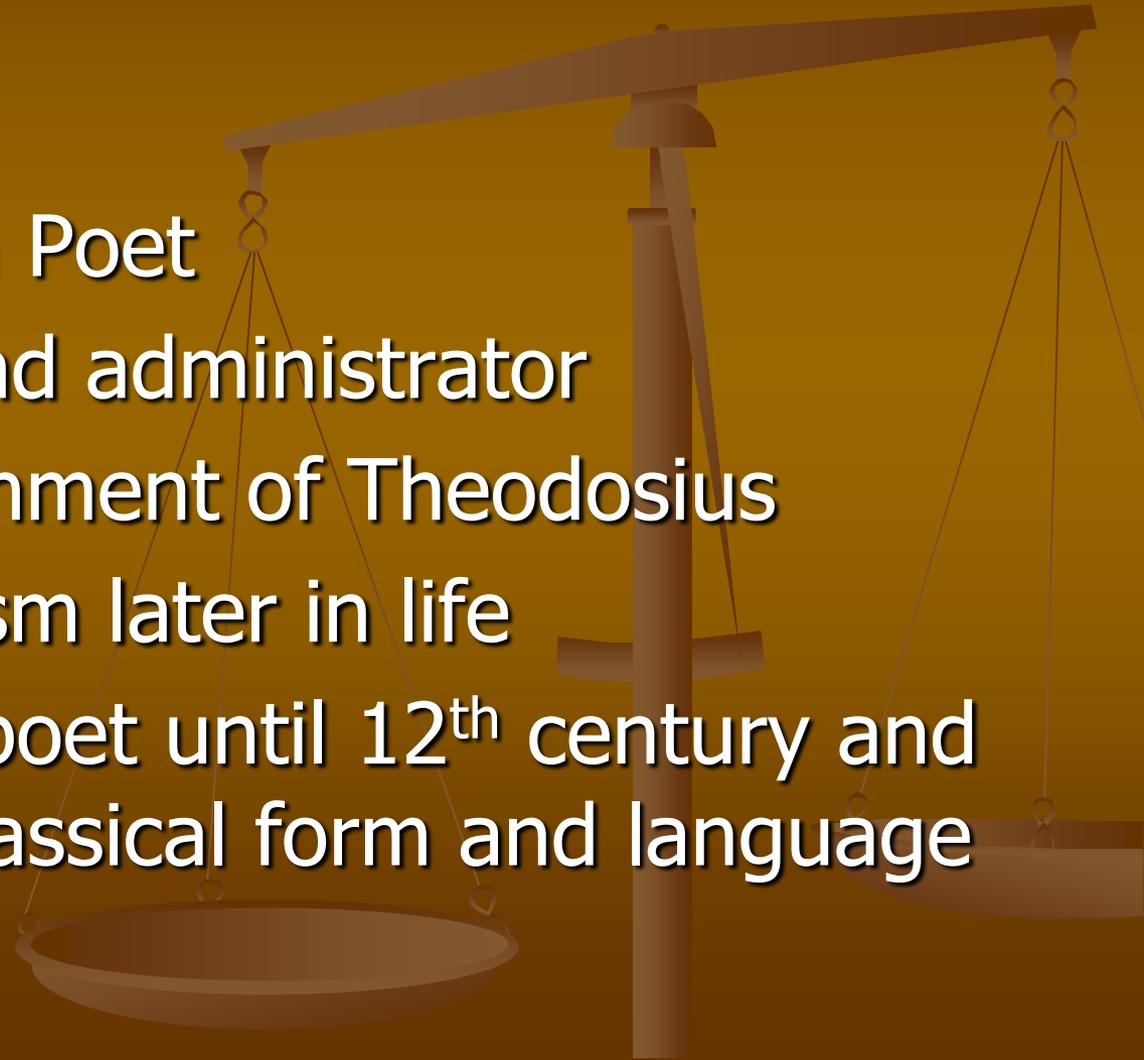
# Prudentius' *Psychomachia* and Christian Allegory

