

THE PLACE OF "MELIBEE" IN THE CANTERBURY TALES

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Chapter 1

"The Tale of Melibee" is rarely anthologized and is labeled by some critics as a "rather stupid piece"; it is said to be "a demonstration of inept authorship," consistent with Chaucer's comical characterization of himself as a sort of elfish blockhead.¹ In recent years, however, opposition to this critical position has arrayed itself, beginning with D. W. Robertson's reevaluation of the tale in A Preface to Chaucer (Princeton, 1962).² Even years before Robertson, Tatlock warned those moderns who considered the "Melibee" simply to be a rather tedious joke that perhaps the medieval sensibility saw the tale in a different light; he cites, for example, that Lydgate thought the "Melibee" one of only three tales worthy of mention in his Fall of Princes.³ Now, with rather wide acceptance of Robertson's reinterpretation of the linking passage between "The Tale of Sir Thopas" and "The Tale of Melibee," the old "stupid piece" must be esteemed as an integral part of Chaucer's "hy sentence" purposed for the complete work. In fact, "The Melibee" might prove to be the Tales' "keystone."⁴

¹The Prologue, the Knight's Tale, and the Nun's Priest's Tale, from Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, ed. F. J. Mather (Boston, 1899), p. xv; and Trevor Whittock, A Reading of the Canterbury Tales (Cambridge, 1968), p. 215.

²See also Bernard F. Huppé, A Reading of the Canterbury Tales (Albany, 1964), pp. 235ff. The summary of his analysis follows in the next paragraph.

³J.S.P. Tatlock, The Development and Chronology of Chaucer's Works (Chaucer Society, 1907), p. 190.

⁴This suggestion is made by Professor Richard L. Hoffman in his article, "Chaucer's 'Melibee' and Tales of Sondry Folk," appearing first in Amsterdämer Beiträge Zur Älteren Germanistik, Band 7 (Amsterdam, 1974), p. 186. I would also like to acknowledge my indebtedness to Dr. Hoffman for his helpful suggestions.

This interpretation of the linking passage between "Sir Thopas" and the "Melibee," referred to above, can be understood through a rather involved analysis of the text. In this passage, Harry Bailey calls "Sir Thopas" to a halt. He asks Chaucer to tell something else, "In which ther be som murthe or som doctryne," and the poet proposes to tell a "moral tale vertuous" of "sondry folk." The phrase "sondry folk" harkens back to line 25 of the General Prologue, where the words refer to the Canterbury pilgrims. If the reader is to believe that here again Chaucer is making reference to the same, he must understand the manner in which a pithy, axiomatic work like "Melibee" could be about the "folk" of the preceding tales. The following digression (the headlink to "Melibee") explains how the gospels seem different when read on the surface, yet they are found to be the same when interpreted spiritually. Biblical passages must be read below the literal level before their underlying meanings and harmony become visible: "And alle acorden as in hire sentence./ Al be ther in hir tellyng difference." By giving the example of the gospels whose "sentence is al oon," Chaucer implies that in like manner, the "Melibee's" sentence and the underlying meaning of the other tales is "al oon." This implication is supported further when Chaucer apologizes for the excessive number of proverbs found in the "Melibee":

As thus, though that I telle somewhat moore
Of proverbs than ye han herd bifoore
Comprehended in this litel tretys heere.⁵

⁵The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. F. N. Robinson, (1933; rpt. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961), p. 167, 11.955-957. All further references to the text are taken from Robinson's edition and will be notated by line numbers only.

Robertson and Hoffman sufficiently dispute critical opinion which identifies the "litel tretys" as Albertanus of Brescia's Latin work or Renaud's version of "Melibee" on the grounds that such an interpretation is contrary to fact; that is, Chaucer's work does not contain more proverbs than his sources.⁶ On the contrary, his "Melibee" has even fewer proverbs than Renaud's condensed version (Renaud drastically edited Albertanus's original story). The words, "litel tretys," then, most likely refer to The Canterbury Tales itself. The poet is comparing the number of proverbs in "Melibee" to the lighter charge of the preceding fabliaux and courtly works. Robertson substantiates this interpretation by pointing out that "litel tretys" is used in Chaucer's "Retractions" to signify The Canterbury Tales (1. 1082).⁷ Finally, the poet makes the same assertion about the poetic allegory of The Canterbury Tales as he made about the spiritual allegory in the Gospels:

As in my sentence,
Shul ye nowher fynden difference
Fro the sentence of this tretys lyte
After the which this murye tale I write. (11.961-964)

The reader will find no difference between the underlying meaning of "this tretys lyte" (The Canterbury Tales) and the following very sententious tale ("Melibee"). This focus on the submerged meaning of the tales is strengthened even more by the poet's curious choice of the verb "write" rather than "speak." His diction indicates that he is addressing not only

⁶D. W. Robertson, Jr., A Preface to Chaucer (1961; rpt. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 369; Hoffman's "Chaucer's 'Melibee' and Tales of Sundry Folk," p. 166.

⁷Preface, p. 369.

the pilgrims here in the headlink, but also his more sophisticated literary audience, which is expected to be more sensitive to the profound, rather than the surface, meaning of his work. This pervasive allegorical unity revealed in the quotation above implies that a clear understanding of that "moral tale vertuous" will provide a basis for rightly interpreting the intended "sentence" of the other tales.

With this hopeful prospect of understanding something of the emphasis and meaning of The Canterbury Tales, the initial task at hand is a thorough and working explication of the "Melibee" in its medieval Christian context.

In the distant past (c. 1393) the treatise was valued for its literal proverbial wisdom as exemplified by references made to it in Le Menagier de Paris, a work about "domestic economy" written by a goodman for the practical instruction of his young wife.⁸ Also, as mentioned earlier, Lydgate, who was "no unfavourable specimen of the cultivated man," considered the "Melibee" to be one of his favorite works (unfortunately, he does not say why). On the other hand, critics at the turn of our century did not like "Melibee" at all. R. D. French spoke of the treatise as "Chaucer's literary sin"; W. P. Ker ranked "Melibee" below "Sir Thopas" in value: "It [the inclusion of 'Melibee'] is hard to forgive, especially when one thinks that it was to this the innocent Sir Thopas was sacrificed."⁹ For the entire time of its circulation "Melibee" always has seemed too "commonplace" for explanation or for

⁸Eileen Power, trans., The Goodman of Paris (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1928), pp. 45, 210.

⁹R. D. French, A Chaucer Handbook (New York, 1929), p. 246; W. P. Ker, "Chaucer," in English Prose, ed., Henry Craik (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1907), p. 42.

close analysis; yet, oddly enough, what seem to be very straightforward, commonplace ideas have been cherished by some and equally deplored by others. As suggested by Tatlock, Ker, and others, the purely medieval flavor of the work may be simply distasteful to the modern reader, but there is another possibility: the "Melibee" may be a highly sententious work of art misunderstood in our day.

W. W. Lawrence suggests this possibility in Essays and Studies in Honor of Carleton Brown (1940): "But I think that another and more important feature of the tale has been strangely neglected--its repeated and earnest pleading for peace rather than war, for mediation and law rather than private revenge. Compared with this, its moral lessons, its psychologizing, and its elegant extracts seem of secondary significance."¹⁰ Lawrence is completely correct in concluding that the overall moral themes of the treatise take precedence over any of the literal, instructional proverbs. Chaucer himself suggests the preeminence of moral doctrine over literal significance when after the "Nun's Priest's Tale" he alludes to the teachings of St. Paul:

Taketh the moralite, goode men.
For seint Paul seith that al that is writen is,
To oure doctrine it is ywrite, ywis;
Taketh the fruyt, and lat the chaf be stille. (11.3440-3443)

Chaucer's words support Lawrence's attempt to delineate the "Melibee"'s essential moral theme; however, the reference to the Bible also reveals a limitation of Lawrence's opinion: the critic fails to associate

¹⁰This article may be found in Chaucer and His contemporaries, ed., Helaine Newstead (New York: Fawcett Publications, 1968), pp. 207-217; for the quotation above see p. 210.

the moral message of the "Melibee" with the medieval Christian sensibility. Neglecting to relate the treatise's message of peace to the "Prince of Peace" (Messiah), the full depth of the "Melibee's" theme is not recognized and also the unifying rationale within the work, which illuminates the just relationship between its parts, remains a mystery.

During the early 1960's Robertsonians pursued the Christian explanation of the treatise. Bernard F. Huppé says of the "Melibee": it is "an allegory of Penance, and of the inward meaning of the words of the Lord's Prayer: forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us."¹¹ In addition, Richard L. Hoffman follows the trail even further by determining the identity of Melibeus's daughter, Sophia: she is an allegorical rendering of Christ.¹² Since her "wounds" set the tale of "Melibee" in motion, the thematic centrality of Christ in the treatise becomes apparent. Professor Hoffman explains, " . . . it was God's Wisdom, or Christ, who taught us that Prayer and Who was wounded upon the Cross to save us from attacks by the World, the Flesh, and the Devil."¹³ From this point, the thematics of "Melibee" remain "commonplace" or perhaps just undiscovered. With the tantalizing expectation that "Melibee" may be the "keystone" to Chaucer's tour de force, the following chapter analyzes the text of "Melibee" and suggests a medieval Christian framework which shows our "stupid piece" to be a coherent, theological and artistic unity.

¹¹Reading, p. 239.

¹²"Chaucer's 'Melibee'," pp. 168-170.

¹³Ibid., p. 173.

CHAPTER 2

To understand clearly how "The Tale of Melibee" relates to the Canterbury Tales, it will first be wise to understand, as thoroughly as possible, "Melibee" itself in its medieval context. Contrary to much modern opinion, "Melibee" is not just a listing or conglomeration of gnostic commonplaces; more significantly, it was not a boring treatise in the medieval estimation. Any lack of appreciation for "Melibee" may be explained, as it is by some critics, to be the result of a modern sensibility, an uninterested mind weaned in a post-Christian era.¹⁴ In part, this explanation may be true, but this lack of interest itself has in many ways cheated the tale out of a fair hearing. One of the characteristics of axiomatic style is that it is meditative; it demands more than one reading, more rumination than spontaneous intellection. The beauty of "Melibee" is that it is designed to yield first perhaps only a shallow allegory of a man who needs to correct his life (this is as far as many readers are willing to go), but, on a second reading, "Melibee" becomes a manual explaining the lifelong inner dynamics of the "new" man (i.e., the Christian regenerate). Following medieval debate-literature on the tropological level, Melibeus is no longer a man, but the spirit of man taking part in an internal monologue with right reason, Prudence.¹⁵ This understanding probably corresponds with the intention of the originator, Albertano of Brescia, who wrote the treatise as a

¹⁴William Witherle Lawrence, "The Tale of Melibeus," in Chaucer and His Contemporaries, ed. Helaine Newstead (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, 1968), p. 203.

¹⁵J. V. Fleming also uses the term, "tropological," to refer to the internal monologue in his study of allegory, The Roman De La Rose (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 59.

guide for his third son as he came of age and entered upon his own career.¹⁶ The "Melibee" probably also continued to yield its fruit to the medieval man, who could appreciate the work on another allegorical level as a celebration of certain vital theological concepts--the Crucifixion and the Trinity; the treatise then, is a delicate interweaving of theology and practical sententious wisdom. Because of this technical and thematic excellence, "The Tale of Melibee" was popular in the Middle Ages.

Any understanding of the "Melibee," according to Albertano's original intent, will involve a close study of the treatise as a guide or manual for the "new" man. "New" man is a Christian theological term which refers to regenerate man, man changed from his fallen state in Adam to a "new" condition of hope in Christ: "Therefore, if any man is in Christ he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, the new things have come."¹⁷ Christian regeneration is a lifelong process resulting ultimately in following the example of Christ himself. St. Paul says, " . . . we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ," and St. Peter teaches the same doctrine as well: "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps."¹⁸ Progressing along this narrow road leads to supreme wisdom, to a personal knowledge of Christ, Sapientia Dei (i.e., the wisdom of God).

¹⁶W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster ed., Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales (1941; rpt. New York: Humanities Press, 1958), p. 560.

¹⁷II Corinthians 5:17; Preface, pp. 379-382.

¹⁸Ephesians 4:15; I Peter 2:21

The didactic core of "Melibee" ultimately finds its source in Augustine's Christian Instruction, which outlines the seven steps in the Christian's progress toward wisdom.¹⁹ In the broader context of Augustinian thought, however, these seven steps are derived from his earlier work, Commentaries on the Lord's Sermon On The Mount, and more specifically from his explication of the first seven promises in the Beatitudes.²⁰

In his Commentaries on the Lord's Sermon On The Mount, Augustine emphasizes that in the Sermon on the Mount one will find "the perfect standard of the Christian life" and in fact "all the precepts which pertain to the formation of such a life."²¹ The "Melibee" is based on this foundation; Chaucer could not have chosen a better work to contain the precepts underlying the lives of his pilgrims. In addition, Augustine distinguishes the first seven promises of the Beatitudes as maxims of "universal application," pointing out that the eighth blessing is a repetition of the first; that is, it "returns, as it were, to the beginning: it presents and approves something consummate and perfect."²² It is from these seven "consummate and perfect" maxims

¹⁹The translation used in this paper is John J. Gavigan's "Saint Augustine: 'Christian Instruction'," in The Fathers of the Church (1947; rpt. Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1966).

²⁰The translation used in this paper is Denis J. Kavanagh's "Saint Augustine: 'Commentary on the Lord's Sermon on the Mount with Seventeen Related Sermons'," in The Fathers of the Church (1951; rpt. Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1963).

²¹Ibid., p. 19.

²²Ibid., p. 25.

that Augustine discovers the seven steps to wisdom. The "Melibee"'s structure is based on this perfect and universal progression of Christian regeneration. In stressing the fundamental nature of these maxims, Augustine spends no little effort; he says that these seven truths or "stages" coincide with the "sevenfold operation of the Holy Spirit," and also with the seven petitions in the Lord's Prayer.²³ Augustine considered these seven steps to be at the very center of doctrinal truth concerning the "new" man's walk down the narrow path. Truths so vital to the spiritual dynamics of the "new" man provided Albertano with an ideal theological framework on which to attach the more practically applicable proverbial wisdom.

In Christian Instruction, a work written three years after the Sermon on the Mount commentary, Augustine gives the most complete explanation of these seven steps to wisdom: fear of God, gentleness through piety, knowledge, fortitude, counsel of mercy, purity, and wisdom.²⁴ The nature of each step will become only partially evident with the following rather brief explanation. However, the progression will become more clearly defined as it is related to the "Melibee." The fear of God, noted in Proverbs to be "the beginning of wisdom," is awakened by "reflection upon our mortal nature," and results in humility.²⁵ Gentleness through piety (meekness) is achieved

²³Ibid., p. 27; Professor Huppé also concludes that "Melibee" is "an allegory of Penance, and of the inward meaning of the words of the Lord's Prayer," in Reading, p. 239.

²⁴Gavigan, C.I., pp. 66-69.

²⁵Ibid., p. 66.

through submission to the authority of the Scriptures; the "soul is nourished by its proper food . . . The meek are those who submit to iniquities and do not resist evil, but overcome evil with good."²⁶ This submission leads to the next step, knowledge. With knowledge of Scripture a man discovers "that he has been enmeshed by the love of the world," and he mourns.²⁷ This is a transitional emotion experienced after a person is cognizant of the Truth and before he is completely devoted to it. "The fourth step, fortitude, is reached when on the rebound from despair, the soul 'hungers and thirsts for justice.'" "In this state he withdraws himself from every deadly pleasure of passing things," and turns to love of eternal things, that is, the "unchangeable Trinity in Unity."²⁸ By the fifth stage, man realizes that he is not "capable of extricating himself from the entanglements of such great miseries unless he is aided by one who is more powerful." This stage, called the counsel of mercy, occurs when man "zealously practices the love of his neighbor." It is reasonable that he who expects to be aided by God and his forgiveness should "give aid to one who is weaker where he himself happens to be less weak."²⁹ Consciousness of good deeds done at level five makes possible a contemplation of "the supreme good"; this contemplation characterizes stage six, purity. The pure in heart "will not be turned away from truth, either through a

²⁶ Ibid., p. 66.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 67.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 68; it is of interest to note that in "Melibee" the allegorical celebration of the Trinity emerges in step four.

