
THE PARDONER IN THE GENERAL CONTEXT OF THE CANTERBURY PILGRIMAGE*

Anthony M. Schembri

When we meet the Pardoner and the Summoner in the *General Prologue*, we are immediately struck by their physical and moral deformity. The song they sing, their greed, and their intimacy have made critics refer to them as the villains of the *Canterbury Tales*. However, it must be noted that the churchmen who meet at the Tabard, with one shining exception – the Parson – do not live up to their ideals, but display, instead, their worldliness in the same way, if not exactly to the same degree, as our iniquitous couple.

The clergy are not the only ones to be shown up by Chaucer. It is not only Madame Eglentyne with her dubious 'Amor vincit omnia', or the Monk with his jingling bells, or the Friar who was 'an esy man to yeve penaunce, ther as he wiste to have a good pitaunce', or the Summoner who 'in daunger hadde he at his owne gise / the younge girles of the diocese'. The clergy were neither better nor worse than their lay companions – the Merchant who 'estatly was he of his governance / With his bargaynes and his chevysaunce', the Sergeant of Law who 'of fees and robes had he / many oon', the Frankeleyn 'withoute bake mete was never his hous', the Shipman who 'of nyce conscience took he no keep', the Doctor in collusion with the apothecary 'for ech of hem made oother for to wynne', the Wife of Bath with her five husbands 'withouten oother compaignye in youthe', and the Miller who 'koude he stelen corn and tollen thries'. All the company on the way to Canterbury, with the exception of the Parson and his brother the Ploughman, and possibly the Knight, the Squire, and the Clerk, are in the grip of one ruling passion for wealth and good living. They all suffer from *cupiditas* in its several manifestations.

Perhaps, it did strike Chaucer that a pilgrimage was not exactly the time or the place to be over-critical. People on a medieval pilgrimage were

*This is the text of a lecture given to the British Culture Association at the Library of The Foundation for International Studies of the University of Malta in March 1988.

carefree. They made friends easily. Pilgrimages were mostly fun. Pilgrimages started in the spring, when the rigours of winter were over and people wished to stretch themselves after being pent up throughout the long winter. The Church, on the whole, stood in favour of the general festive spirit, as Archbishop Arundel would say about singers and players who accompanied the pilgrims 'for with such solace the travail and weariness of pilgrims is lightly and merrily borne out'.

One has therefore to judge the Pardoner's *Confessio* against the background of a typical pilgrimage – good company, songs, tales, dancing, wine. All are merry, all become friends; and the coy are drawn out, let alone an extrovert like the Pardoner who finds such a fertile situation for his ribaldry and chicanery.

The enmity between the Host and the Pardoner has somewhat distracted many critics from looking too closely at the Host. As the Pardoner is a self-confessed unsavoury character, mine Hu has benefited and few ever enquire closely into his character and motives. I am not so sure that Chaucer would have been as enthusiastic about Harry Bailey as some critics believe.

Chaucer the Pilgrim's first impression of the Host is most favourable. The food in his tavern is of the best, the wine pure and unadulterated. Chaucer is also struck by the personality of the Host:

Boold of his speche, and wys and wel ytaught,
And of manhod him lakkede right naught. (GP, 755-756)

All this goes counter to the image of the Taverner as expressed by Gower and the literature of the time.

But, in the Link before the Pardoner's Tale, 'oure Hoost gan to swear as he were wood'. And again at the end of the Tale when the Host is openly provoked, his language is vulgar in the extreme. This is the same person who with sugared tongue talks the pilgrims into his game. This 'seemly man' able to be a 'marshal in a halle' and who 'of manhood him lakkede right naught' confesses, when nearing 'Rouchester', that one day his wife would drive him mad and that he would kill someone. If a neighbour as much as slights her and the Host does not beat him up, she calls him false coward and a milksop. He also confesses that he is 'perilous with knyf in honde'. This gentle Host is not only a hen-pecked husband but he is also a dangerous man. The Wife of Bath would not dare tell him to his face that 'dropping houses, and eek smoke, / and chidyng wyves maken men to flee, / Out of hir owene hous; a "benedicite"!'

It is evident that the Host must have been on pilgrimages before and

acted the master of ceremonies many times before we meet him. One can see with what deftness and smoothness he can impress his clients:

Greet chiere made oure hoste us everichon,
 And to the soper sette he us anon;
 And served us with vitaille at the beste.