Dr. Alan Haffa

Please Silence Cell Phones

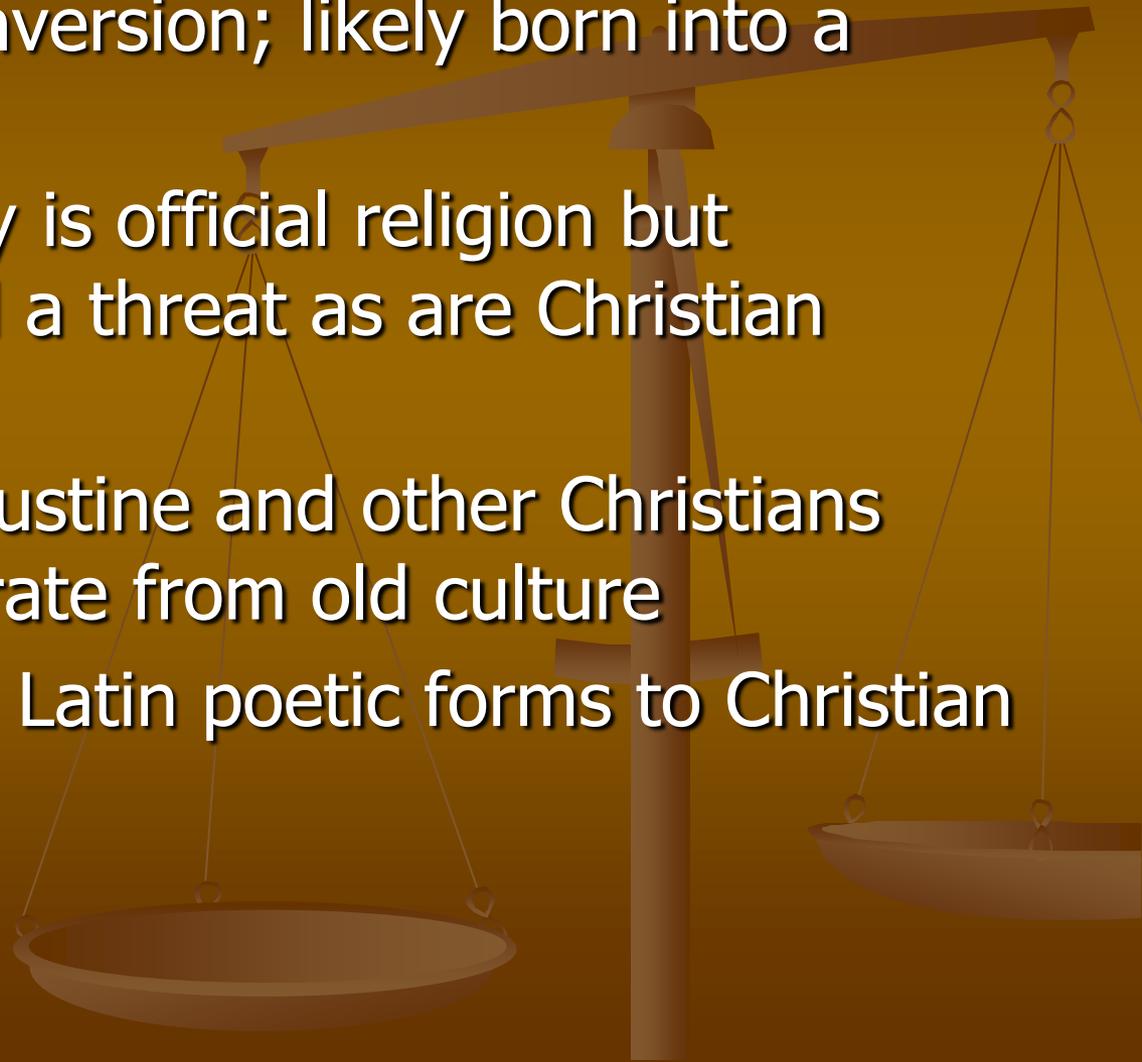
# Aurelius Prudentius Clemens (348-410?)

- Spain
- Roman, Christian Poet
- Roman lawyer and administrator
- Worked in government of Theodosius
- Adopted asceticism later in life
- Last great Latin poet until 12<sup>th</sup> century and last to write in classical form and language