²⁹ Gavigan, C.I., p. 68; Kavanagh, S.M., p. 25.

desire of gratifying men or through an intention of evading whatever inconveniences disturb this life."³⁰

Finally, man will reach wisdom, the seventh step, characterized by "perfect calm and serenity." The seventh Beatitude which blesses the peacemaker corresponds to this seventh stage, called wisdom. As implied earlier, supreme Christian wisdom is Christ-likeness.³¹ It is of interest then that Augustine says, to these peacemakers "who are perfected in wisdom, and conformed to the image of God through regeneration unto the new man -- likeness to God is imparted."³² This God-likeness, or, if you will, Christ-likeness, is characteristic of step seven. This ultimate pose of the "new man is consistent and reasonable since in imitation of Christ (the Son of God), the seventh beatitude asserts that "peacemakers" are to be called "children of God." Furthermore, in his interpretation of "peacemaker" Augustine mentions those who might literally reconcile enemies, but he emphasizes the "inner" peace which is in those "who calm their passions and subject them to reason." This "peacemaker" has inner wisdom; he is therefore like Christ, who is called "the wisdom of God."

This emphasis on "inner" peace, on the internal working of wisdom, brings up one level of understanding in the "Melibee," the tropological level, or level of the internal monologue. The potential for this interpretation is apparent in Augustine's definition of wisdom:

³⁰ C.I., p. 69.

³¹ Cf. I Corinthians 1:30 and Colossians 2:2-3

³² S.M., pp. 23-24.

"All those who calm their passions and subject them to reason, that is, subject them to mind and spirit, and who keep their carnal lusts under control" are wise.

Inside the wise one it is true that "everything in man which is common to us and to the beasts is spontaneously governed by that which is chief and preeminent in man, namely, mind and reason; and that this same preeminent faculty of man is itself subject to a still higher power, which is Truth Itself, the only begotten Son of God. Man is unable to rule over the lower things unless he in turn submits to the rule of a higher being."³³

"Melibee" is obviously a story about a man who experiences changes in his life (e.g., honey drinking in the fields, Sophia wounded, his enemies asking for forgiveness); however, these outward experiences come to pass only as Melibeus's "inner" condition or attitude changes (e.g., overcomes grief, comes to accept and apply counsel, forgives his enemies, etc.). I would suggest that the understanding of the "new" man's life, can be related to the "Melibee" through the following correspondences:

- (1) the spirit of a man is Melibeus;
- (2) the mind (right reason) is Prudence;
- (3) the passions and carnal desires are the three enemies; and
- (4) Truth is Sophia (i.e., Christ).

When the spirit of a man (Melibeus) counsels together with his mind (Prudence), with the example of Truth to follow (i.e., the wounded Sophia, or crucified yet forgiving Christ), the passions will be controlled in the same way that Melibeus's enemies submit to his "lordship." On this level of interpretation, "The Melibee" is an internal monologue, a psychomachic treatise.

³³ S.M., p. 24.

The outward reality of wisdom is seen in the experience of Melibeus, the man, as he learns to take advice and to forgive those who have wounded his daughter. This is the literal level on which most readers first encounter "The Melibee"; it is the level to which Albertano attached the practical proverbial wisdom which would hopefully help his son "to work out his salvation." It is a boring plane, a conglomeration of proverbs, if the inward process is not recognized simultaneously at work. In his interpretation of wisdom, Augustine placed heavy emphasis on the inner dynamics, and I believe Albertano, Chaucer, or any medieval man, if pointing to the excellence of the work would have readily set aside the outer chaff of Melibeus's experiences, for the kernel--the lifelong moral progress of the "new" man.

With the tropological view of "Melibee" in mind, the following analysis reveals the correspondences between Augustine's steps to wisdom and the experience (literal and psychomachic) of an "everyman" character, Melibeus.

A man, a "honey drinker," suddenly realizes that his daughter, Sophia, has been wounded severely, possibly even mortally, by three enemies. Melibeus enters upon the first step to wisdom as he begins to reflect on the possible death of his daughter. He reacts to the reality of death intemperately, and Prudence, in her correction, reveals the true source of Melibeus's sadness--his own mortality: "The wise man shal not take to greet discomfort for the death of his children;/ but, certes, he sholde suffren it in pacience as wel as he abideth the deeth of his owne propre persone "(11.983-84).³⁴ Relating this reflection on death to the

³⁴Step one, the fear of God, covers lines 966-1000.

first step to wisdom, Augustine states: "By it [reflection on man's mortality] all our emotions of pride are fastened to the wood of the cross...."³⁵ He likens the humiliation of recognizing one's mortality (an inward event) to Christ's crucifixion. This inner crucifixion occurring at the beginning of the way to wisdom corresponds to a crucifixion committed at the beginning of the "Melibee," that is, the wounding of Sophia. Professor Hoffman has asserted that Sophia, Melibeus's daughter, is indeed to be identified with Christ and His crucifixion. His three-fold argument substantiates this correlation:

- 1) In Albertano's Latin original, Prudentia reminds Melibeus explicitly of Christ's Crucifixion, by equating their daughter's five wounds with those five which the Savior suffered.
- 2) It is a curious fact that while this daughter is nameless in both Albertano and Renaud, Chaucer christens her "Sophia" --the Greek equivalent (Σοφία) of Latin Sapientia, which is the regular medieval designation of Christ.
- 3) In the listing of Sophia's five wounds (corresponding, one would expect, to the five senses), she is said to be wounded "in hir feet" rather than eyes. The implication is that Albertano gave "Feet, hands, ears, nose, and mouth: four of the five senses, and four of the five wounds of Christ conflated in a single list to reinforce the allegorical identification of "Sophia" or "Sapience" with Sapientia Dei, or Christ."³⁶

With Sophia's identification with Christ understood, the two levels

³⁵ C.I., p. 66.

³⁶ "Chaucer's 'Melibee'," pp. 168-172.

of the story emerge: on the literal level, a man's daughter has been attacked; likewise the crucified Christ appears in the psychomachic drama. On the literal plane, Melibeus, because of his daughter's misfortune, contemplates man's mortality and thus begins to learn the fear of God. Sophia, as Christ, also takes her place on the second level of the "new" man's internal moral progress. Augustine explains the role God plays in a Christian's inner person: "The soul of a just man is the seat of wisdom [Sophia]. And where has God His seat except where He dwells? And where does He dwell except in His temple? 'For the temple of God is holy and His temple you are.'"³⁷ Sophia then is this indwelling crucified Christ, the "new" man's example ever present before his mind's eye. St. Paul, speaking for himself and every Christian, says we are "always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body."³⁸ The wounded Sophia within a person's body is the theological basis for the internal monologue; it is the "new" man's confrontation with mortality, his initiation into true humility, and thus his first step toward wisdom and the "life of Christ."

The "Melibee" directly moves into the second maxim, called gentleness through piety.³⁹ As mentioned above, this stage is characterized by a submission to the authority of the scriptures; Augustine explains: "We ought not to protest against Holy Scripture, either when we understand it and it is attacking some of our faults, or when we do not understand

³⁷ S.M., p. 216.

³⁸ II Corinthians 4:10

³⁹ Step two covers lines 1001-1234 in "Melibee."

it and think that we ourselves could be wiser and give better advice."⁴⁰

For approximately the next two hundred lines of the treatise, Melibeus learns to submit to the counsel of the Scriptures quoted to him by his wife, Prudence. Just as Augustine predicts, Melibeus goes through a phase when he desires to follow his own advice rather than the Scripture: "This Melibee answerde unto his wyf Prudence: 'I purpose not, quod he, to werke by thy conseil . . . '" (1.1054). The second step to wisdom is a process by which Melibeus comes to accept Holy counsel as "more beneficial" and "more reasonable" than his own opinion. Prudence must first defend her right as a woman to counsel the man, Melibeus. After a number of arguments and counter-arguments, Melibeus concedes and follows his wife's good counsel; this decision marks his full entrance into the second stage. After her husband submits, Prudence immediately points him to the first and foremost counselor: "Ye shul first in alle youre werkes mekely biseken to the heighe God that he wol be youre counseillour" (1.1115). The word "mekely" (also used elsewhere in this passage) is a key to identifying Melibeus' progress, since it echoes the second Beatitude--"Blessed are the meek . . ."--which corresponds to the second step to wisdom. On the literal level, it may be difficult to justify Melibeus' submission to his wife, but on the plane of the internal monologue, Prudence, the representative of reason (the daughter of God), must initiate the Christian's entrance into the way of wisdom. Augustine explains: "We are necessarily led to knowledge (the third step to wisdom) in two ways, by authority and reason. In time authority is first, but in reality

⁴⁰C.I., p. 66.

reason precedes."⁴¹ At first, Prudence (right reason) must take control of a man's spirit to lead him to knowledge and faith.

After Melibeus learns to submit to the counsel of Scripture, he moves to the third step, knowledge.⁴⁶ In the light of knowledge given by Prudence, Melibeus learns the underlying spiritual reality of his experience. Here he learns the spiritual truths at work in his life which the audience recognized from the beginning of the treatise:

Thou has doon synne agayn oure Lord Crist;/
for certes, the three enemys of mankynde,
that is to seyn, the flessch, the feend,
and the world,/ Thou hast suffred hem
entre in to thyn herte wilfully by the
wyndowes of thy body ... And in the
same mannere oure Lord Christ hath woold
and suffred that thy three enemys been
entred into thyn house by the wyndowes,/
and han ywounded thy doghter (11.1419-1425)⁴³

These truths concerning Melibeus are explained by Prudence on the plane of the internal monologue. She refers to the windows of Melibeus's house as the "wyndowes of thy body," that is his eyes. The basis for this analogy is found in the last chapter of Ecclesiastes in which "those who look through windows" (the dying man's eyes) are said to "grow dim." So, in the psychomachic drama, reason brings knowledge which

⁴¹This translation is found in Eugene Portalie's A Guide to the Thought of Saint Augustine, trans. Ralph J. Bastian (1960; rpt. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1975), p. 115; De ordine II, 9, 26, (32,1007).

⁴²Step three, knowledge, covers lines 1235-1711 in "Melibee."

⁴³Italics mine.

reveals Melibeus' personal sin.⁴⁴ Augustine emphasizes this result, stating that in the light of knowledge the man discovers how "he has been inmeshed by the love of the world."⁴⁵ At the entrance into knowledge, Prudence tells Melibeus the meaning of his name--"'a man that drynketh hony.'/ thou hast ydronke so muchel hony of sweete temporell riches, and delices and honours of this world . . . " (11.1409-10). Melibeus, the man, is illuminated; he has looked into the mirror of Scripture and seen his true inner nature and situation. Of course, the reader (especially the medieval reader), from the very beginning of the treatise, is looking beyond the shallow story. Without the underlying internal monologue, Melibeus, the man, and his realization are trite and artificial. "Melibee" has been condemned for this displeasing, contrived veil of allegory; but this is exactly the point. The man is indeed dense, blinded to spiritual truth. Melibeus is so slow to recognize the obvious realities of his dilemma that he becomes the focus of a rather repulsive irony, and he remains ignorant of his situation until he reaches the third step to wisdom, knowledge.

After receiving this revelation concerning his personal condition, Melibeus continues to grow in knowledge. His second important lesson is predicted by Augustine: in the knowledge of Scriptures "he will find nothing else except that God must be loved for His own sake, and our neighbor for the sake of God."⁴⁶ Prudence must teach her husband the

⁴⁴ According to the Christian schema, sin characteristically enters someone's life through the eyes (cf., Eve, Achan, David, etc.). See also explanation of John the Scot's commentary on the Fall, in Preface, p. 91.

⁴⁵ C.I., p. 67.

⁴⁶ C.I., p. 67.

doctrine of charity, that is, not to seek revenge against the three enemies who attacked his family, but instead to forgive his enemies and trust God to judge and punish the offenders. As Augustine predicts, growing in knowledge means becoming progressively more aware of "entanglements with the world" for Melibeus. He attempts to avoid Scriptural authority by trusting Dame Fortune to help him get revenge: "I bithenke me now and take heede how Fortune hath norissed me from my childhede...Now wole I assayen hire, trowynge, with Goddes help, that she shal helpe me my shame for to venge " (11.1444-45). Prudence rebukes Melibeus for his desire to trust fickle fortune and then continues to point out the harms of seeking his own revenge.

Next Melibeus turns to another worldly means to vengeance--riches: "For I am richer and moore myghty than myne enemys been;/ and wel knownen ye that by moneye and by havynge grete possessions been alle the thynges of this world governed " (11.1547-48). Prudence again rebukes her husband for "avanten hym of his riches" and instructs him first on the proper use of money and then, with respect to the original problem, on war: "therfore sholde a man flee and eschue werre, in as muchel as a man may goodly " (1.1669). Throughout the passage summarized above (11.1409-1679), Melibeus refuses to listen and shows no sign that he has turned away from his original purpose to be avenged. The culminating event of Melibeus's experience with knowledge occurs after Prudence finishes her corrections and reproofs; she then is asked by her husband to give her counsel for positive action. Being "wise," she quotes the seventh Beatitude ("purchacen pees"), and Melibeus responds negatively: "now se I wel that ye loven nat myn honour ne my worshipec " (1.1679).

Prudence's counter-response is very significant if understood as the response of right reason within the internal monologue. She is said "to maken semblant of wratthe"; she seems to be angry; more important, she seems to give up, to despair of ever successfully advising her stubborn husband: "For I knowe wel that ye been so hardherted that ye wol do no thyng for me" (1.1694). According to Augustine, the "new" man, cognizant of the truth yet not successfully applying the truth, is nearly "crushed by despair," and Prudence's discouragement corresponds to this emotion. Because of his wife's anger, Melibeus concedes; Prudence "discovered al hir wyl to hym" (1.1712). This rebound from reason's despair marks Melibeus's entrance into the fourth step to wisdom, fortitude.

Great fortitude is needed to apply the spiritual truths learned in the preceding step. At this stage, the soul "hungers and thirsts for justice," for withdrawal "from every deadly pleasure," and for application of Truth. Full entrance into this step can be identified when Melibeus himself assents to show mercy, to apply counsel; and Prudence for the first time says, "ye han wel and goodly answered"⁴⁷ (1.1779). Melibeus hungers to judge rightly, to apply the Scriptures, and he demands total control and will over the three enemies: "And therefore wol I knowe and wite of you/ wheither ye wol putte the punyssement and the chastisynge and the vengeance of this outrage in the wyl of me and of my wyf Prudence, or ye wol nat?" (1.1813-14). In addition to wanting the freedom to work justice, Melibeus desires to alienate himself from the World, Flesh, and Devil. He tells his wife that he plans "to desherite hem (the three enemies) of al that evere they han, and for to putte him in exil for evere" (1.1834).

⁴⁷Step four, fortitude, covers lines 1712-1834.

Augustine explains that the man with fortitude is eagerly striving to extricate "himself from the deadly pleasures" which entangle him. The fact that Prudence then admonishes Melibeus to make a more merciful judgment on the World, the Flesh, and the Devil is an enigmatic occurrence for some readers.

The explanation of Melibeus's merciful dealings with the deadly three rests in the theological implications of Melibeus's regeneration. As mentioned earlier, Augustine states that "likeness to God is imparted" to the "new" man who is being "perfected in wisdom." At the fourth step to wisdom, Melibeus begins to apply Scripture to his life. He becomes a picture of the regenerate "new" man; this is no longer the stubborn and blind Melibeus, but a "God-like" Melibeus, and with this shift in Melibeus's identity emerges another level of "sentence." This is not at all uncommon in the interpretation of medieval allegory, as Professor Fleming points out: exegetes tend "to shift the focus of a text so as to make it susceptible to a whole new series of meanings.... What was a moment ago but a part now becomes the whole."⁴⁸

I suggest that during the fourth stage, the medieval audience would have begun to recognize the man, Melibeus, on an additional anagogical plane, as a type of God the Father. This correlation seems reasonable since Melibeus actually is the father of Sophia, or Christ. Augustine states that the fourth stage to wisdom results in "love of eternal things, namely, the unchangeable Trinity in Unity."⁴⁹ With Melibeus corresponding to God the Father, Prudence as the Holy Spirit, and Sophia as Christ, a

⁴⁸Fleming, The Roman De La Rose, p. 65.