Strong was the wyn, and wel to drynke us leste(GP, 747-750)

Our Host spins and files his tongue to increase his business:

'Lordynges', quod he, 'now herkneth for the beste;
 But taak it not, I prey yow, in desdeyn...
 And which of yow that bereth hym beste of alle,
 That is to seyn, that in this caas
 Tales of best sentence and moost solaas,
 Shal han a soper at our aller cost
 Heere in this place, sittynge by this post,

Whan that we come agayn fro Caunterbury.' (GP, 788-801)

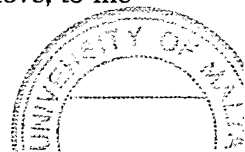
The Host's bonhomie is a means to an end; and once he has made the company swear submission to his judgement and made certain that they would all go back to his inn, his courtesy progressively deteriorates.

We come to know the Pardoner through Chaucer's description and comments, through the back-biting between him and the Host, through the Wife of Bath's repartee, through the general reaction of the Pilgrims themselves, and, above all, by the way he looks, what he tells us about himself, and through a comparison with the other pilgrims, especially the Parson.

Chaucer starts off his portrait in *The General Prologue* by calling him a 'gentil' Pardoner. 'Gentil' was a word extensively used and, whatever it meant exactly, it was the opposite of 'villainous, low, and rustic'. Chaucer describes the Knight as a 'verray parfit gentil knight'. But he also describes the Summoner as a 'gentil harlot and a kynde'. Whereas Chaucer in the case of the Summoner links 'gentil' with 'harlot', he does no such thing in the case of the Pardoner, thereby showing respect for the Pardoner's position.

Chaucer also says that the Pardoner was coming from the Court of Rome. Wycliffe complains about priests 'who can faste renne to Rome and bere gold out of the lond and paie it for dees leed (bulls) and a litil wrytings (indulgencies)'. Rome, coming right at the very beginning, seems to qualify the Pardoner's actions. Right after this we have a comment about the singing of the Pardoner and the Summoner:

Ful loude he (the Pardoner) soong, 'Come hider, love, to me'
 This Sumonour bar to him a stif burdoun,



Was never trompe of half so greet a soun. (GP 672 - 674)

We are surprised by their lack of decorum, but, on rethinking, was it not Archbishop Arundel himself who advocated singing and playing of bagpipes on pilgrimages for 'how otherwise would the pilgrims forget the inconveniences of the road?' Their singing might have jarred on the sensitive ears of Madame Eglentine, who sang 'ful seemely through the nose' but would have been quite welcome to the rest of the pilgrims.

On Chaucer's pilgrimage the fun element is emphasized time and time again. The Host, proposing the game, talks of best sentence and solace. The Canon, catching up with the company, says:

'God save', quod he 'this joly compaignye!

Faste have I priked', quod he, 'for youre sake,

By cause that I wolde yow atake,

To riden in this myrie compaigne.'

His yeman eek was ful of curteisye,

And seyde, 'Sires, now in the morwe-tyde

Out of youre hostelrie I saugh yow ryde,

And warned heer my lord and my soverayn,

Which that to ryden with yow is ful fayn

For his desport; he loveth daliaunce.' (CYT, 583 - 593)

Most of the Host's interventions emphasize the fun element. The Host tells the Clerk not to preach like friars do in Lent, dragging out all our sins to make us weep. One should also remember the Host's reaction to the Monk's series of tragedies and, also, that he himself, specifically, asks the Pardoner to tell a 'myrie' tale.

In their own grotesque sort of way the Pardoner and the Summoner do make a jolly couple. 'Bourdoun' might carry a sexual implication, more so when Chaucer dedicates five full lines to describe the Pardoner's lanky hair falling in rats' tails over his shoulders. Suddenly Chaucer stops in the middle of his description, as if haunted by the eyes of the Pardoner:

Swiche glaringe eyen hadde he as an hare. (GP, 684)

And three lines further down he muses again on the Pardoner's strange features:

A voys he hadde as smal as hath a goot,

No berd hadde he, ne nevere sholde have,

As smothe it was as it were late shave. (GP, 688-691)

It all starts to add up. The unhappy truth dawns on the poet. Chaucer voices his suspicions:

I trowe he were a geldyng or a mare. (GP, 691)

Curry interpreted these lines to mean that our Pardoner was an *eunuchus*

ex nativitate.

However, we should also remember that in Chaucer's time animals were ascribed traits which had long been established by tradition, and I think that the similes 'glaringe eyen ... hadde he as an hare' and 'voice as hath a goot' do not stop at the surface physical resemblance. If Chaucer gives the Pardoner the characteristics of the hare and the goat, we must rest assured that Chaucer's audience would have been inevitably conscious of the associations. It is true that the eyes of the hare, placed as they are on the sides of the face, give the Pardoner a gargoyle look.

It is also true that the goat's voice might deflate the Pardoner's pretensions as a singer. As Rowland says:

'But these two animals have qualities in common. One of the persistent beliefs about the hare is that it is a hermaphrodite or bi-sexual - a superstition which survived up to the eighteenth century.