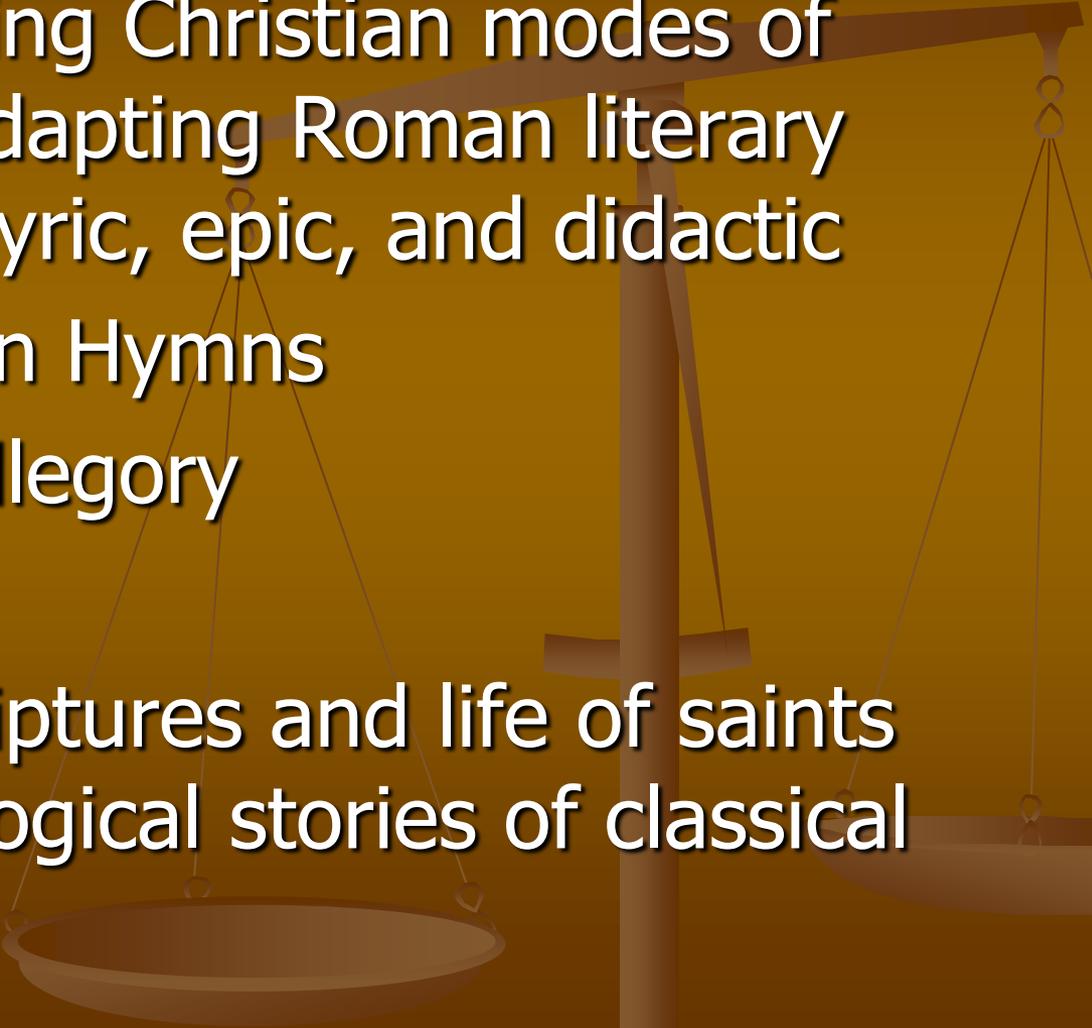


# Prudentius in Cultural Context

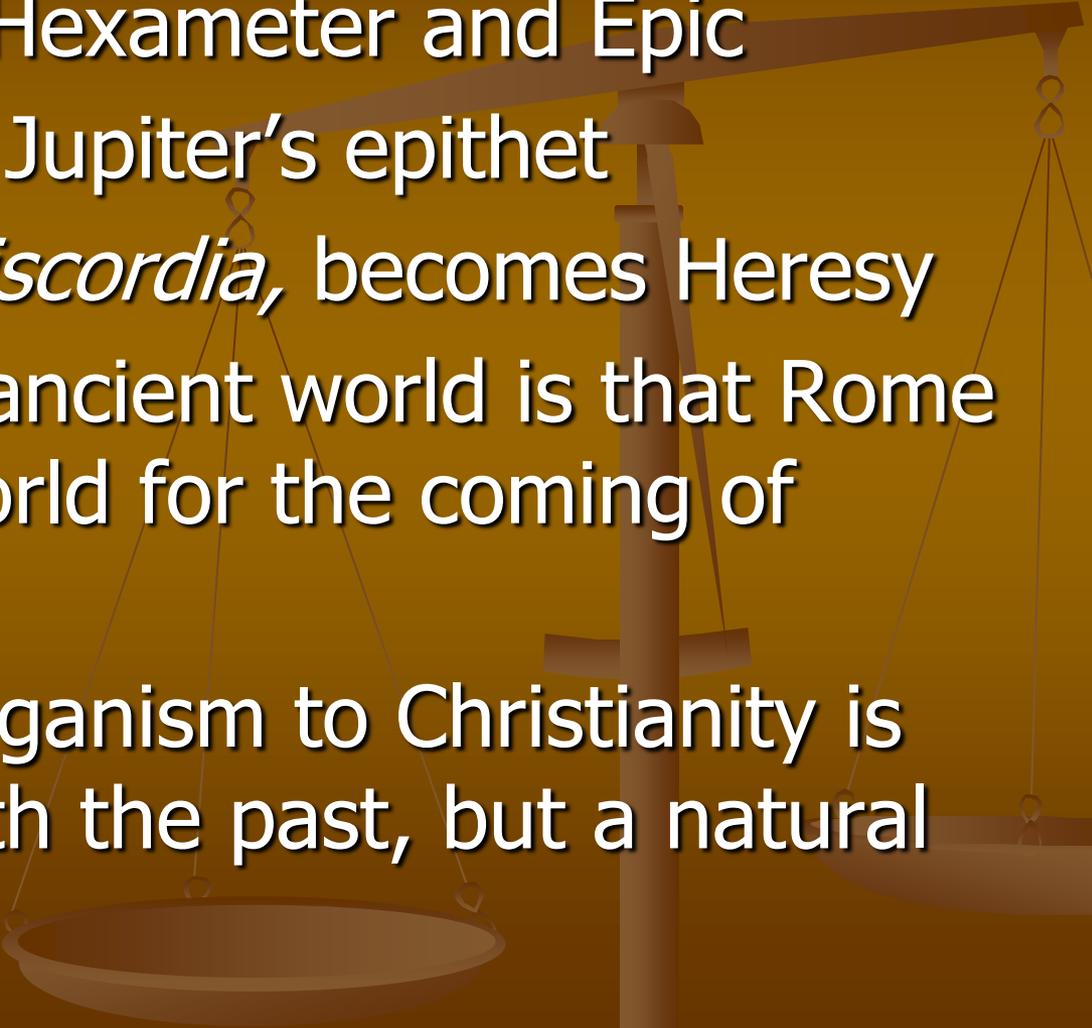
- No mention of conversion; likely born into a Christian family
- By 400 Christianity is official religion but paganism was still a threat as are Christian heresies
- Contrast with Augustine and other Christians who seek to separate from old culture
- Prudentius adapts Latin poetic forms to Christian subject matter