⁴⁹C.I., p. 68.

celebration of the Trinity emerges which is perfectly consistent with the plot and theology of the treatise. Prudence goes to reconcile the three enemies to her husband. Since it is the Spirit, the love of God, (Amor Dei) which comes to convince the world of "sin, and righteousness, and judgment," Prudence's role, like the Holy Spirit's (or the Virgin Mary's), is one of intercession. She tells the three enemies: "...and I shal so werken in this cause that by the grace of oure Lord God, ye shul been reconsiled unto us " (1.1763). Melibeus, God the Father (Potentia Dei), demands justice and his judgment must be tempered by Prudence. The three enemies of Melibeus are no longer just the World, Flesh and Devil, but on this new plane the three enemies of God the Father undoubtedly represent mankind. These three pray to the Virgin (i.e., Prudence, the mother of Sophia, or Christ): "and therefore, noble lady, we biseke to youre wommanly pitee, to taken swich avysement in this nede that we, ne oure freendes, be not desherited ne destroyed thurgh oure folye " (11.1749.50).⁵⁰ Interestingly enough, at the fourth stage Melibeus has attained to "God the Father-likeness" (just, righteous), not "Christ-likeness"; he is by no means the completely rejuvenated man yet.

Prudence causes Melibeus to realize that all his striving to be holy, to extricate himself totally from the enemy, is unwise. This event marks the movement into the fifth step, counsel of mercy, and this is literally Prudence's counsel: "Wherfore I pray yow, lat mercy been in youre herte,/ to th' effect and entente that God Almighty have mercy on yow in his

⁵⁰ It is of interest to note that these enemies of Melibeus are no longer referred to as the World, Flesh, and Devil, but as "thise trespassours and repentyng folk" (1.1800); this is further evidence of the shifted meaning in the allegory.

laste juggement" (1.1866).⁵¹ Parallels exist between Melibeus's situation and Augustine's explanation of the "new" man's experience at the fifth step: "Now, full of hope and spiritually vigorous, when he has attained even to the love of his enemy . . . no one is capable of extricating himself from the entanglements of such great miseries unless he is aided by one who is more powerful. . . . The counsel is reasonable, therefore, that whoever wishes to be aided by someone more powerful (by God and his forgiveness) should give aid to one who is weaker, where he himself happens to be less weake."⁵² Melibeus "assented fully" to Prudence's counsel of mercy, and this act marks the fulfillment of the fifth step: "Wherefore I [Melibeus] receyve yow [enemies] to my grace,/ and foryeve yow outrely alle the offenses, injuries, and wronges that ye have doon agayn me and myne" (1.1880-81).

Exercising mercy, Melibeus attains a Christ-like pose. Chaucer obviously wanted to emphasize the counsel of mercy given to Melibeus since the two lengthiest additions which the poet makes to his French source reinforce this idea: one occurs at the conclusion of the final speech of the transgressors pleading for mercy (11.1825-26), the other at the conclusion of Melibeus's speech granting it (11.1884-88).⁵³ Melibeus's inner crucifixion (an attitude change), which has been in process throughout the treatise, finally comes to hold full sway. Jesus' last words on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," are repeated by Melibeus, the regenerate Christian man, in his final say

⁵¹The fifth step spans lines 1835 to the end of the treatise.

⁵²S.M., p. 25.

⁵³Bryan and Dempster, Sources, p. 365.

to his enemies. So, in addition to being a manual for the "new" man's psychomachic experience and a celebration of the Trinity, this treatise is a meditation on the dying of Christ, as it is worked out in the life of one, Melibeus, a former honey-drinker.

A problem may exist in identifying both Melibeus (at the end) and Sophia as types of Christ. This can be resolved with further definition and explanation of the "new" man. Sophia as a type of Christ functions exclusively in the internal monologue. She is a part of Melibeus' inner man along with his reason and spirit and passions. This idea of the indwelling Christ is an emphatic Pauline doctrine: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me." Paul specifically refers to this "mystery" of the "new" man in Colossians 1:27: "To whom [the apostles] God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the gentiles which is-- Christ in you, the hope of glory."⁵⁴ Sophia is this indwelling Christ; this hidden truth must be revealed to the "new" man. With respect to this mystery, St. Paul and Prudence have similar goals set for themselves and "everyman": "And we proclaim Him admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom that we may present every man complete in Christ."⁵⁵ The "new" man must be admonished and taught so that ultimately he will be complete or mature in Christ (i.e., like Christ).

So we see that Sophia is the indwelling Christ, the mystery which must be revealed. Melibeus is admonished and taught, and ultimately he recognizes his inner Sophia (wisdom). This realization necessarily

⁵⁴Galations 2:20; Italics are mine in Colossians 1:27.

⁵⁵Colossians 1:28.

results in an imitation of Christ.

A brief explanation for the "Melibee's" conclusion at the fifth step (rather than the seventh) seems necessary. In later years, Augustine himself revised his original bold assertions concerning man's potential for perfect wisdom. In The Retractions, he says the "new" man's moral progress can be realized "to that measure of human perfection to the degree that perfection is possible in this life."⁵⁶ Purity is the sixth step to wisdom; the eye of the heart must be cleansed so that God becomes visible. Augustine points out, however, that on earth man can hope only to see in "an obscure manner" (I Corinth. 13:12).⁵⁷ It is only with the administration of the final sacrament, at death, that the heart is thoroughly cleansed and prepared to see God clearly. Likewise, wisdom (i.e., the seventh step--"Christ-likeness") cannot be achieved until the end: "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He [Christ] appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purified himself, just as He is pure."⁵⁸ "Melibee," above all, emphasizes practical aspects of the "new" man's experience; it is mystical to the extent that it shows the miraculous metamorphosis of Melibeus' life. The more mystical, theological fulfillments of steps six and seven in the afterlife

⁵⁶The translation used in here is Sister Mary Inez Bogan's "Saint Augustine 'The Retractions'," in The Fathers of the Church (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1968), p. 80.

⁵⁷S.M., p. 23.

⁵⁸I John 3:2-3.

are not suited for consideration in this treatise.

Since the "Melibee" so strongly emphasizes forgiveness of enemies (because of Albertano's original intent and Chaucer's additions), it is rightly interpreted as part of a medieval theological tradition of forgiveness which "dominated the doctrine and art of the early Christian and medieval periods."⁵⁹ When Jesus said, "Father, forgive them...", this was His final word to the Jews who opposed His teachings and devised his execution. Traditionally, the Jews were recognized as the murderers of Christ. Augustine himself refers to the Crucifixion as "the crime of the Jews," and so, in a limited and distinctive sense Jesus's final words fall on them.⁶⁰ St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, followed this example (as did the other apostles); he rebuked the Jews for being a "stiffnecked people," but his last words were a prayer of forgiveness for them. If Melibeus, the "new" man on the road to regeneration, will imitate Christ, he will forgive those who wounded his Sophia--the Jews. The doctrine of the "Melibee" is not a toothless or general "plea for peace rather than war, for mediation and law rather than private revenge."⁶¹ The treatise opposes the strong current of popular anti-Semitism working in society during Chaucer's lifetime.⁶²

⁵⁹ Wolfgang S. Seiferth, Synagogue and Church in the Middle Ages: Two Symbols in Art and Literature, trans. Lee Chadeayne and Paul Gottwald (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1970), p. 17.

⁶⁰ The translation used is Sister Mary Sarah Muldowney's "Saint Augustine 'Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons'," in The Fathers of the Church (New York: Fathers of the Church Inc., 1959), p. 211.

⁶¹ Lawrence, "The Tale of Melibeus," p. 210.

⁶² This claim becomes especially relevant when considering "The Prioress's Tale."

A medieval tradition which emphasized forbearance and forgiveness toward the Jews, called Concordia Veteris et Novi Testamenti, was based theologically on an understanding of the harmonies between the Old Testament and New Testament. In his study, Synagogue and Church in the Middle Ages: Two Symbols in Art and Literature Wolfgang S. Seiferth explains:

It was the unshakable belief of the early Christians that the religious expectation of Judaism had been fulfilled in the life and teachings of Christ...The incorporation of the Old and New Testaments into one and the same doctrine of salvation was systematically extended by the early church fathers. An appropriate passage from the writings of Paulinus of Nola (ca. 400) was quoted repeatedly in the following centuries: "The Old Covenant establishes the New, the New fulfills the Old: in the Old is hope, in the New, faith. But Old and New are wedded by the grace of Christ...The inner harmony of the two Testaments in ideas, events, and figures was proclaimed here [in Concordia]. Every event and every doctrine in the New Testament writings already lay dormant like a grain of seed, a prophecy in some passage of the Old Testament...⁶³

These harmonies became the foundation of the intensive typological art of the Middle Ages; for example, in the visual arts and in literature, Issac and the bundle of sticks on his back could be a symbolic reminder of Christ carrying His cross. With Jewish history so vitally a part of Christian revelation, early Christian art reflected little hostility toward the Jews; in fact, their role as co-equal sharers in God's progressive dealings with mankind is implied. Seiferth expounds this idea in his examination of "Ecclesia and Synagoga" iconography: "This typological understanding of Ecclesia and Synagoga was free of

⁶³Seiferth, Synagogue and Church, p. 14; this explanation can also be found in recent defenses of patristic exegesis: see Robertson, Huppé, and Kaske.

all conflict, as is most evident in the previous examples; a temporal succession, or a sequence of stages of revelation, is suggested. The two allegories are members of a higher unity."⁶⁴ For those of the Middle Ages who recognized this "higher unity," the Jews posed less of a threat to Christianity; forbearance and even forgiveness then could be a real possibility rather than the popular anti-Semitic disposition. Obviously, this realization was never made by the majority; historical discord grew simultaneously with the theology of Concordia. Seiferth explains that Concordia was "an abstraction, a theological definition, an ideal"; this made the concept the exclusive meditation of two elite groups in the Middle Ages: the learned clergy and artists.⁶⁵ The first group simply studied and recognized the harmonies in Holy Scripture. The second was easily submerged in typology, since their work was to translate the Christian doctrine allegorically into profitable yet pleasing works of art. Seiferth points to Dante's Divine Comedy and Boccaccio's Decameron as works which reflect this "spirit of Concordia."⁶⁶ Likewise, Chaucer, in spite of the popular anti-Semitic opinion of his day, was another great artist of the Middle Ages who recognized this "higher unity"; he was certainly a man of his age, but Concordia was also a part of his inheritance as a great medieval artist, as one who understood well Augustine's insistence on the doctrine of charity: "Whoever, then, appears in his own opinion to have comprehended the Sacred Scriptures, or even some part of them, yet does not build up with that knowledge the

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 18.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 20.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 149-152.

twofold love of God and his neighbor, 'has not yet known as he ought to know.'"⁶⁷

Chaucer chose the "Melibee" for its doctrinal excellence; his translation varies little from the source text, but the lines which he does add promote charity, particularly Christ's exemplary love--forgiveness for the Jews.

The poet does say of the "Melibee," "as in my sentence,/ Shul ye nowher fynden difference " (11.961-62). Therefore, the following chapter is an interpretive analysis of the tales in Fragment VII, with special attention given to the influence of the "Melibee's" theme on those stories.

⁶⁷C.I., p. 56.

Chapter 3

W.W. Lawrence calls the "Shipman's Tale," "a little masterpiece of living narrative and brilliant characterization."⁶⁸ The story's verve is accredited to Chaucer's genius despite the fact that it is his closest imitation of the fabliau form. A great deal of scholarly investigation has been done by Pratt and Spargo in comparing it with the two extant Italian analogues of Boccaccio and Sercambi.⁶⁹ No satisfactory patristic exegesis has been discovered for the tale, probably because a fabliau is by definition "sans arriereplans, sans profondeur; il manque de metaphysique." Yet, the same scholars who see dominant elements of the fabliau in the tale hold certain reservations about its complete typicality.⁷⁰ Many agree that the tale differs from the fabliau because of its depth of characterization; there are certain particular details given and developed which contribute little to the forwarding of the action (e.g., the Monk claiming the merchant is a relative). In addition, the teller of "The Shipman's Tale" can hardly wait to philosophize, even though the fabliau form requires an impersonal and action-oriented style and subject matter: "But wo is hym that payen moot for al..." (1.10).⁷¹ The implication is that Chaucer took liberties with the form, redesigning its limits. Apparently, the poet made one significant change in the plot:

⁶⁸ William Witherle Lawrence, "Chaucer's Shipman's Tale," Speculum, XXXIII (1958), p. 67.

⁶⁹ R.A. Pratt, MLN, LV (1940), pp. 142-45; J.W. Spargo in his essay in Sources and Analogues, p. 439.

⁷⁰ Lawrence, pp. 56-8, French citation from J. Bedier, Les Fabliaux. Spargo also says Chaucer's fabliau probably has "more complex characterization" than his source.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 58.

in the analogues, the wife must give the money back to her husband; she is the focus of comic ridicule.⁷² In the "Shipman's Tale," however, this focus shifts, and the merchant is the butt of the joke. With Chaucer obviously reworking the plot and characterization of his source, some underlying rationale would be anticipated, but until now the tough outer shell has concealed any kernel of doctrinal truth within the tale.

In this hidden, undiscovered truth lies the fulfillment of Chaucer's promise that "shul ye nowher fynden difference" between the meaning of "Melibee" and the other tales preceding it, even the "Shipman's Tale." The words, "underlying rationale," used above may connote that some rather fierce allegory hunting is to come; however, the true objective and outcome of this analysis is simply to understand the story and to give an interpretation which is consistent with both text and context (i.e., the surrounding tales)--an interpretation which resolves problematic, obscure passages. However, in finding some form of underlying didactic unity between "Melibee" and the "Shipman's Tale," it is not necessary to discover a likeness in their "means" or mode. According to Augustine, the teacher may choose to teach the same lesson in two ways--through opposite remedies or like remedies: "A physician, in treating an injury to the body, applies certain opposites, as cold to hot, wet to dry; in other cases he applies like remedies, as a round bandage to a circular wound or an oblong bandage to an oblong wound...."⁷³ So, the same lesson can be taught through "like" example as well as through

⁷²Albert H. Silverman, "Sex and Money in Chaucer's 'Shipman's Tale'," Philological Quarterly, XXXII, III (July, 1953), p. 331.

⁷³C.I., p. 36.

opposite example. "The Shipman's Tale," a tale told by a man who carries a dagger around his neck and who by water "sente hem hoom to every 'lond," could very easily be that "like" remedy and the "Melibee" that "hot to cold" sort of cure, an opposite applied to the wound--cupidity. If the "Shipman's Tale" is a "like" remedy, it is ironic; that is, it depicts cupidity, sans commentaire, with the didactic intent to promote the opposite--charity. J.V. Fleming points out that "ironia," an Isidorian form of allegory, "is impossible to demonstrate convincingly by reference to the literal text itself since it involves what is not in the text."⁷⁴ A discussion of particular iconography and typology is needed if the following interpretation of the tale is to be thorough and convincing.