'Hermaphroditism may also be found in the goat. Some goats, says Aristotle in *De Animalum Generatione*, have both male and female organs of generation.'

Although the possibility that the Pardoner was an eunuch cannot and should not be excluded, I think that Chaucer is simply telling us that the Pardoner is neither fish nor fowl. In the Link before the *Pardoner's Tale*, the Host calls the physician 'Thou art a proper man.' This being so close to the Pardoner's *Confessio*, only helps to underline the Pardoner's lack of purely male characteristics. However, Chaucer is never explicit about the matter and does not tell us more. He deliberately creates doubts. So we can never be absolutely sure about the relationship between the Pardoner and the Summoner, or whether the wench in every town is unallayed wishful thinking, or whether the Host's blunt reference to the Pardoner's virility, or rather, lack of it, was justified, or whether the Wife had really and truly read him.

The Wife of Bath in her long *Preamble* speaks about the power of the wife over her husband's body. In his attempt to reassure the Pilgrims, the Pardoner pushes his luck a bit too far:

'Now, dame' quod he...

I was aboute to wedde a wyf; allas!

What sholde I bye it on my flessch so deere?

Yet hadde I levere wedde no wyf to-yeere!

'Abyde!' quod she, 'my tale is nat bigonne,

Nay, thou shalt drynken of another tonne,

Er that I go, shal savoure wors than ale!' (WBT, 164-171)

If the Pardoner was, as we suspect and as the Wife might have

concluded, impotent, then surely he would have been in for a rough time.

It is true that Canon Law held that consent, not coitus, made a marriage valid. But this was not altogether borne out by medieval practice. It was quite possible for a wife to secure an annulment on the grounds of her husband's impotence. Such instances are recorded in Canterbury in 1293 and York in 1370. Marriage was a very serious business by this time, and annulment on this count, particularly, would not have even been considered without adequate and inconfutable proof. Besides declarations under oath and the accepted three statutory years of cohabitation, the man was inspected by 'expert and honest men'. 'The test was intimate and thorough. But sometimes it went even further, as is seen in the records of Canterbury and York where we find a group of 'honest women' deputized by the court to inspect not the woman but the man. Once the 'honest women', with appropriate provocation, established beyond shadow of doubt that the man could neither show any virility or potency, the 'seven honest' women would curse the unfortunate man and walk out in disgust.

I am sure that the Wife felt that she was certainly not lacking in experience. She still considered herself attractive enough. She was sufficiently exposed to religious literature. She did not lack religious fervour by the way she jostled her way to Holy Communion. I am sure that she felt that she was the right candidate for any such assignment, and she would have obliged with pleasure.

But it is the Host who really attacks the Pardoner directly. When we come to the final test and he asks the company to kiss his relics, it is the Host who objects in the most vulgar language manifestly referring to the Pardoner's deformity. Why, of all the Pilgrims, it should be the Host to make such a fuss and not the Ploughman or the Parson or the Clerk or the Knight has still to be established. Is it simply a matter of antipathy? Or is it the case of Greek meets Greek? The medieval Christian seems all too prone to accept relics of any sort without question as a kind of ballast in a sea of conflicting beliefs and superstition. For example, Knighton writes in *Chronicon II* in 1364:

'Likewise the head of St Hugh of Lincoln was stolen, and, after taking the silver and gold and precious stones, they threw the head in a certain field. And as is wonderful to relate, a certain raven, as the story went, guarded this until it was known through these same robbers and carried to Lincoln.'

Chaucer's contemporary, Richard Poynings, Knight, bequeathed a large piece of Christ's Cross to be divided equally between his wife and two

sons. And among relics owned by Edward III, we find a bone of the arm of St Amphibiates, part of the column to which Christ was bound, relics of St Stephen, a tooth of St Adrian, and the blood of St George.

If the upper classes were so uncritical, do we expect the common folk to be less so? My guess is that in spite of the very fact that the Pardoner himself had told the company of the worthlessness of his relics, they would still have reverently kissed them. If Chaucer is being ironical, and I think he is, the irony is not addressed solely at the Pardoner but also at the general naivety and gullibility of the people.