# Poetry of Prudentius

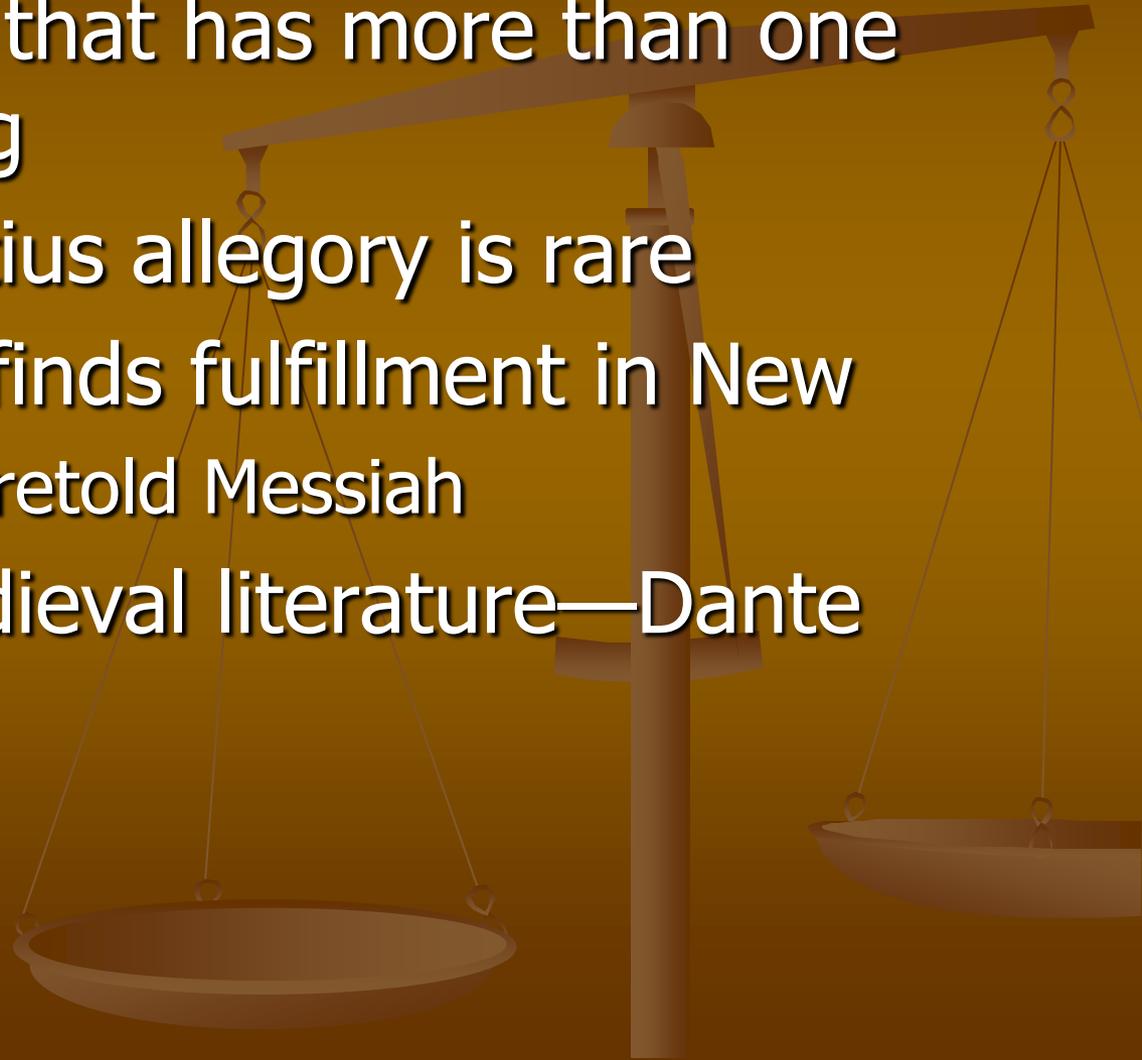
- Pioneer in creating Christian modes of expression by adapting Roman literary modes such as lyric, epic, and didactic
  - Created Christian Hymns
  - Literary moral allegory
  - Christian Ballad
  - Stories from scriptures and life of saints replaces mythological stories of classical literary
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# Resolving Differences with Classical Heritage