In Synagogue and Church in the Middle Ages, Professor Seiferth defines and explains an artistic tradition which is manifested most distinctly in medieval Christian iconography, a tradition which I believe finds expression in "The Shipman's Tale." This theme, which began in the tenth century and continued throughout the Middle Ages, focused on the advent of Christ and on the subsequent shift from the Old Law to the New. Iconographic renderings of this tradition usually portrayed Christ on the cross with two women looking on: on one side of the cross stands Ecclesia, symbolizing the church militant (the Virgin sometimes takes her place), who receives Christ's commission and authority (pictorialized by the reception of His blood in a chalice). On the other side stands Synagoga, who at times is passively intent on the Christ or cowering (depending on the artist's conception), who represents Judaism, "which Christ turned away from in conferring

⁷⁴Fleming, p. 110.

succession upon Ecclesia."⁷⁵ Seiferth concludes that at the outset there is one tradition, referred to here as Concordia, which emphasizes harmonies between the Old Testament and the New, the fulfillment of the Old Covenant in the New. Augustine explains in his Retractationes: "It is not correct that everything in the New Testament is presaged in the Old Testament, but it is true that almost everything is. The promise of the kingdom of heaven, for example, is not. However, the two commandments to love God and one's fellow man are there, and the law, the prophets, and all the Gospels and apostolic teachings can be traced back to them."⁷⁶ Augustine's statement is a paraphrase of the words of Jesus himself: "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."⁷⁷ This tradition in visual art renders Synagoga as a figure of dignity despite the fact that she is being superceded by Ecclesia; the crucifixion seems to be the event which brings two respected figures together rather than an obstacle which separates them. The Biblical figure, John the Baptist, is a type representative of this harmonious interaction between Old Testament and the New. This absence of bitterness toward Judaism reflects a knowledge of the Augustinian doctrine of charity discussed above in Chapter 2.

However, the Cross does become a barrier between the two theological abstractions with the emergence of a second, drastically different

⁷⁵Seiferth, p. 3.

⁷⁶Retractiones, I.21.2

⁷⁷Luke 24:44

tradition in which the debacle of Synagoga is emphasized, rather than Judaism's vital, dignified role in divine revelation. In depictions of this tradition, Synagoga cowers blindfolded; sometimes an angel drives her away; she is unstable; her crown falls off her head.⁷⁸ As mentioned earlier, Seiferth says that this portrayal of the discord between the Church militant and Judaism continued and grew along with the popular anti-Semitic opinion of the middle and late medieval period; however, he also suggests that the theme of Concordia persisted as well in the works of an elite group of learned clergy and secular artists. It is of interest to note that St. Paul would commend this later elite group, whereas the first, he would admonish: "But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you."⁷⁹

It is mentioned parenthetically in an earlier statement that Ecclesia is many times replaced or used interchangeably with the Virgin Mary figure. Allegorical correlations like this one and other theological correspondences should be explained at this point so that the implications of the Ecclesia and Synagoga may be extended to the "Shipman's Tale."

As Seiferth notices, the Virgin Mary, in addition to playing her actual role as the mother of Christ, symbolizes the church militant in medieval theology and allegory. Moreover, this correspondence moves

⁷⁸Seiferth, pp. 8-11.

⁷⁹Romans 11:17-18

one step further in the Song of Songs, a love poem about Solomon and his bride. It is interpreted allegorically by the Fathers as depicting the courtship and union of Christ with His Church.⁸⁰ Therefore, typologically the Virgin Mary is not only the mother of Christ but also His bride, His wife. This paradox excited the medieval intellect and became the focus of lyrical meditations like the well known, "I sing of a maiden."

These additional roles which the Virgin played in medieval symbology can be extended to those figures who surround Mary in the Biblical context. For instance, Joseph is bound to Mary by marriage yet is weak in this relationship to the extent that he does not father her first child (i.e., Christ, the bridegroom fathers the child); therefore, he typically symbolizes the ineffectual Old Law. In a rather familiar fourteenth-century lyric which begins, "As I lay upon a night," Mary, Joseph, and the child, Jesus, are described. The dreamer-poet says of Joseph: "He sempte be his semblant/ A man of the elde lawe."⁸¹ The Old Law is ineffectual because its writers only blindly foreshadow the coming of Messiah, the Jewish hope of effectual deliverance. This signification for Joseph can be recognized in early Renaissance painting as well; for example, in Lorenza Costa's depiction of Mary, Joseph, and the Child, the light fall most intensely on the Christ and somewhat less intensely on the Virgin's face. Joseph, however, is positioned so that

⁸⁰ Preface, p. 55.

⁸¹ Maxwell S. Luria and Richard L. Hoffman, ed., Middle English Lyrics (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1974), p. 190; all citations from lyrics come from this critical edition.

very little light is reflected in his face; in fact, his countenance is so darkened that it looks as though his eyes may be shut. At best, Joseph, as he represents the Old Law and Judaism, is a vital sharer in God's divine plan, of which Christ is the fulfillment; however, he does not see Christ clearly. He is "darkened" in understanding, ignorant of God's ways in the New Covenant: "...for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their [the Jew's] hearts."⁸²

To complete this triangular relationship we must understand all the theological implications of Christ's role in the Joseph-Mary context. On the literal level, Christ is Mary's son, but not Joseph's. The Holy Spirit fathers the child, so Jesus is Emmanuel, "God with us." Also, He is the crucified Christ, the one who establishes the New Law. Thus, by association, He symbolizes the New Covenant. In addition, as we have said, He is the bridegroom of the church; that is, being separate from, yet one with the other persons of the Trinity (i.e., one with the Holy Spirit), Christ is the lover who makes Mary conceive. Meditation on this paradox of the Virgin Birth can again be seen in the lyric, "I sing of a maiden," when the "King of alle Kinge" (i.e., Christ) "cam also stille/ To his moderis bowr" to impregnate her.⁸³ In summary, the medieval artists and typologists recognized the full implications of the love triangle -- Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. The signification which most concerns this discussion is that Christ, the New Law, supersedes

⁸² II Corinthians 3:14-15.

⁸³ Middle English Lyrics, p. 170.

the Old Law (Joseph) by having holy intercourse with his Church, the Virgin Mary.

In the spirit of Concordia, the Virgin Birth, the fulfillment of the Old Law in the New, the Crucifixion and commissioning of Holy Church, can all be artistically depicted without an anti-Semitic tone, even though the triangular Mary-Joseph-Christ relationship certainly has potential for sardonic commentary against the Old Law and Judaism. For instance, the temptation to call Joseph a sort of trumped cuckold is apparent. In fact, Holy Scripture implies that this was Joseph's initial conclusion before the angelic messenger explained the situation: "And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her, desired to put her away secretly."⁸⁴ The temptation to depict Joseph (the Old Law, Judaism) as a cuckold is certainly overcome in many cases, as it is in the lyric, "As I lay upon a night." In this poem Joseph goes to great length to show his confidence in his wife's fidelity:

But or evere wiste I
 Hire wombe began to rise;
 I telle the treuthe, treuly,
 I me wot nevere in what wise.
 I troste to hire goodnesse,
 She wolde nothing misdo ...
 That rather a maiden shulde
 Withouten man conceive
 Than Marye misdoun wolde
 And so Joseph deceive.⁸⁵

In contrast, works reflecting a more bourgeois, popular mentality do

⁸⁴ Matthew 1:19.

⁸⁵ Lyrics, p. 191.

follow the tradition of discord and anti-Semitism in the characterization of Joseph in his blind, ignorant state prior to the angelic revelation. For instance, in the Coventry Pageant of the Shearmen and Taylors, Joseph's blindness is exploited for all its ironic potential. Joseph, the Old Law, Judaism, becomes the focus of comic ridicule:

(Joseph) Tell me, woman: whose ys this chyld?
 (Mare) Non but youris, husbond soo myld,
 And thatt schalbe seyne, [ywis]⁸⁶

In this short exchange Mary is obviously not addressing Joseph as her flesh and blood husband, since indeed he fathered no child; instead she is saying that the Old Law foreshadows and in a theological sense fathers Christ by bearing witness of his coming. Joseph (i.e. Judaism) does not recognize Jesus as his son; he is blind to this theological reality and therefore becomes a focus of comic ridicule. The cuckoldry issue is mentioned briefly several lines later for its comic effect. Joseph speaks words which could have easily come from the mouth of Chaucer's January:

All olde men, insampull take be me, -
 How I am be-gyled here may you see!--
 To wed soo yong a chyld.⁸⁷

It is apparent then that two attitudes exist in the Middle Ages toward the Old Law. One emphasizes concordance between the covenants and implies a certain forbearance and forgiveness for the Jews. This

⁸⁶ John Matthews Manly, ed., Specimens of the Pre-Shakespearean Drama (1897; rpt. New York: Dover Publications, 1967), p. 124.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 124.

attitude, based primarily on an abstract theological idea, was held by learned clergy and scholars who understood, along with Paul and Augustine, the Biblical preeminence of charity, that concept which summarizes all of Scripture, exemplified by the Master's words, "Forgive them for they know not what they do." The second attitude toward the Old Law emphasizes discord, the debacle of Judaism with the advent of Christ. It is the epitome of uncharitableness, a certain arrogance which Paul warned against, a Christian sneer at a cuckolded people.

This sneer is the import of the "Shipman's Tale" if interpreted on the surface. However, Chaucer's intent is to utilize this story as a "like" remedy, an ironic exemplum, to heal the wound of the popular anti-Semitic opinion.

As mentioned earlier, this ironic mode is not easily analyzed. Therefore, a short discussion of medieval world view, didacticism, and ironic mode seems appropriate here.

According to St. Paul (and to Chaucer), all is written for doctrinal edification; all is written to build up Holy Church. This didactic bent of the Middle Ages is recognized, if not appreciated, by most critics of our age. This didacticism appears in the scriptural exegeses, exempla, and treatises which explicitly "spell out" the Truth, that one path to take in life's pilgrimage. There is only one path to take if "everyman" is going to realize a "good ending"; the only alternative leads to spiritual sterility and death. This rather simple vision of life's opportunities is the medieval Christian view; life offers a narrow road and a broad road. One leads to life, the other to death. In Proverbs, man is depicted standing at the crossroads of the way; Wisdom stands on

one side and calls, "whoever is naive, let him turn in here"; on the opposite side the Woman of Folly gives exactly the same call.⁸⁸ In many ways these two women are mirror images of one another.⁸⁹ They both have the same call; they both have a dwelling and a table set for their visitors but each has her own path leading in the opposite direction. As inheritors of a modern sensibility we must lay aside our Hegelian dialectic to comprehend the polarized world view of coming either to Lady Wisdom or the Woman of Folly, of charity or cupidity, of people "in bono" and people "in malo", of the New Law or the Old Law.

As we have said, many of the Christian treatises throughout the Middle Ages explicitly teach the right path; however, another method (less ostensible in its didactic approach) ironically implies the doctrines of Christianity. This irony develops when the author, without extensive commentary, depicts the broad, worldly way, the mirror-image of the narrow road of Truth. Since this road "in malo" is the inverse of Truth in every way, the story of the unregenerate life on the wrong path ironically echoes the story of the regenerate. The medieval audience easily perceived this parody; they realized too that one way led ultimately "up" and the other "down," whereas the unregenerate characters seem blind to the ultimate end of their path; thus, they become the focus of irony and an example to the faithful to avoid Folly's road.

In order to understand the didactic import of a character within

⁸⁸Proverbs 9.

⁸⁹For a discussion of the Old Law being the mirror image of the New in iconography, see Seiferth, pp. 15-17.

this polarized ("in bono" or "in malo") schema, we must turn to typology, the search for types of New Testament figures foreshadowed in the Old Testament and pagan works. Seeing Issac as a type of Christ is not difficult when we read that Abraham purposes to sacrifice his son on Mount Moriah and has him carry the bundle of sticks for the sacrifice on his back. Issac is a type "in bono"; however, it sometimes becomes quite a task to recognize types "in malo," such types as we would expect to find in the "Shipman's Tale." This "in malo" type may do the same thing as its counterpart, but for the opposite or wrong reason (for cupidity rather than for charity); in other cases, the "in malo" one may say the "in bono" verbal response yet do the opposite or the perversion of it. Therefore, the complexities involved in understanding the typological identities of the characters in the "Shipman's Tale" are great. The merchant, his wife, and daun John taken only at face value cannot be appreciated in their fullness. We must learn to see the Biblical echoes which reverberate beyond their immediate surfaces.

The Shipman, true to his character, tells a tale for its bawdy, entertaining quality. It has the simple appeal of adventurous adultery. In addition, the story's effectiveness hinges on the monk's clever scheme and the ironic blindness of the cuckolded merchant. However, if the conclusions of the following analysis are correct, another entertaining quality must be ascribed to the tale -- that is, a view of the tale as a joke focused not on merchants or on cuckolds in general, but on Judaism. This is not to say that the Shipman has some secret clerical background or some exceptional anti-Semitic bitterness. His tale reflects the popular biases of his day; it probably is comparable

in intent and tone to that of a present-day racist joke, a joke told at the expense of a commonly ridiculed group of people. Since Jews are the focus of comic ridicule, the Shipman obviously has very little forgiveness for the Jews; by opposing this Christ-like attitude his tale's message is the epitome of uncharitableness.

Keeping in mind the preceding discussion of Ecclesia and Synagoga, I suggest these correspondences which will be substantiated in the following analysis:

- 1) the merchant suggests first Judaism, and therefore he is a representative of the Old Law, and in his relation to his wife, he is a type of Joseph.
- 2) the wife suggests first a type of church militant, and also therefore a type of the Virgin Mary.
- 3) the monk suggests first a type of Christ, representative of the New Law, and paradoxically, a type of the Holy Spirit.

These typological echoes may at first seem somewhat blasphemous, but the focus of ridicule must be understood to rest on the merchant, a representative of Judaism, not on the type of Christ or Church in the tale. Also, the taleteller is not Chaucer but the Shipman who "sente hem hoom to every lond." In the Shipman's unregenerate view, harassing the Jews would seem healthy, even Christian, since they are labeled as the murderers of Christ. Ironically the Shipman's attitude is in the manner of the Old Law -- revenge, and if the Shipman does not understand the preeminent doctrine of charity, his tale is not going to reflect a clear vision of Christ or the Church either. In his tale the type of Christ, daun John, is a type, "in malo." This is all conjectural and

dependent on the ironic mode of the tale; an examination of the text will support the preceding claims.

The tale begins, "A merchant whilom dwelled at Seint-Denys." First of all, it is of interest that merchants are stereotypically Jews in history and literature. Seiferth says, "Their destiny as wanderers, their homelessness, their knowledge of languages, and their social isolation had, ever since ancient times, thrust the business professions upon them."⁹⁰ Another business which is strongly associated with Judaism in the Middle Ages is usury. With respect to practice of usury in England, one modern historian writes that "during the Middle Ages it was largely confined to the Jews," even after laws were relaxed, and Christians were free to enter the profession.⁹¹ The merchant in the "Shipman's Tale" is not exclusively a usurer, but one of the most significant decisions he makes in the story is to loan daun John a sum of money. Also, we certainly conclude that he knows a great deal about loans when we read his advice to his wife about proper lending procedures at the end of the tale; there is a definite emphasis in the story on the merchant's consciousness of debt and his feverish money counting ("rekene").

The "reckoning" with debt which so obsesses the merchant suggests the Jewish vocations in the medieval period, but, in addition, it corresponds stereotypically on an underlying theological plane with Judaism. According to Tertullian, "debt" in the Scripture "is used figuratively to mean sin, because of this analogy. When a man owes

⁹⁰ Seiferth, p. 46.

⁹¹ Barbara W. Tuchman, Bible and Sword (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1956), p. 57.

something to a judge and payment is exacted from him, he does not escape the just demand unless excused from the payment of debt⁹² In the Christian view, the Jews of Biblical history tried vigorously to pay the debt of sin which would procure peace with Jehovah. Animal sacrifice for sin was a necessity in their tradition. However, when the Jew thought that the debt was paid by energetically reckoning with the Old Law, ironically the debt actually remained: "For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."⁹³ In a similar manner, the merchant in the "Shipman's Tale" is reckoning and carefully staying out of debt when in reality there is a very great love debt which he has left unpaid to his wife. This ironic blindness to debt corresponds to Joseph's blindness explained in the preceding discussion of Ecclesia and Synagoga.⁹⁴

Chaucer most directly hints at the merchant's identity as a Jew in this rather enigmatic comment made by the merchant:

Scarsly amonges twelve tweye shul thryve
Continuelly, lastynge unto oure age.⁹⁵

⁹² Translation is from Rudolph Abbesman and Sister E. J. Daly and E. A. Quain's "Tertullian: Disciplinary, Moral, and Ascetical Works," in The Fathers of the Church (New York: Fathers of the Church Inc., 1959), pp. 165-166.