- Meter: Dactylic Hexameter and Epic
  - God as *Tonans*, Jupiter's epithet
  - Virgil's Strife, *Discordia*, becomes Heresy
  - His view of the ancient world is that Rome prepared the world for the coming of Christ.
  - Change from paganism to Christianity is not a breach with the past, but a natural development
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# Medieval Allegory

- Allegory: a text that has more than one level of meaning
- Prior to Prudentius allegory is rare
- Old Testament finds fulfillment in New
  - Christ as the foretold Messiah
- Common in Medieval literature—Dante through Milton



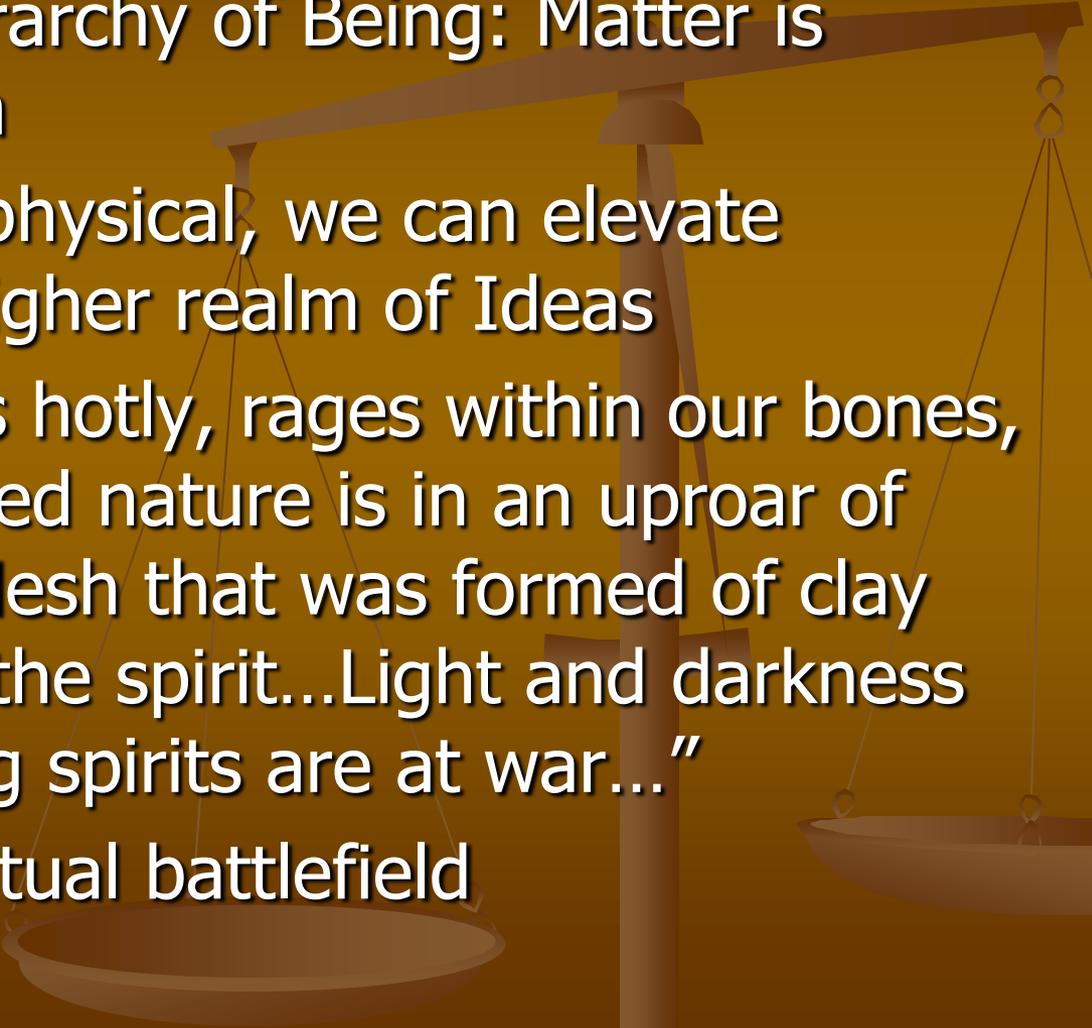
# Virtues battle Vices: Lists are NOT Canonical