⁹³ Hebrews 10:4

⁹⁴ Silverman, p. 330; he analyzes this "chief ironic point of the 'Shipman's Tale'," reflected in the final "taillynge" pun: "the Shipman means not only 'tallying' (incurring or paying debts) but also 'sexual intercourse.'"

⁹⁵ A certain textual ambiguity as to whether "tweye" should be read as "ten" or "two" is resolved if this analysis is correct (cf. Robinson's note, p. 733, l.228).

In the history of the Jewish nation after the death of Solomon, there was division. The twelve tribes broke into two groups -- the northern kingdom, Israel, made up of ten tribes, and the southern kingdom, Judah, with two tribes. The northern kingdom was shortlived because it turned to idol worship. Israel was utterly destroyed as a nation by conquering invaders. From Judah (the tribes of Judah and Benjamin) came David and the "shoot" from the "stem of Jesse," that is, Jesus Christ. This southern kingdom also was conquered, all the people were taken as slaves to Babylon. However, the fate of the two tribes differs from the ten because ultimately a "remnant" of Judah returns from Babylon to rebuild the temple and reestablish the nation. This remnant from the two tribes will endure until the end of the age according to Christian tradition.⁹⁶ So, when he refers to the "tweye" (two) in "twelve" which are "lastynge unto oure age," the merchant is speaking not only about the fate of businessmen but more significantly about his own Jewish heritage and future.

As the tale starts we realize that the merchant has an extravagant wife, and from the beginning the wife tells how her husband's niggardliness could lead to someone else paying his debt:

And if that he noght may, par aventure
 Or ellis list no swich dispence endure,
 But thynketh it is wasted and ylost,
 Thanne moot another payen for oure cost,
 Or lene us gold, and that is perilous. (11.15-19)

Obviously, this foreshadows daun John's adultery with the merchant's wife,

⁹⁶ R.L. Ottley, History of the Hebrews (Cambridge: University Press, 1901), pp. 192, 217; H.H. Halley, Halley's Bible Handbook (1927; rpt. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1965), p. 193.

but also the passage ironically describes the same love triangle explained in the discussion of Ecclesia which emphasizes Joseph as a cuckold.

The merchant is a Jew, a representative of the Old Law which failed to provide for the Church (i.e., the wife) through adequate payment for the debt of sin. The wife, a type of the Virgin Mary, is married to the Old Law (Joseph); however, daun John, like the New Law (or Christ), secretly and paradoxically has intercourse with the wife and pays the debt (both monetary and sexual) which the Old Law was unable to pay.

As mentioned earlier, the movement from the Old Law to the New Law can be understood positively as the Old Law foreshadowing and preparing the way for the New. In this schema, the two work in harmony; the Old Law fathers the New. This close relation between the two covenants is ironically parodied in daun John's friendly familiarity with the merchant; the monk calls him his "cosyn" or relative.⁹⁷ This is a lie which daun John (the New Law) forsakes when it becomes an obstacle to the acquisition of the wife (the church) for a night:

He is na moore cosyn unto me
Than is this leef that hangeth on the tree! (11.149-150)

Continually throughout the tale the merchant and the monk, daun John (ironic representatives of the Old Law and New Law respectively), are set in contrast to each other. For example, in contrast to the initial suggestion that this merchant is niggardly with his wife, daun John is depicted by Chaucer as being generous and therefore popular, not

⁹⁷This "cosynage" issue demands some underlying rationale since the Shipman makes so much of it.

only with the merchant and wife but also with the merchant's servants. Chaucer curiously describes the monk's popularity in the response of the merchant to daun John's friendly familiarity:

The monk hym claymeth as for cosynage
And he agayn, he seith nat ones nay,
But was as glad therof as fowel of day; (11.36-38)

The servants are elated when the monk arrives and Chaucer repeats himself:

For which they were as glad of his comyng
As fowel is fayn whan that the sonne up riseth. (11.50-51)

This "rising sun" motif is mentioned by Seiferth in his study of medieval iconographical renderings of Ecclesia and Synogoga. These scenes show the crucifixion with two women (representing Holy Church and Judaism) standing at the foot of the cross. The didactic purpose of such a depiction is to emphasize the progressive change the Old Law to the New Law or the debacle of the Jewish religion, depending on the artist's conception. In one such work, Ecclesia proclaims as she gazes at the crucified Son, "the grace of God rises up like the sun."⁹⁸ Through the use of this familiar formulaic line Chaucer points out the monk's place as a Christ figure in the tale.

In contrast to the merchant's tight-fisted nature, Chaucer further emphasizes that the monk's popularity is due to his generosity:

⁹⁸Seiferth, p. 9.

Free was daun John, and namely of dispence
 As in that hous, and ful of diligence
 To doon plesaunce, and also greet costage
 He noht forgat to yeve the leeste page
 In al that hous (11.43-47)

Furthermore, daun John's popularity and generosity are brought into stark contrast with the merchant on the theological level. The monk is joyfully welcomed by the servants just as the birds welcome the "sonne" when it "up riseth." If daun John is to be taken as an ironic typological echo of Christ then an additional meaning for this phrase emerges in reference to the victorious resurrection of Christ. Christ arose on the third day, verifying the power of the New Law, and He brought the free gift of grace (cf. the monk's generosity) to those who were formerly slaves to the Old Law. In contrast to this figure, the merchant rises on the third day and locks himself in his "countour-hous" to reckon his debts, to do the ineffectual work of the Old Law:

The thridde day, this marchant up ariseth,
 And on his nedes sadly hym avyseth,
 And up into his countour-hous gooth he
 To rekene with hymself, as wel may be,
 Of thilke yeer how that it with hym stood, (11.75-79)

In fact, he is so intent on calculating his debt that his wife comes and chides him:

How longe tyme wol ye rekene and caste
 Youre sommes...
 The devel have part on alle swiche rekenynges!
 Ye have ynough, pardee, of Goddes sonde. (11.216-219)

On a literal level the wife's oath is rather innocent; however, on the

allegorical level she tells the Jew that his dealings in the temple are devilish, and he has had enough of God's visitation ("sonde") there. The irony continues when simultaneously the Jew is feverishly counting his money and his wife is telling daun John of her husband's "nygardye." The merchant busily counts his wealth and thinks that his debts are all paid. However, he is ironically blind to what he owes his wife: first, he does not provide his wife with adequate funds for her monetary debt, and second, he apparently has never adequately paid his sexual debt to her (cf. the likenesses to the ineffectual Old Law): according to his wife he is neither "free" nor "fressh abedde" (11.176-77). The merchant's blindness to his true debts marks him as a stereotypical Jew. In visual iconography Synagoga is depicted with a blindfold. Augustine refers to the Jews as being blinded to the truth; Jesus himself said, "...they know not what they do." The irony of the merchant in "The Shipman's Tale" is the irony of the blind Jew, the ineffectual "old" Joseph. Guilty of uncharitable anti-Semitism, the Shipman purposes to hold up the Jew's condition for the comic entertainment of the other pilgrims.

When the Monk and the wife meet in the garden to make their love plans, Chaucer uses formulaic description again to hint at the figurative identity of these characters. At their secret meeting it is the quality of daun John's gait which is particularly interesting:

This good syf cam walkynge pryvely
 Into the gardyn, there he walketh softe, (11.92-93)⁹⁹

This is an ironic description because the monk is actually not a gentle

⁹⁹ Italics mine.

man; when they make their bargin he "caughte hire by the flankes,/ And hire embraceth harde, and kiste hire ofte." After this, the monk makes a similar qualitative statement:

Gooth now youre way, quod he, al stille and softe (1.204)

On a literal level, these adverbs emphasize the secrecy of their meeting. The underlying implication of this ironical tension (between gentleness and the monk's vigorous lust) can be seen more clearly if we examine the popular religious lyric, "I sing of a maiden."¹⁰⁰ In this poem the "King of all kinges" (Christ) is coming to make the Virgin conceive; the paradox of the calm, gentle nature of this conception in contrast to more furious human lusts is brought out through the repeated use of adverbs similar to those employed in "The Shipman's Tale":

He cam also stille
 Ther his moder was
 As dew in Aprille
 That falleth on the gras.¹⁰¹

Chaucer uses a formulaic literary concept to reveal typological echoes

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Jemielity in his article, "'I Sing of a Maiden': God's Courting of Mary," Concerning Poetry (1969), comments on the same lines: "That tone is enhanced by the reiteration of 'stille,' which qualifies the one literal predication in these three stanzas: 'He cam. Stille' connotes God's respect for the virginity of Mary in its denotation as freedom from commotion or disturbance of any kind. God's approach is thus both physically and psychologically tender, and Mary's intercourse, unlike that of Yeat's Leda, is not violent."

¹⁰¹ Lyrics, p. 170; Italics mine; Jemielity, speaking of the formulaic nature of these lines, says that each stanza restates "the manner of God's approach to Mary in images familiar to the medieval audience because of their use in the Advent liturgy."

in the tale -- the "stille and softe" aspect of the Monk and wife's rendezvous suggests that they are types of the Holy Spirit (i.e., paradoxically "King of alle kinges" or Christ) and Mary, and the Monk's hardy lust creates a tension, an incongruity, characteristic of formulaic literary rendering of the Virgin Birth paradox. In addition to this paradox, in the lyric the tension of the Holy Spirit coming to "his modres bowr" is emphasized.¹⁰² In "The Shipman's Tale" the wife feels the same tension concerning such intimacy with close kin, but the Monk assures her: "He (the merchant) is na moore cosyn unto me/ Than is this leef that hangeth on the tree (ll.149-150). This incest paradox, related to the Virgin Birth, accounts further for all the explanation surrounding the merchant's make-believe kinship to daun John.

If one accepts these correspondences discussed above, "The Shipman's Tale" is more than an entertaining lusty tale or a tale about the commercialization of marriage; it is an "old" anti-semitic folk-joke reworded by Chaucer to carry its full impact as an attack against the Jews. The real sardonic punch in the tale is not so much the cuckolding of the merchant but his lending the money which allows daun John to purchase "myrthe al nyght." So it is with Israel; according to Jesus, "salvation is from the Jews"; unfortunately they blindly missed the Messiah, and as a result, the preeminence of gentile Christians in God's salvation plan emerged in history. It is this shameful, uncharitable sneer at the expense of the Jews which Chaucer wished to exemplify in "The Shipman's Tale," the same sneer to which Paul retorts: "But if some of the branches were broken off, and you being a wild olive, were grafted

¹⁰²Lyrics, p. 170; Italics mine.

in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you."¹⁰³

Let it be reaffirmed again that Chaucer agrees with St. Paul. The poet is conscious of the doctrine of charity and the tradition of Concordia. In "The Shipman's Tale" Chaucer is not advocating anti-Semitism, the Shipman is. The tale exemplifies the unregenerate darkened soul; it contrasts Chaucer's charitable treatise, "The Tale of Melibee."

The characterizations of daun John and the merchant's wife as typological echoes of Christ and His bride, the Church, are not blasphemous because the monk is a Christ "in malo," and the wife is a Virgin "in malo." The mode of the tale is entirely ironic.

The monk's "in malo" nature is ironically and clearly revealed by Chaucer in daun John's words, "He is na moore cosyn unto me/ Than is this leef that hangeth on the tree!" The literal context of these lines has already been discussed. In addition to disavowing his kinship to the merchant the monk is unconsciously making another oblique statement about his own nature. The key to understanding this additional irony in the lines is in the word, "leef." The word means "leaf" literally; however, the word "leef" can also be used as a shortened form of "leef-man" or "lover." In medieval literary tradition, the only lover who is ever referred to as being "on the tree" is Christ. Chaucer ironically hints at the "in malo" aspect of the monk by having him say-- the merchant is no more a close relative of mine than is Christ who hung

¹⁰³Romans 11:17-18.

on the tree. The poet ingeniously directs the reader to daun John's role in the upside down parody.

Daun John's statement, conscious or unconscious, harkens back to the candid confession of identity made by the devil to the Summoner in the "Friar's Tale." In the "Shipman's Tale" there is a garden in which this "devilish" monk seduces a woman; this echoes the story of the Fall (cf. "The Merchant's Tale"). With this story overlaying the coming of the New Law and Christ discussed above, the irony becomes almost grotesque.

The Shipman's unregenerate soul is blinded by cupidity. His story is at once a vibrant bourgeois fabliau and a black parody. As stated above, there is no blasphemy on Chaucer's part. The poet is simply very consistent and true; the Shipman can no more rightly depict Christ and the Church than he can understand the doctrine of charity. The poet lets him tell his tale, and his condition colors his taletelling. The result is that Chaucer provides an exemplum for the epitome of uncharitableness (i.e., no mercy for the Jews). The tale is a "like" bandage designed to heal the wound of cupidity. Its ironic theme of merciless ridicule makes it fit neatly into the fifth step to wisdom in The Canterbury Tales as a whole, the fifth step in which the "Prioress's Tale," "Sir Thopas," "Melibee," and the "Monk's Tale" also play a part.

As implied in the final lines of the preceding paragraph, "Melibee"'s theme of charity (especially forgiveness for Jews) influences the interpretation of the first story in Fragment VII, "The Shipman's Tale." Also, it implies that Fragment VII, viewed as a unity, is step five on the road to wisdom in the overall schema of The Canterbury Tales. This conclusion concerning the underlying rationale and order in the Tales is unsupported

at this point but will be discussed more fully in the following chapter.

In order to understand Chaucer's intent in connecting the "Prioress's Tale" with the other tales of this fragment, we must again keep in mind Chaucer's tale, "Melibee," and its theme of forgiveness. Albert B. Friedman, among other critics, has concluded that Chaucer through the "Prioress's Tale" "would seem to be furthering anti-Semitism"; "medieval anti-Semitism was almost wholly religious.... It pervaded popular Christian piety, and to the extent that Chaucer shared in this piety, he could not help withholding sympathy from the obstinate people." Friedman says further that "geniuses are not entirely above the accepted beliefs of their age and social milieu."¹⁰⁴ This discussion differs with Dr. Friedman and concludes that Chaucer is indeed "above" this particular belief of his age.

The poet's "Melibee" reveals his intent, and again if we are to believe that we will "nowher fynden difference" between "Melibee"'s sentence and the underlying meaning of the other tales, then the Prioress and her tale must be another ironic "like" exemplum of anti-Semitism, the epitome of uncharitableness. She is the religious counterpart of the secular Shipman. In the "General Prologue" the poet mildly criticizes the Prioress's courtly aspirations, and in a special way he ironically emphasizes the nun's lack of mercy and charity. First, he says, "she was so charitable and so pitous," and that with her "al was conscience and tendre herte" (11.143 and 150). Ironically, her charity is rather misdirected. For example, she feeds her lap dogs

¹⁰⁴ Albert B. Friedman, "The 'Prioress's Tale' and Chaucer's Anti-Semitism," Chaucer Review, vol. 9, no. 2 (Penn. State University Press), pp. 119, 120.

"rosted flessch, or milk and wastel-breed" while the poor die for want of food. In addition, her motto is Amor vincit omnia rather than "charity conquer all." "Amor" is cupid's brand of love, not Christ's. Chaucer certainly would not share the point of view (as Friedman concludes he does) of one who is characterized with such obvious uncharitable tendencies.

These tendencies are given full vent in the "Prioress's Tale." Like the Shipman, her condition colors her taletelling. For instance, at the end of her story, the Prioress asks for Christian mercy:

Preye eek for us, we synful folk unstable,
That, of his mercy, God so merciable
On us his grete mercy multiplie,
For reverence of his mooder Marie. (ll.687-690)

She mouths the New Law, but she falls short of having a Christ-like forgiveness for the Jews. Like the Shipman, she ironically applies the Old Law to them:

"Yvele shal have that yvele wol deserve";
Therefore with wilde hors he dide hem drawe,
and after that he heng hem by the lawe. (ll.632-634)¹⁰⁵

The Prioress's particular hatred for the Jews is the epitome of uncharitableness. Chaucer the pilgrim must follow these two anti-Semitic tales with his own story.