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- Faith
  - Chastity
  - Patience
  - Humility
  - Hope
  - Sobriety
  - Good Works
  - Worship of Old Gods
  - Lust
  - Wrath
  - Pride
  - Luxury
  - Greed
  - Discord

# Psychomachia: Abraham as Symbol of Battling Soul

- Abraham and Sara had no child until they overcame vice in their hearts; willingness to sacrifice what we most love for God is a sign that we are spiritually ready
- "This picture has been drawn as a model for our life to trace out with true measure, showing that we must watch in the armor of faithful hearts, and that every part of our body which is in captivity and enslaved to foul desire must be set free by gathering our forces at home..."

# Platonic Order: Spirit Superior to Body

- Plato's idea of Hierarchy of Being: Matter is secondary to Form
  - By mastering the physical, we can elevate ourselves to the higher realm of Ideas
  - "Savage war rages hotly, rages within our bones, and man's two-sided nature is in an uproar of rebellion: for the flesh that was formed of clay bears down upon the spirit...Light and darkness with their opposing spirits are at war..."
  - The Soul as a spiritual battlefield
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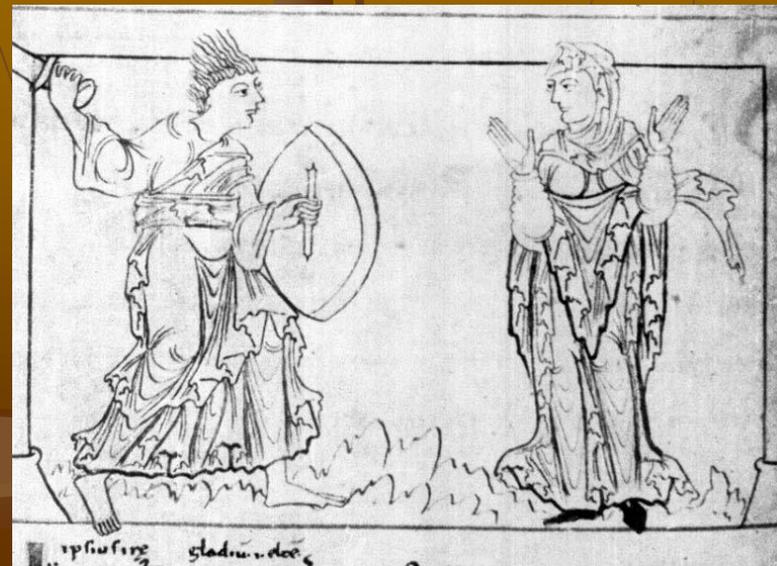
# Chastity versus Lust

- “the maiden Chastity, shining in beauteous armor. On her falls Lust, the Sodomite...and thrusts into her face a torch of pinewood blazing murkily with pitch and burning sulphur, attacking her modest eyes with the flames and seeking to cover them with the foul smoke.”
- Model: Virgin Birth, Word conquers Flesh



- Ira's javelin "rebounds, for Virtue had prudently put on her shoulders a three-ply corselet of mail...So Patientia abides undisturbed...standing unmoved by the javelin while the monster that shot it rages in ungoverned frenzy, she waits for Wrath to perish by reason of her own violence."
- Job as model

Patientia (Long Suffering Endurance) versus Ira (Wrath)



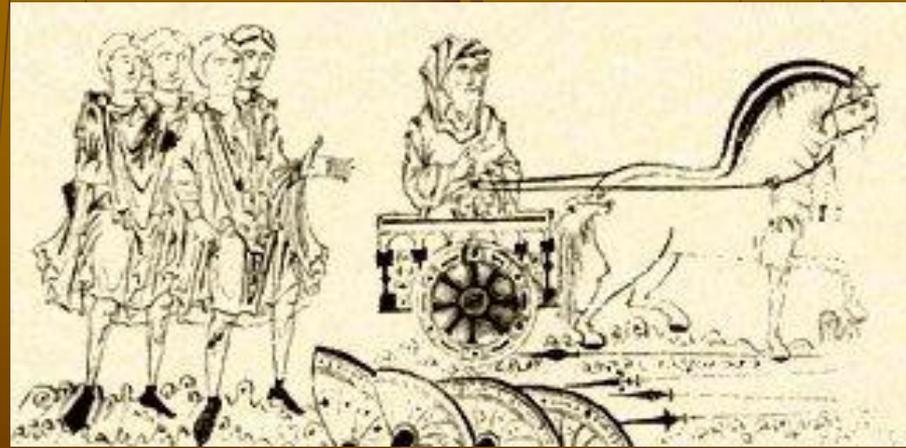
- Vaunt of Pride
- Deceit trips up Pride
- Vices fail because of themselves
- Humility hesitates but Hope inspires her and she cuts off the head of Pride
- Goliath and David as model