The whole troop of pilgrims is sobered by the Prioress's story, and the Hooste pays special attention to Chaucer's attitude:

¹⁰⁵ cf. R.J. Schoeck, "Chaucer's Prioress: Mercy and Tender Heart," in Schoeck and Jerome Taylor, Chaucer Criticism: The Canterbury Tales (1960), p. 246; Schoeck concludes that the "widely circulated ritual murder legend is held up for implicit condemnation as vicious and hypocritical."

For evere upon the ground I see thee stare....
 For unto no wight dooth he daliaunce. (ll.696-75)

Harry Bailey begins to joke about the exceptional reservation of Chaucer, the pilgrim. He lightheartedly accuses him of fleshly lust by claiming that the poet is looking for the "hare." The Hooste certainly does paint a ludicrous picture of an "elvyssh" Chaucer, and this comedy along with the following burlesque of the popular metrical romance does bring relief from the dreary story told by the Prioress.¹⁰⁶

The poet's reserve, understood by the carnally minded Harry Bailey, brings comedy, but when interpreters of Chaucer's pose take this to be the sole *raison d'être* of the scene, they overlook its "sentence." Unregenerate people in Chaucer's Tales are characteristically blind to reality. Therefore, their opinions cannot always be understood as synonymous with the poet's intent. Chaucer, the teller of "Melibee," is not blind to the wrongheadedness of the Shipman's or the Prioress's tale. His staring at the ground and general lack of participation in the "daliaunce" is a silent, uncondemnatory disagreement with those two pilgrims' uncharitableness. Earlier in the Tales, Chaucer, in word, communicates that he will allow his pilgrims to tell the tale which their character determines, but he separates himself from the guilt which their attitudes and stories incur:

For Goddes love, demeth nat that I seye
 Of yvel entente, but for I moot reherce
 Hir tales alle, be they bettre or werse,
 Or elles falsen som of my matere. (ll.3172-75)

¹⁰⁶Helen S. Corsa, Chaucer: Poet of Mirth and Morality (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), pp. 198-99.

In his characterization of himself after the "Prioress's Tale," Chaucer exemplifies, in deed, what he previously communicated in word. In another work, Troilus and Criseyde, the poet also separates himself from the guilt of his unregenerate characters when he says: "For I, that God of Loves servantz serve."¹⁰⁷ He wants to serve the servants of the God of Love (i.e., Cupid) by showing them their folly; he does not condone their cupidity. Chaucer again is an uncondemnatory observer of man, separate from the evil he depicts, yet close enough to be an effective teacher.

The "Tale of Sir Thopas" serves as comic relief and prepares the way for "Melibee." The burlesque must necessarily act as a sort of "buffer" because placing the rather straightforward idealism of "Melibee" beside the "Prioress's Tale" would communicate a blatant condemnatory attitude not characteristic of Chaucer's personality or art. Helen Corsa explains this function of "Sir Thopas": "Whatever the object of the satire, it seems perfectly clear that Chaucer had no intention of devoting much of his time to the attack, nor, from the brevity of the tale, does he seem to be interested in seriously ridiculing the genre. He burlesques most of its characteristics in short order, his satiric and comic purposes are served, and he quickly passes to something more important."¹⁰⁸

From "Sir Thopas" the narrative progresses to the headlink and "Melibee" which have already been discussed in detail. "Melibee" is that ideal tale at the fifth step to wisdom which the other tales

¹⁰⁷ Robinson, ed., Troilus and Criseyde (1.15).

¹⁰⁸ Corsa, p. 199.

contrast or parody in some manner. It is an "opposite" remedy, hot to cold, wet to dry, designed to cure the wound of cupidity.

At first it is rather difficult to recognize the influence of "Melibee" in the "Monk's Tale." As mentioned earlier, life's opportunities are very limited in the medieval world view; man must choose one of two ways: either the narrow or the broad, either the lady of Wisdom's or the Woman of Folly's. The Monk tells a series of stories which show the end of taking folly's path. Dame Fortune has a place in this polarized schema as well. She is the "in malo" counterpart of the Virgin Mary. Dame Fortune is queen of the earth and all that is mutable and passing away; in contrast, the Virgin is the queen of heaven and all everlasting things. When crisis strikes in her realm, the true Virgin grants mercy. In "Melibee," for example, we see Prudence playing this role, exercising her "wommanly pitee" and working the reconciliation between Melibeus and his enemies. On the other hand, Dame Fortune characteristically shows no mercy when crisis comes to her worshipers. Instead, she "covere hire brighte face with a clowde." Thus, the "Monk's Tale" is an ironic exemplum for the fifth step, the counsel of mercy; he tells stories of famous men who were shown no mercy because they stepped on Fortune's wheel.

This idea is more clearly exemplified in Troilus and Criseyde, a work which also follows the steps to wisdom in the ironic mode.¹⁰⁹ In the Troilus (and in the fifth book, which corresponds ironically in the fifth step to wisdom), Cassandre is about to interpret Troilus's dream,

¹⁰⁹ Boccaccio's De Casibus and Lydgate's Fall of Princes, generally reflect this ironic context of Medieval tragedy.

which will reveal Criseyde's unfaithfulness and Dame Fortune's merciless turning. Before she interprets the dream, Cassandre recounts a relatively long list of other men who have tragically fallen because Dame Fortune showed no mercy. She starts in the past, and recounts tragedy after tragedy until she comes to Troilus's fall:

She gan first smyle and seyde, "O brother deere,
If thow a soth of this [dream] desirest knowe,
Thow most a fewe of olde stories here,
To purpos, how that Fortune overthrowe
Hath lordes olde... (11.1456-61)¹¹⁰

Troilus does not accept Cassandre's interpretation and calls her speech abruptly to an end. In a similar manner, the Monk tells tragedy after tragedy. His speech is called abruptly to a halt by Harry Bailey because it "anoyeth al this compaignye."

In conclusion, then, a listing of tragedies seems to be a formulaic, artistic move found in ironic renderings of the fifth step to wisdom. The "sentence" of the "Monk's Tale" is directly related to "Melibee" as Dame Fortune's changing favor is ironically related to the changeless mercy of the Virgin Mary.

In answer to the host's request for a tale which will make "oure hertes glade," Sir John tells a comedy which is very similar to the one in "Melibee." In both cases, characters are blinded by cupidity (i.e., Melibeus is a "honey-drinker" and Chauntecleer, a servant of Venus). In both cases, the enemy strikes (the World, Flesh, and Devil wound Melibeus's daughter; the Fox--a type of devil--tries to devour Chauntecleer); in both cases, the character triumphs over the adversary

¹¹⁰Troilus

in a seemingly foolish way (i.e., Melibeus gains lordship over the enemies by forgiving them; Chauntecleer escapes from the Fox's mouth by seeming to take his side in the struggle). Finally, both characters have "good ending." Mercy is a paradoxical concept in the Christian schema. It would seem foolish from the natural man's point of view to forgive enemies rather than struggle against them. Both Melibeus and Chauntecleer must learn this "foolish" Christian means to victory.

Augustine explains: man was "deceived by the wisdom of the serpent but freed by the foolishness of God."¹¹¹ This "foolishness" of God (from the natural man's point of view) is the crucified Christ and His forgiving attitude; it is the way which ultimately leads to the "good end" as exemplified in the tale told by that "sweete preeste," that "goodly man," Sir John. His animal fable is certainly a pleasant, entertaining way to make that underlying doctrine of charity more palatable, and thus it closes the fifth step to wisdom, the counsel of mercy.

¹¹¹C.I., p. 37.

Chapter 4

If Fragment VII is step five, the counsel of mercy on the road to wisdom, then the works from the "Knight's Tale" through the "Pardoner's Tale" should divide into the first four stages which Augustine delineates: fear of God, submission to scripture, knowledge, and fortitude. In addition, "The Second Nun's Tale" through "The Parson's Tale" reflect the themes of steps six and seven as defined by Augustine (i.e., purity and wisdom). This underlying rationale for the overall work supports the Ellesmere ordering, the ordering used by F.N. Robinson in his edition of the Tales. Many critics, however, do not believe that the Ellesmere ordering is Chaucer's ultimate plan, and it is not the aim of this discussion to argue that it is.¹¹² Yet, behind the following analysis rests the persuasion that the Ellesmere ordering fits an underlying rationale, if not intended by the poet, then certainly intended by the meticulous and artful designers of the most elaborately prepared Chaucer manuscript.

The following schema reveals the sententious meaning of The Canterbury Tales. Each tale will be discussed briefly with respect to its particular place in the seven steps to wisdom:

"Knight's Tale"	
"Miller's Tale"	
"Reeve's Tale"	fear of God
"Cook's Tale"	
"Man of Law's Tale"	
"Wife of Bath's Tale"	
"Friar's Tale"	
"Summoner's Tale"	submission to Scriptures
"Clerk's Tale"	
"Merchant's Tale"	
"Squire's Tale"	knowledge
"Franklin's Tale"	

¹¹²Robinson., p. 889.

"Physician's Tale"	fortitude
"Pardoner's Tale"	
"Shipman's Tale"	counsel of mercy
"Prioress's Tale"	
"Sir Thopas"	
"Melibee"	
"Monk's Tale"	
"Nun's Priest's Tale"	purity
"Second Nun's Tale"	
"Canon's Yeoman's Tale"	
"Manciple's Tale"	
"Parson's Tale"	wisdom

As mentioned many times in the preceding chapters, fear of God is the first step to wisdom. It is characterized by "reflection upon our mortal nature," and results in true humility. This principle of the first step is the primary theme of the first tale told by the Knight. The tale is an ideal "opposite" remedy functioning in the first step as "Melibee" does in the fifth. The "Knight's Tale" presents an ideal standard which most of the other tales in step one contrast or parody.

At the beginning of the story, Palamon and Arcite are both young, lusty bachelors; both are stock courtly lovers who ironically show all the foolish and useless results of pursuing cupidity. By the end of the story, Arcite realizes the end of seeking Dame Fortune's goods; that is, he falls from victory to death. Palamon learns from witnessing his brother's fall (literal and figurative) and submits himself to the figure of wisdom in the story, Theseus. Theseus's "olde fader Egeus" enters and gives the "sentence" of the preceding drama:

"Right as ther dyed nevere man," quod he,
 "That he ne lyvede in erthe in some degree,
 Right so ther lyvede never man," he seyde,

"In al this world, that som tyme he ne deyde.
 This world nys but a thurghfare ful of wo,
 And we been pilgrymes, passynge to and fro.
 Deeth is an ende of every worldly soore." (11.2843-2849)

With this sobering testimony of man's transitory condition the story comes to a close. Order (i.e., reason over the passions) is restored with Theseus's discourse on that "faire cheyne of love" which dissolves everyone's intemperate mourning and leads the way to the marriage of Palamon and Emelye.

The first step to wisdom in "Melibee" directly parallels the plot of the "Knight's Tale" described above. Melibeus has been out in "the feeldes hym to pleye," that is, in pursuit of lust (cf. "Wife of Bath's Prologue," l. 549) when he comes face to face with man's mortality. He mourns intemperately until Prudence counsels him to the contrary. Professor Hoffman marks the parallel at this point by correlating the "Knight's Tale," ll. 3041-44 and 3058-61 with "Melibee," ll. 990-93:

"Melibee": Measure of wepyng sholde be considered, after the loore that techeth us Senek:/'Whan that they frend is deed,' quod he, lat nat thyne eyen to moyste been of teeris, ne to mucche drye; although the teeris come to thyne eyen, lat hem nat falle;/ and whan thou hast forgoon thy freend, do diligence to gete another freend; and this is moore wysdom than for to wepe for thy freend which that thou has lorn, for therinne is no boote.'

"Knight's Tale": Thanne is it wysdom, as it thynketh me,
 To maken vertu of necessitee [i.e., "gete another freend"].

And take it weel that we may nat eschue,
 And namely that to us alle is due.

Why Grucchen we, why have we hevynesse,
 That goode Arcite, of chivalrie the flour,
 Departed is with duetee and honour
 Out of this foule prisoun of this lyf?¹¹³

¹¹³"Chaucer's 'Melibee'," p. 176, No. 3.

After man has contemplated mortality, mourned, and then turned from intemperate sorrow, he has attained to step one, the fear of God. This is the initial confrontation and victory over cupidity and especially over fleshly lusts. This form of cupidity is the special weakness of the young, who are just beginning their walk down life's road; and consequently, it is the inverted mirror image (the counterpart) to the fear of God. Therefore, bawdy tales are used by Chaucer at step one to ironically contrast the Christian ideal promoted by the Knight and the Man of Law.

The Miller, Reeve, and Cook are men who have never realized step one. They are pursuing cupidity as revealed in Chaucer's characterizations: the Miller leads the pilgrims out of town playing his bagpipe (an instrument emblematic of lechery); as described in the "General Prologue" the Reeve is cunning and avaricious; in the "Maniciple's Prologue" the Cook is so drunk that he falls off his horse. Their condition colors their tale-telling; their fabliaux are the product of the "old" nature. Unlike Palamon and Arcite, they have not realized the temporal and ultimately disappointing nature of their fleshly pursuits.

"The Man of Law's Tale" is an ideal story which finishes the first step to wisdom. Custance contrasts Alisoun and the Miller's wife and daughter because she remains unblemished by fleshly lust: "...Crist unwemmed kept Custance" (1.924). The story emphasizes the mutability of life and man's mortality. This theme is especially apparent at the end of the story when Alla and Custance are happily reunited, only to be separated again a year later by death:

That litel while in joye or in plesance
 Lasteth the blisse of Alla and Custance.
 For deeth, that taketh of heigh and logh
 his rente. (11.1140-1144)

The reality of death pervades the "good ending" of this tale. Even after Custance returns "in herte blithe" to be with her father, it is again warned that this earthly joy can only be experienced "til deeth departeth hem, this lyf they lede" (1.1158). With this powerful and sobering ideal in view, the first step to wisdom is completed. The fear of God, knowledge of one's mortality, has been explicitly promoted and set in stark contrast to the temporal fleshly pursuits of the Miller and Reeve. Understood in this context, these bawdy characters and their stories provide a "like" remedy, an ironic exemplum designed to discourage cupidity.

The second step to wisdom is characterized by submission to the authority of Scriptures; man learns to accept Holy counsel as "more beneficial" and "more reasonable" than his own opinion. The Wife of Bath as Chaucer characterizes her is the epitome of rebellion against authority. That is, she has been confronted with Holy counsel concerning her adulterous way of life and has distorted it to suit herself. For example, when speaking of Scripture which would condemn her actions, like Jesus's dealings with the Samaritan woman (i.e., she had five husbands too), the wife claims she cannot comprehend the principle being taught in that passage: "what that he mente therby, I kan nat seyn."¹¹⁴ She says she likes the scripture which "bad oure housbondes for to love us weel," (1.161) but she fails to finish quoting that verse in which St. Paul also says that wives should likewise submit to their husbands. In fact, the Wife of

¹¹⁴Preface, pp. 320-21.

to the authority of Scripture quoted to him by Prudence. In both stories a man is wed to a woman to whom he initially does not wish to submit. The knight does not desire the woman in the Wife's tale because she is "foul," "oold," and "poore." However, the old woman goes into a rather methodical defence against the objections raised by the knight, dealing with each aspect one by one. Likewise, Melibeus gives five reasons why he should not submit to Prudence, and his wife meets all five objections in a methodical and reasonable discourse that follows. After considering the woman's arguments, each man submits and gives away all the "maistrie"; in the "Wife of Bath's Tale" the knight says:

'My lady and my love, and wyf so deere,
 I put me in youre wise governance...'
 'Thanne have I gete of yow maistrie,'
 quod she,
 'Syn I may chese and governe as me lest?'
 'Ye, certes, wyfe,' quod he, 'I holde
 it best.' (11.1230-38)

At step two, Melibeus response is strikingly similar:

And, wyf, by cause of thy sweete
 wordes, and eek for I have assayed and preved
 thy grete sapience and thy grete trouth, I wol
 governe me by thy conseil in alle thyng. (1.1113)

Finally in each case, following submission to the woman, the advice which seems bad turns into good. The knight's wife magically becomes both true and beautiful, and Prudence subdues the enemies through mercy, which seems foolish to Melibeus at first. This astonishing change following submission is characteristic of the divine way in the Christian schema. Chaucer testifies to this in The House of Fame when he prays again and again that

"God turne us every drem to goode." Christ turns the Fall into the felix culpa; His foolishness overcomes the wisdom of Satan and the World as discussed earlier with respect to the "Nun's Priest's Tale."