## Pride versus Humility

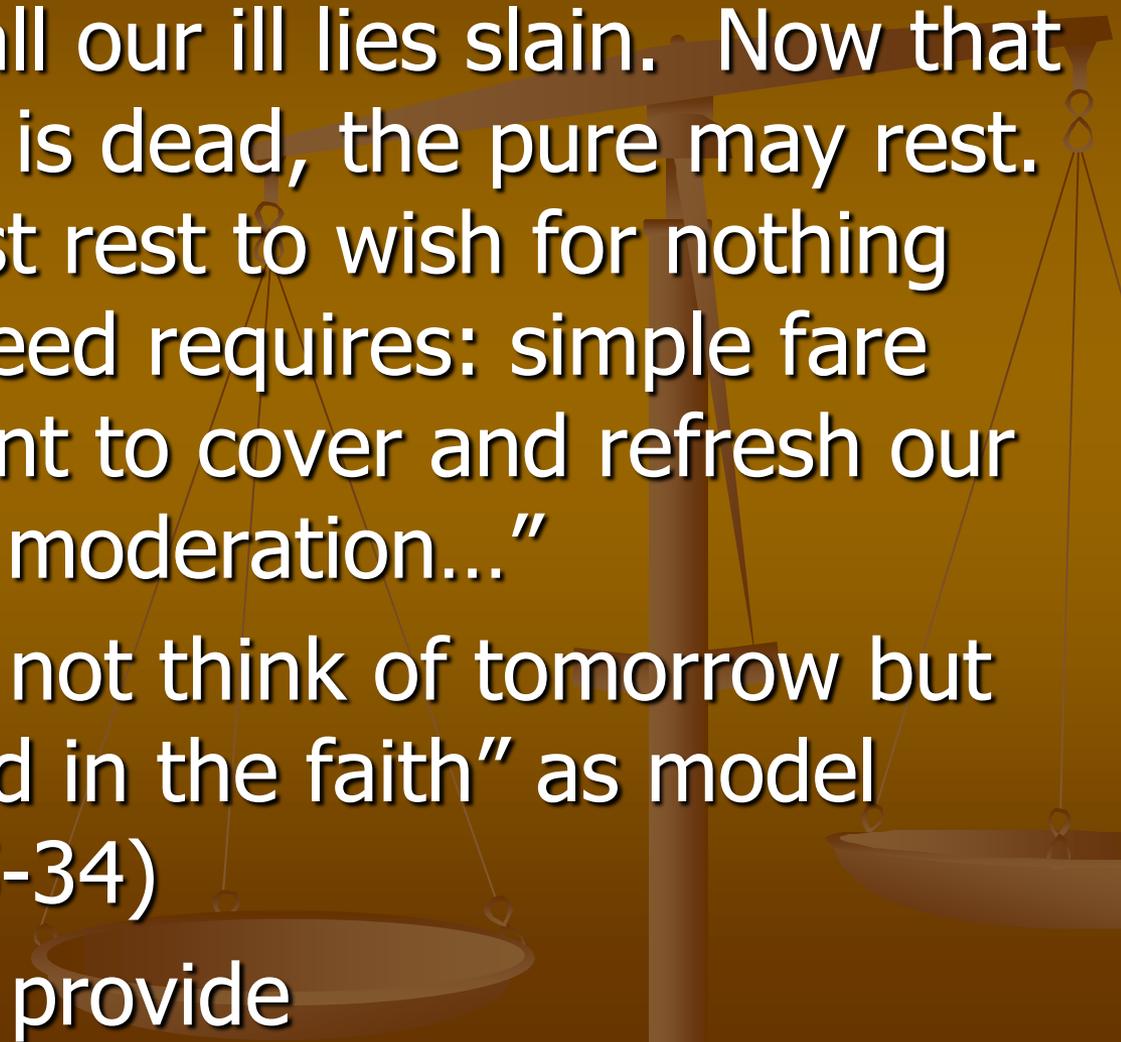


- “Luxury...her locks perfumed, her eyes shifting, her voice listless, abandoned in voluptuousness she lived only for pleasure...she was languidly belching after a night-long feast...her foot slipping as she stepped through pools of wine and perfumes, and trampling on the flowers, and was making her drunken way to the war.”