The Wife of Bath chooses the wisdom of the world and shuns this seemingly "foolish" Christian counsel, yet Chaucer turns her wrongheaded tale ironically to communicate truth on the allegorical level, just as God turns misery to good. Chaucer and his perceptive audience share in this celebration, in the "laughter of God," as the Wife of Bath emerges as the focus of comic irony.

At step two, Melibeus faces another struggle in addition to his initial submission to Prudence. He must learn to discern which counsel to heed since there are many counsellors with diverse opinions; some are good and some are devilish. Chaucer also addresses this dilemma of the multitude of counsellors in "The Friar's Tale," and "The Summoner's Tale," and he takes advantage of this opportunity to make his most bitter anti-fraternal comment in the Tales. In the poet's eyes, regular clergy with their "scole-matere" are evil counsellors in the flock, since they wander from Scripture into futile speculations.

For example, the Friar tells a story about a Summoner (a regular clergyman) who asks a disguised devil to instruct him in the work of his office: "Teche me, whil that we ryden by the weye...Som subtiltee, and tel me feithfully/In myn office how that I may moost wyne" (11.1418-20). At first the devil's identity is somewhat hidden, but even after he blatantly admits, "I am a feend," the Summoner blindly continues to listen to his teaching, and he asks questions characteristic of scholastic argument:

"Han ye [the devil] a figure thanne determinant/In helle...."¹¹⁶ When the devil suggests that the Summoner may decide to forsake his counsel, the Summoner responds:

My trouthe wol I holde to my brother [the fiend],
As I am sworn, and ech of us til oother. (11.1527-28)

When Prudence asks Melibeus to change counsellors, the man responds in a similar way: "...every wight wolde holde me thanne a fool,/this is to seyn, if I, for thy counseillyng, wolde chaungen thynges..." (11.1054-55). Prudence explains the proper attitude: "For I seye that it is no folie to chaunge conseil whan the thyng is chaunged, or elles whan the thyng semeth ootherweyes than it was biforn" (1.1064). The Summoner, unlike Melibeus, does not listen to his prudence, and because he keeps his evil friend, he literally goes to the devil. This "bad ending" reveals Chaucer's invective against the regular clergy, and it also serves as an exemplum for step two, which discourages his audience from choosing those evil counsellors.

In the "Summoner's Tale," the Friar is another regular clergyman, a hypocrite, and thus, a false counsellor to the layman, Thomas. The Friar gives his sermon on anger, but Thomas does not receive his preaching but decides to stay loyal to the secular clergy (the poet's idea of good counsellors):

'But shewe to me al thy confessioun'
'Nay,' quod the sike man, 'by Seint Symoun!
I have be shryven this day at my curat.' (11.2093-95)

The Friar further presses for money and for the authority of the regular

¹¹⁶The Summoner's blindness is discussed in Preface, pp. 267-8.

clergy's counsel. He tells Thomas that he should give money: "For elles moste we oure bookes selle,/And if yow lakke oure predicacioun [preaching],/Thanne goth the world al to destruccioun" (11.2108-10). Thomas continues to resist the Friar, but under continued persistence he gives him a donation--a fart! The hypocritical Friar goes into a rage (the sin he has just preached against) and becomes the focus of comic ridicule. Chaucer achieves his anti-fraternal ends, and he further develops the second step to wisdom with the example of wise Thomas who shuns evil counsellors and submits to the true teachers of Holy Scripture, the secular clergy.

Finally, the "worthy clerk" ends the second step to wisdom with his very explicit, ideal exemplum of patience and submission to authority. His tale's message stands in stark contrast to the Wife of Bath's rebellion and the Summoner's stupidity and "bad ending" in the "Friar's Tale." In a very straightforward manner, the story of patient Grisilde acts as an "opposite" remedy, an ideal standard which functions in step two much like "The Knight's Tale" or "Melibee" in their respective places. Grisilde submits to the authority of her husband despite what seem to be disastrous consequences, and like the knight in the "Wife of Bath's Tale" and Melibeus, she receives the joyous surprise of a "good ending."

January, the main character of the Merchant's story, also must decide which advisor to heed when seeking marriage counsel. Unlike Melibeus and Thomas, however, January shuns his honest counsellor, Justinus, and follows the advice of a flatterer, Placebo. On Placebo's advice, the old man rejects one of the key teachings given by Prudence to Melibeus at step two. These two parallel passages noted by Professor Hoffman are

significant here:

"Melibee": Salomon seith, 'Werk alle thy
thynges by conseil, and thou shalt never repente.'
(1. 1003)

"Merchant's Tale": 'Wirk alle thyng by counseil,' thus seyde he
[Solomon].

[Placebo speaking] 'And thanne shaltow nat repente thee.'
But though that Salomon spak swich a word,
Myn owene deere brother and my lord,
So wysly God my soule brynge at reste,
I holde youre owene conseil is the beste.
(11. 1484-86)¹¹⁷

The flatterer advises January to follow his own inclinations just as Melibeus's false counsellors tell him to pursue the revenge he initially desires. Melibeus overcomes the temptation, but January makes an unwise choice, and afterward the old man is characteristically blind. He is blind physically throughout most of the story; he is also blind intellectually since he is unaware of his wife's unfaithfulness. This blindness or ignorance makes January a fit ironic exemplum for step three, knowledge. With knowledge man grows in self-awareness and sees how much he has been "enmeshed by the love of the world." In contrast, January continually grows more ignorant. First, his initial choice of a wife is described as a move in the dark:

And chees hire [May] of his owene auctoritee
For love is blynd alday, and may nat see. (11.1597-98)¹¹⁸

Second, the old man suddenly grows physically blind, and the poet likens this physical condition to January's lack of reason:

¹¹⁷"Chaucer's 'Melibee'," p. 177, No. 5.

¹¹⁸Preface, p. 111.

O Januarie, what myghte it thee availle,
 Thogh thou myghte se as fer as shippes saille?
 For as good is blynd deceyved be
 As to be deceyved whan a man may se. (11.2107-2110)

The ultimate evidence of January's inner blindness comes at the end of the tale when he regains his sight and actually sees his wife with Damyan in the pear tree. The old jalou says, "He swyved thee, I saugh it with myne yen" (1.2378). Yet, by the end of their argument January closes his eyes to reason and accepts his wife's incredible story. At the end of the tale, January is glad and at peace with his wife, but it costs him his reason (i.e., true insight or knowledge). He is the epitome of ignorance which is initiated by an unwise choice of counsel, promoted by his physical condition, and perpetuated by an act of his own will.

"The Squire's Tale" provides a mild comic relief from the bitter irony of the "Merchant's Tale." Chaucer "pokes gentle fun" at the young inexperienced Squire by showing his awkward rhetoric and general lack of control over the courtly romance formulas.¹¹⁹ In the third step to wisdom, this tale functions much as "Sir Thopas" does in step five. That is, the actual content of the tale is not as significant as the following response of another pilgrim to it--the words of Franklin to the Squire and the "Franklin's Tale." The theme of knowledge is ironically born out in these two passages spoken by the Franklin.

First, the Franklin's compliments to the Squire's literary craft seem quite excessive when the actual dullness and rhetorical maladroitness

¹¹⁹ Corsa, p. 168; Donald R. Howard, The Idea of the Canterbury Tales (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 264-67.

in the tale are considered. However, to the bourgeois Franklin "gentillesse" is "gentillesse" for he has only a shallow knowledge of the courtly formulas; he simply aspires, showing an appreciation for the courtly manner, and in doing so, he shows his ignorance:

As to my doom, ther is noon that is heere
Of eloquence that shal be thy peere. (11.677-78)¹²⁰

There certainly are others in the company who are more eloquent, such as the boy's own father, the "parfit gentil knyght." The Franklin then proceeds to tell his own romance, and again, his condition of ignorance colors his taletelling.

The Franklin does many things correctly in his tale. The story has that entertaining quality ("solas") which Harry Bailey always desires in a tale; however, when the Franklin attempts to give his story some "sentence," he reveals his lack of understanding. The story's moral complication revolves around the vow made by Dorigen to Aurelius, a vow to commit adultery, made in jest, and contingent on the man's accomplishing the impossible task of removing the "rokkes" along the coast of the sea. The story moves to its conclusion as Aurelius magically has the rocks covered by water (not removed); Dorigen then feels the moral necessity of keeping her vow, and finally her own husband concedes that she must be true to her promise.

The moral blindness of these characters (and therefore of the Franklin) becomes the focus of comic ridicule in the following ways. First, the rocks are never truly removed but only covered. The

¹²⁰Preface, p. 276.

complication then is, in fact, an "illusioun." Second, both Dorigen and Arveragus do not realize that vows made in jest or in ignorance of their implications cannot constrain them; the promise should be simply abrogated. For example, the Summoner in the "Friar's Tale" has this same misconception. When the carter curses his horse and wagon, the Summoner expects the devil to take them. The devil explains that the carter is just angry and "it is not his entente" to send them to hell. He explains further that "the carl spak oo thing, but he thoghte another" (ll.1556 and 1568).¹²¹ So it is with Dorigen's vow; she makes a vow which would lead to the removal of the rocks and her husband's safe arrival. Her intent is not adultery but the faithful love for her true husband. She, her husband, and the Franklin are morally shallow and literal-minded, and they never realize that the conflict is an illusion. Third, the characters do not realize that an oath should never constrain them to commit a greater evil (i.e., in this case, adultery). Melibeus is faced with the same dilemma but fortunately his Prudence gives him the knowledge he needs:

For I seye that it is no folie to chaunge conseil
 whan the thyng is chaunged, or elles whan
 the thyng semeth ootherweyes than it was biforn.
 And mooreover, I seye that though ye han sworn
 and bihight to perfourne your emprise, and
 nathelees ye weyve to perfourne thilke same
 emprise by juste cause, men sholde nat seyn
 therfore that ye were a lier ne forsworn. (ll.1064.65)¹²²

The characters in the "Franklin's Tale" have no prudence or knowledge

¹²¹Robertson discusses these characters' inability to discern true moral responsibility in Preface, pp. 268 and 274.

¹²²Preface, p. 274.

because they believe an oath constrains them to perform the greater evil, adultery. Finally, the Franklin's own blindness is reaffirmed when he asks the following question at the end of the tale: "Which was the mooste fre, as thynketh yow?" (1.1622). He is referring to Arveragus who is generous enough to allow his wife to fulfill her promise, and Dorigen who is willing to do so, and Aurelius, who ultimately releases Dorigen from her promise, and the magician, who releases Aurelius from his fee. The question is ironically ridiculous since all the obligations which are generously nullified are nonexistent. Arveragus and Dorigen should have abrogated the foolish vow immediately, and Aurelius should not have to pay the magician for removing rocks which are never really removed.

The question, then, is a trick, a test made by the poet, to reveal the foolishly ignorant and those who possess knowledge. The Franklin fails this test because he asks the question seriously and therefore becomes a fit ironic exemplum for the third step to wisdom, knowledge.

The fourth step to wisdom is fortitude. At this stage the soul "hungers and thirsts for justice," and in the pursuit of justice, man tries to withdraw "himself from every deadly pleasure." When Melibeus reaches this stage he vigorously desires to apply truth and to deal with his enemies (the World, Flesh, and Devil): "I thynke and purpose me fully/to desherite hem of al that evere they han and for to putte hem [the enemies] in exil for evere" (1.1834). Prudence, however, counsels a more merciful reconciliation rather than this harsh attempt to extricate himself from evil. This wrongheaded, excessive pursuit of justice which overrides mercy is a characteristic pitfall of step four. Fortunately, Melibeus listens to Prudence and takes a more merciful

route; the Physician, however, tells a tale about a man named Virginius who does not heed his prudence.

"The Physican's Tale" is a story about justice corrupted. Apius, a lecherous judge, attempts to use his judicial power to extort Virginius's daughter, Virginia. Professor Fleming addresses this subject in his explanation of the Apius and Virginia story: "...human legal and judicial institutions are testimonies to the failure of man's love and its fatal misdirections," and he says further that "law itself, in its human administration, is subject to all the imperfections of fallen human nature...."¹²³ The evil force in the story, Apius and his corrupt judicial court, is the ironic inverse of Melibeus's ideal hungering and thirsting for true justice and his ultimate resolution to show mercy.

Virginius, like Melibeus, is faced with an enemy who wishes to harm his daughter; however, unlike Melibeus, Virginius's misdirected fortitude causes him to completely extricate his daughter from evil; that is, he kills her rather than allow her to be ravished. Virginia mentions the scriptural parallel of this harsh deed in the story of Jephthah and his daughter. In an attempt to work justice, to keep his vow, Jephthah kills his daughter, and the Church Fathers gloss this act as wrongheaded and idiotic.¹²⁴ Virginius then is an example of misdirected fortitude; his deed encourages Chaucer's audience to avoid this pitfall of step four. The final counsel given by the Physician reaffirms the theme of fortitude:

¹²³Fleming, p. 130.

¹²⁴Dr. Hoffman cites these patristic authorities on Jephthah's stupid actions: PL CXCVIII, 1284; PL XVII, 266.

Therefore I rede yow this conseil take:
 Forsaketh synne, er synne yow forsake. (11.285-86)

This is fine, ideal counsel; however, the irony of the work is further developed by the fact that the Physician believes he has told a tale which supports this proverb. He is as blind as Virginius or Jephthah; like the Franklin, his understanding of the moral dilemma is limited. This is consistent with Chaucer's character sketch in the "General Prologue." That is, the Physician is a fine, knowledgeable doctor, but "His studie was but litel on the Bible."¹²⁵

"The Pardoner's Tale" is the final story which we are given in step four, fortitude.¹²⁶ The Pardoner himself certainly could not be a positive example of fortitude, considering Chaucer's accusations of homosexuality and avarice implied in the "General Prologue." In many ways he is like the corrupt judge, Apius. That is, he is an authoritative ecclesiastic who should be an example of ideal righteousness, but he

¹²⁵"General Prologue," (1.438); cf. Professor Hoffman's article on the "Physician's Tale" in Chaucer Review, Vol. II, No. I.

¹²⁶This step only has two tales. D.R. Howard calls Fragment VI the "Floating Fragment," and indeed I believe that step four, which corresponds to this fragment, was not completed by Chaucer. This possibility is further substantiated by the large amount of modern Chaucer criticism devoted to finding that correct resting place for Fragment VI in the Tales (cf. discussion of the "Bradshaw Shift," in R.A. Pratt, PMLA, LXVI, pp. 1141ff.). Fragment II, "The Men of Law's Tale," is another fragment which rests uneasy. In my opinion, Chaucer at one time placed "The Man of Law's Tale" between the "Pardoner's Tale" and "The Shipman's Tale"; this position accounts for the Shipman's words at the end of the "Man of Law's Tale." In addition, the "Man of Law's Tale" could easily provide the ideal story for the fourth step to wisdom, fortitude, since its heroine, Custance, is the epitome of that virtue (as her name implies). However, because of a later revision, the "Man of Law's Tale" assuredly has a place in step one, as its Prologue determines and as manuscripts attest.

is so corrupted that he uses his office to accomplish the opposite of its intended purpose.¹²⁷ He preaches against avarice for his own avaricious ends, just as Apius judges Virginius as a thief so that he might steal his daughter. The Pardoner then is a hypocrite, a wolf in sheep's clothing, who is actively working in the flock. He frankly admits his resolute intention to do evil in much the same way as the devil in the "Friar's Tale":

Of avarice and of swich cursednesse
Is al my prechyng, for to make hem free.