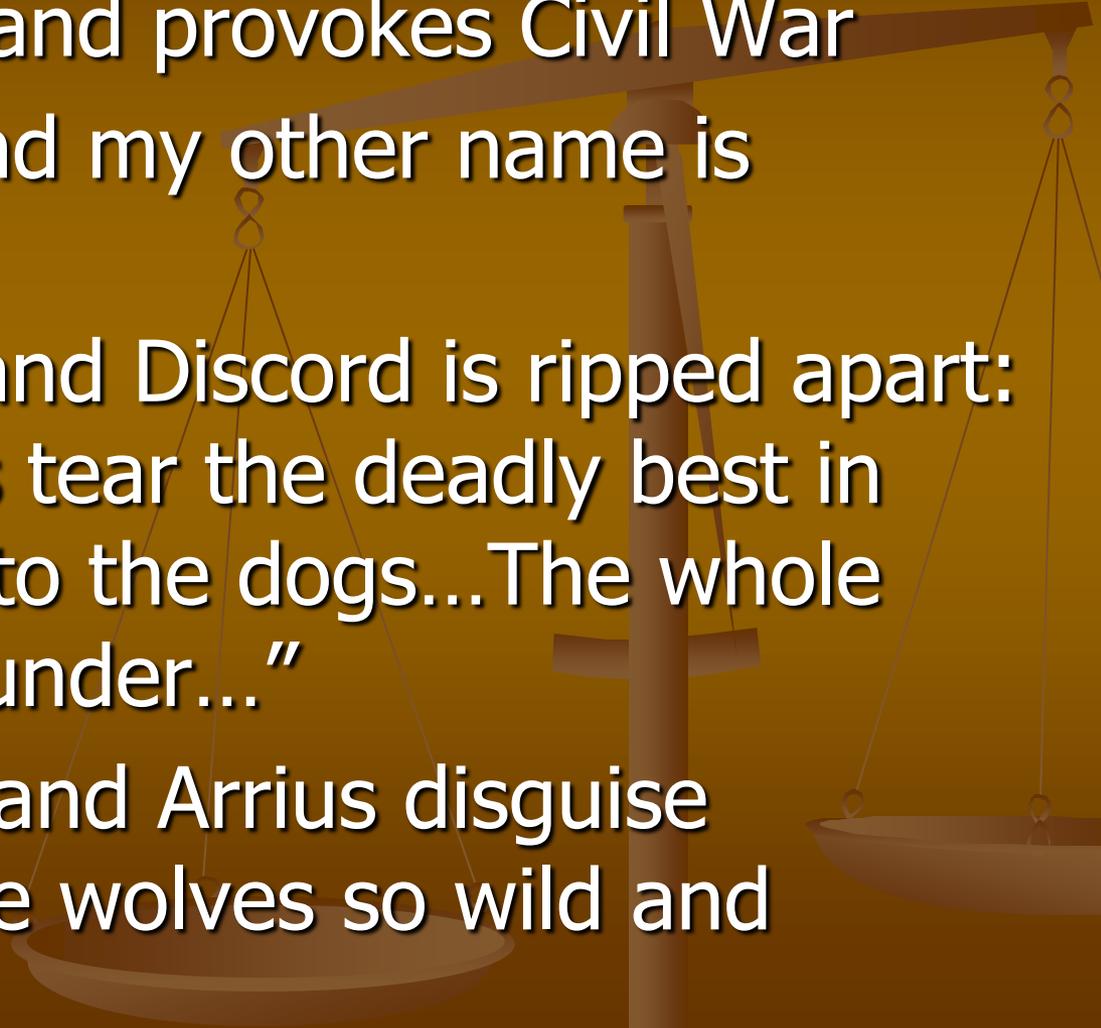
## Luxuria vs. Sobrietas



# Good Works Defeats Avarice

- “The cause of all our ill lies slain. Now that the lust of gain is dead, the pure may rest. It is the deepest rest to wish for nothing beyond what need requires: simple fare and one garment to cover and refresh our weak bodies in moderation...”
  - Bird that “does not think of tomorrow but rests untroubled in the faith” as model (Matthew 6: 25-34)
  - Moral: God will provide
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# Peace to Discord



- Discordia enters and provokes Civil War
- “I am Discord, and my other name is Heresy.”
- Faith stops her and Discord is ripped apart: “Countless hands tear the deadly best in pieces, or throw to the dogs...The whole corpse is torn asunder...”
- Model: “Photinus and Arrius disguise themselves, those wolves so wild and savage”

# Summary

- Prudentius is important as a literary writer who bridges the Pagan and Christian worlds and introduces Allegory as a means of reconciling
- He melds Epic form and Christian matter in *Psychomachia*
- Spiritual struggle is prefigured in Plato
- Prudentius represents the Christian view that saw pagan Roman Empire as preparing the world for Christianity