For certes, many a predicacioun
Comth ofte tyme of yvel entencioun. (ll.400-1 and 407-8)

So, the Pardoner is the ironic inverse of Christian fortitude. With strong resolve, with fortitude, if you will, he does evil, not good.

After fortitude comes the fifth step, counsel of mercy, but this step has already been analyzed in detail. However, at this point it seems necessary to explain briefly how the preoccupation with marriage plays into the schema being discussed since so many critics have labeled a number of these tales discussed above as the "marriage group." On the underlying level of "sentence," we have already discussed the pervasive influence of "Melibee" with its theology of the "new" man progressing to Christ-likeness. This move from man's natural "oldness" to his "new" state is explained in Holy Scripture by the analogy of a woman's legal marriage to a second husband:

For the married woman is bound by law to her
husband while he is living; but if her husband

¹²⁷Preface, p. 270-1.

dies she is released from the law concerning the husband. So then if, while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress, though she is joined to another man. Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God.¹²⁸

All the marital misunderstanding, adultery, rebellion, submission, and reconciliation have their practical domestic lesson to teach, yet the underlying "sentence" of those tales echoes back to the basic condition of each pilgrim. Some profess to be wed to the "new" husband (Christ), but really their "old" man never died and therefore their life styles are an adulteration of what they should be (e.g., the Pardoner and Friar). Others are wed to Christ; their "oldness" is dead, and their ideal tales evidence this change (e.g., the Knight, Parson). Still others seem to be standing at the crossroads (e.g., the Squire, Canon's Yeoman, Manciple).

The sixth step to wisdom is explained by Augustine in the following manner: "There he cleanses the sight itself which can see God.... They see in proportion to the extent that they die to this world, but, insofar as they live to it, they do not see.... Therefore, that holy man will not be turned away from truth, either through a desire of gratifying men or through an intention of evading whatever inconveniences disturb this life."¹²⁹ The "Second Nun's Tale" is the first work at this stage, and it explicitly teaches these doctrines of purity explained by Augustine.

¹²⁸Romans 7:2-4.

¹²⁹C.I., pp. 68-69.

First, in the explication of Cecilie's name, cleanness of heart and especially clarity of sight are emphasized:

It is to seye in Englissh "hevenes lillie,"
For pure chaastnesse of virginitee;

"Wantynge of blyndnesse," for hir grete light
Of sapience, and for hire thewes cleere;

And eek the cleernessee hool of sapience,
And sondry werkes, brighte of excellence. (11.87-8 and 100-1 and
111-12)

Her character is immediately associated with purity, and the tale told about her life is an ideal exemplum of this theme.

The most explicit example of purity in her story is Cecilie's chaste marriage. She tells her lover, Valerian, on their wedding night, that there is an angel guarding her virginity, and she says, "if that ye in clene love me gye,/He [the angel] wol yow loven as me, for youre clenness" (11.159-60). After Valerian is converted, he sees the angel and is convinced to pursue a chaste life. The angel then gives the two chaste lovers two garlands, one made of roses, the other of lilies. It is of interest that they can be seen only by the chaste:

Ne nevere wight shal seen hem with his ye,
But he be chaast and hate vileyng. (11.230-31)

In addition, the angel can be seen only by the pure in heart:

And make the clene, so that thou mowe biholde
The angels face of which thy brother tolde. (11.300-1)

These details follow the doctrine of purity explained by Augustine. God and the things of His light can only be seen to the extent that the heart

is cleansed. Another example of this doctrine can be seen when Maximus, the converted officer, is the only one who sees the souls of the martyrs ascend:

That he hir soules saugh to hevene glyde
With angels ful of cleernesse and of light, (11.402-3)

Finally, Cecilie's confrontation with Almachius is a perfect example of the last doctrine of purity mentioned above. She is not "turned away from truth, either through a desire of gratifying men or through an intention of evading whatever inconveniences disturb this life." In imitation of Christ's boldness and composure before Pilate, Cecilie laughs in Almachius's face and confronts him with his own impurities. She is no people-pleaser when it comes to compromising her beliefs; she refuses to "Doon sacrifice, and Jupiter encense." This attitude leads to quite an inconvenience which "disturbs" her life--that is, her martyrdom. So, Cecilie's etymological identity, the references to cleanness and light throughout the story, and most of all, her exemplary chastity make "The Second Nun's Tale" a proper beginning to the sixth step to wisdom.

In the Canon's Yeoman's personality and tale we find the ironic inverse of the purity and clarity of sight exemplified by St. Cecilia. Considering the definition of step six given above, we see the principle which pervades the "Canon's Yeoman's Tale": "There he cleanses the sight [of the heart] itself which can see God.... They see in proportion to the extent that they die to this world, but, insofar as they live to it, they do not see." The Canon's Yeoman and his master have not died to the

world; in fact, their vocation is intensely preoccupied with the glitter of this world--gold. Rather than Christianity, alchemy is their religion as implied by the Canon's Yeoman in his description of their methods: "To tellen al wolde passen any bible/That owher is" (11.857-8). The result of this worldliness, as the above principle dictates, is blindness. The Canon's Yeoman confesses that his work has affected his sight: "And of my swynk yet blered is myn ye/Lo! which advantage is to multiplie!" (1.730). He also says that avarice and his master's trickery make the priest "blynde":

O sely preest! o sely innocent!
With coveitise anon those shalt be blent (11.1-76-7)

Finally, in his warning against "multiplie" the Canon's Yeoman compares physical sight to that more important inner sight:

If that youre eyen kan nat seen aright,
Looke that youre mynde lakke noght his sight. (11.1418-19)

Cecilie and her friends have this inner purity of heart which allows them to see and desire the true, immutable, gold of heaven; on the other hand, the Canon's Yeoman realizes that he has been deceived and blinded by the world's goods.

This stark contrast between the characters of the two tales is also revealed through Chaucer's descriptions. For their chastity, Cecilie and Valerian are given beautiful crowns of roses and lilies to wear and the sweet smell of these flowers surrounds them. However, the Canon's Yeoman and his master have their own distinctive dress and aroma:

Men may hem knowe by smel of brymstoon
For al the world they stynken as a goot;

And thus by smel, and by threedbare array,
If that men liste, this folk they knowe may. (11.885-6 and 890-1)

The most powerful didactic quality of this tale revolves around the Canon's Yeoman's repentant attitude supported by his firsthand experience with alchemy. Even though the young man is obviously fascinated by the paraphernalia of alchemy, he readily admits in the Prologue and Tale that the science is a frustrating, futile pursuit:

And of my swynk yet blered is myn ye.
Lo! Which advantage is to multiplie!
That slidyng science hath me maad so bare
That I have no good, wher that evere I fare; (11.730-33)

The source of the man's frustration is explained in "Melibee" when Prudence explains the correct means of obtaining worldly goods:

He seith also that 'the riches that hastily cometh
to a man, soone and lightly gooth and
passeth fro a man;/but that riches that
cometh litel and litel, wexeth alwey and
multiplieth. (11.1578-79)¹³⁰

The Canon's Yeoman and his master are pursuing a "get-rich-quick" plan, and it results in disappointment. They are blind to the acceptable way to multiply their wealth suggested by Prudence. The Canon's Yeoman's fruitless work contrasts St. Cecilie's "leveful bisynesse," and he realizes that "all is vanity":

¹³⁰This is Professor Hoffman's correlation in "Chaucer's 'Melibee'," p. 185, No. 32.

We faille of that which that we wolden have,
 And in oure madnesse everemore we rave.
 And whan we been togidres everichoon,
 Every man semeth a Salomon. (11.958-61)

The Canon's Yeoman finishes the story with advice for those who would pursue the world's goods: "I rede, as for the beste, lete it goon." His turn from sin is a positive exemplum which will certainly encourage the poet's listeners to have a pure heart, to avoid blinding covetousness. With this example of one character's initial turn toward regeneration, the pilgrimage as a whole begins to break somewhat from the pervasive carnality and irony to optimism and hope.

Another principle of purity mentioned above is the pervading theme of the Manciple's Prologue and Tale: "Therefore, that holy man will be so sincere and clean of heart that he will not be turned away from truth, either through a desire of gratifying men or through an intention of evading whatever inconveniences disturb this life." The Manciple certainly is no ideal pilgrim as we gather from his foolish rebuke to the Cook in his prologue. Yet, just as Cecilie points out Almachius's faults, unmindful of the consequences, so the Manciple follows the truth as he sees it even though his "oldness" leaves his rebuke to the Cook tainted by foolishness and pride; therefore, the Manciple's example is hopeful yet ludicrously deficient. His attitude parodies Cecilie's purity during her martyrdom, and this identification of the Manciple with Cecilie is even more comical when we consider that the Manciple grows fearful and apologizes in the face of the Cook's wrath.

Moreover, both the Manciple and his tale ironically reflect the principle stated above; that is, both the Manciple and the crow reveal

the true folly of another and must face the consequences. As Professor Hoffman suggests, both the Manciple and the crow receive the same rebuke as Prudence does when she attempts to correct the foolishness of her husband. Melibeus's wrongheaded comeback goes as follows:

And Salomon seith that 'he that
entremetteth hym of the noyse or strif of another
man is lyk to hym that taketh an hound
by the eris.'/For right as he that taketh a
straunge hound by the eris is outhewhile biten
with the hound,/right in the same wise
is it resoun that he have harm that by
his inpacience medleth hym of the noyse of another
man, wheras it apertenth nat unto hym. (11.1541-43)

So, these three characters--Prudence, the Manciple, and the crow--take the hound by the ears. Prudence avoids the consequences by winning over her husband to the way of reason; the Manciple avoids the consequences by breaking the principle of purity and compromising with truth in order to gratify the Cook, but Phoebus's Crow is bitten for revealing truth to the cuckold.

The "oldness" of the Manciple and Crow which gives their actions an ironic turn from the ideal is revealed in the hastiness of their words. The Manciple emphasizes this fact at the end of the tale:

The firste vertu, sone, if thou wolt leere,
Is to restreyne and kepe wel thy tonge (11.332-3)

In fact, he chatters about the "sentence" of the story for an excessive amount of time. The fact that he recognizes his weakness and simultaneously shows that he still cannot control his tongue promotes that tone of divine hope mingled with human need which emerges in the latter stages

of the road to wisdom. He is like the Canon's Yeoman who sees the futility of alchemy yet still stands only at the threshold to regeneration. Through their blindness the Canon's Yeoman and Manciple catch a glimpse of truth.

This blindness caused by an unclean heart is the distinguishing feature of the ironic exempla of step six to wisdom. Cecilie in her clear and clean aspects is the ideal reflection of the pure heart. The final step in her story is indeed the final step to wisdom--death.

This is the logical end of the "new" man. In his desire to imitate Christ he should ultimately die because Christ also suffered and died. In addition, complete and perfect wisdom cannot be attained until the "new" man comprehensively realizes the wisdom of God (i.e., Sapientia Dei or Christ), and this does not occur in the Christian schema until the end of life's pilgrimage:

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is.¹³¹

The Parson says that his tale is designed for this end:

To shewe yow the wey, in this viage,
Of thilke parfit glorious pilgrymage
That highte Jerusalem celestial. (11.50-51)

His tale explains penitence, the "fruyt" of which is the "endlees blisse of hevene." There, the seventh step to wisdom is consummated because in heaven "every soule replenyssed with the sighte of the parfit knowynge of

¹³¹I John 3:2.

God."¹³² (1. 1078)

In summary then, The Canterbury Tales is designed according to a sevenfold theological schema delineated by Augustine. He calls these seven steps "the perfect standard of the Christian life," and maxims of "universal application." So, the Tales, indeed, is "written for oure doctrine" as Chaucer says when he takes his leave.

Since the "Tale of Melibee" also includes a sententious explication of all seven steps to wisdom, the poet can say that in this one tale "shul ye nowher fynden difference" between its underlying meaning and the intended "sentence" of all the other stories. Therefore, "Melibee" is the keystone to the overall work, and it is especially helpful for understanding other tales written in the more obscure ironic mode. The best way to comprehend this relationship of "Melibee" to the Tales as a whole is to consider the analogy of looking at the reflection of one's eyes in a mirror. First, the overall countenance is seen in the mirror; in the eyes of the reflection is a smaller image of the whole countenance, and in the eyes of this even smaller reflection is a picture of the whole, and so on. The Canterbury Tales is a formulaic representation of life, a mirror image if you will. The picture divides into seven parts. One of those parts (i.e., the "Melibee") is the mirror image of the whole and contains the seven parts. Within the "Melibee" is one part, called knowledge. By definition, it must contain all seven parts of the Christian life, and so on. The progression moves out of

¹³² Italics mine.

sight into eternity and into the heart of "Melibee."¹³³

Finally, it seems necessary to mention that the rather cold and straightforward explication of the "sentence" in the preceding discussions should not be mistaken for the tone of the Tales itself. Chaucer is rarely so bare or so explicitly didactic. That is why he employs allegory and irony to carry his message. Much of the poet's art has gone unmentioned in this analysis; each tale will have to be analyzed in much greater depth before it will be accepted and allowed to rest easy in one of the steps of wisdom.

Moreover, a great deal of the poet's humor and good nature seems to have gone unnoticed in this paper. Chaucer, in a wonderful way, is able to reveal the weaknesses and vices of his pilgrims and simultaneously ascribe value to their persons. The troop has something of a glorious aspect to it, in spite of its flaws. Chaucer portrays himself, not as a playwright who laughs at the expense of others, but as an actor in the comedy. With the poet in this pose, everyone is free to enjoy the ride. But, after all the guffawing, chortling, and all the humming and smiling settle into reflection, the poet turns into a teacher, looks us dead in the eye, and opens the door that leads to wisdom.

¹³³ Another way to understand this structure of The Canterbury Tales is to compare it to the structure of the Bible as the canon was established in 1611. The Bible has 66 books (39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New). There is a book located approximately in the center of the Bible, Isaiah, which also has 66 parts. The fortieth chapter of Isaiah, the third verse, reads: "A voice is calling,/ Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness,/ Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God." In the fortieth book of the Bible, Matthew, and in the third chapter and third verse, the same prophecy is fulfilled as it is repeated by John the Baptist: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness,/ make ready the way of the Lord,/ make His paths straight." The book of Isaiah then, is a miniature Bible. One of the parts of the Bible reflects the whole, and in a strikingly similar manner, one of the parts in the Tales, "Melibee," reflects the whole.

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THE PLACE OF "MELIBEE" IN THE CANTERBURY TALES

Michael Steven Lane

Abstract

Until recent years, Chaucer's "Tale of Melibee" was scorned by most critics as a boring conglomeration of proverbs. As a result, little attempt has been made to understand the tale's content and the reason for its popularity in the Middle Ages. However, D. W. Robertson, in his reevaluation of the headlink between "Sir Thopas" and "Melibee" concludes that Chaucer intended "Melibee" to contain all the sententious meaning which underlies the other tales.

Presupposing that the tale may prove to be the keystone of The Canterbury Tales, this thesis purposes to explicate "Melibee" in its medieval context and to show its vital tie with the thematics of the other tales. The first chapter summarizes relevant Chaucer criticism on "Melibee" and introduces the Robertsonian analysis of the headlink. Chapter two correlates the text with St. Augustine's commentary on the seven steps to wisdom found in De doctrina Christiana. In chapter three, the tales surrounding "Melibee" in Fragment VII are explicated in light of their relationship to "Melibee" in the seven part schema. Special emphasis is given to the analysis of "The Shipman's Tale" since until this time there has been no "patristic" analysis of the story. The fourth chapter briefly draws the correlation between the seven steps to wisdom within "Melibee" and the seven-part progression followed in the overall thematic structure of the Tales.

Thus, the "Melibee" is shown to be the key to discovering the rationale for Chaucer's ordering of the tales and also the key to understanding the intended theological "sentence" of each individual story.