Chaucer assures us in the *General Prologue*:

But trewely to tellen, atte laste,
He was in chirche a noble ecclesiaste.
Wel koude he rede a lessoun or a storie,
But alderbest he song an offertorie. (GP,707–710)

All this nobility amounts to nothing more than a craft - a craft which the Pardoner had made quite lucrative. On the other hand, when one remembers the general state of ignorance of the majority of the clergy, the Pardoner would have been more than welcome to his audience regardless of his motives. It is true that the Pardoner measures his success in terms of cash rather than in terms of souls. Still, as a practitioner, he is good at his job. There seems to have been quite a distinction in Chaucer's day between the man and his office. Although the Pardoner is despicable as a person, he could still perform his office well, which for the people was really what counted. This could not be said of all the good clergy, not even perhaps, of the very exemplary Parson himself who, for his Tale, simply recited the basic and traditional teaching of the Church.

The Pardoner's Tale is a masterpiece. The Pardoner ably weaves together elements of folklore, Roman elegy, and traditional escatology. He is a sly preacher, pleasant in delivery, graphic in his descriptions, able to create curiosity and suspense. The home-spun Parson only presents the most traditional, even if the most essential, Christian doctrine in sack-cloth. The Pardoner knows that people do more easily respond to stories about the Pardoner's depravity itself, which he flaunts in his *Confessio*, and which brings him closer to his audience, in contrast to the Parson's saintliness which somehow separates him from the rest of the pilgrims. The Pardoner does not argue, he simply talks about sins which his hearers accept as sins and which they all understand. The background to the story is sordid yet familiar. In this way he has a far greater catchment. Through his rhetoric, he produced an atmosphere

heavy with sin, fear, and uncertainty. His sinners are real living persons, and he ably creates sympathy between the revellers in the tale and his audience. The pilgrims are mesmerized to the very end.

We treat the Pardoner himself as a real living person. We never really care whether the Parson delivers his sermon in the shadow of a church-tower or against one of the very many crosses that punctuated the medieval country-side. Not so with our Pardoner - does he tell the tale in a tavern? Or to the accompaniment of hoofs and clatter? None of the other pilgrims, with the exception, perhaps, of the Wife of Bath, has excited so much controversy about the most peripheral of details. The Parson will remain for ever an abstraction. But the Pardoner with his colourful, if discordant, personality has instigated our reaction as if he were a real breathing person. When we censure him, we hate him as a person. We probe into his personality; we mentally call his bluff. The Wife of Bath, the Host - they score on our behalf. And we wonder why on earth the Knight of all people should show the Pardoner any sympathy.

With the Pardoner the catalyst is vice. Vice is the prime mover of his every deed and action. We feel this even in his most innocuous remark:

but I most thynke

Upon som honest thyng while that I drynke. (Pd'sT,327-8)

The spheres of morality and of vice somewhat lose their lines of demarcation. Religion becomes a business concern and not a commitment. Religion is presented to the people as awesome, fearsome, inscrutable. Man is the son of the fallen Adam - the product of original sin. Man can be caught unawares. The Pardoner proposes a formula for a jolly time and a guaranteed salvation. It is a practical solution within the reach of the great majority. The Pardoner's mentioning of Christ's pardon, laudable as it might seem, is also a tacit reminder of the alternative - the Parson's solution. The Parson with his unconcealed thoroughness, his lack of real security, his unswerving dedication, and sobriety, is a wet blanket to the festive spirit of this typical Christian pilgrimage. On the other hand the Pardoner's Bulls offer instant security at very little cost and without spoiling the fun.

It must also be remarked that the Parson, the point of reference of every saintly virtue, is assaulted just as churlishly by mine Host as the Pardoner himself:

'Sir Parrish Prest!' quod he (Host) 'for Goddes bones,
Telle us a tale, as was thi forward yore
I se wel that ye lerned men in lore

Can moche good, by Goddes dignitee!
 The Parson hem answered, 'Benedicite!
 What eyleth the man so synfully to swere?'
 Our Host answerde, 'O Jankin, be ye there?
 I smelle a Lollere in the wynd', quod he.
 'Now!, goode men,' Quod oure Hoste, ' herkeneth me;
 Abydeth, for Godds digne Passioun,
 For we schal han a predicacioun;
 This Lollere here wil prechen us somewhat!

(Epilogue of M of L's T, 1164-1176)

Harry Bailey accuses the saintly Parson of Lollardy - a heresy not only condemned by the Church but suppressed by the heavy arm of the State. The Shipman heartily seconds the Host and warns the other Pilgrims that the Parson should not be trusted to interpret the Gospels. No reaction to these accusations is reported.

The extent to which the Pardoner acted beyond his brief is not easy to decide. That he exploited the people and Christ's pardon for money is manifestly clear. But in this he was more the rule than the exception on Chaucer's Pilgrimage. The Summoner does not hesitate to tell us 'Purs is the arcedekens Helle!' But the faithful are not necessarily the losers. The passage of Grace does not depend on the spiritual state or the motives of the minister. It depends on the faith and disposition of the recipient. The real loser is the Pardoner himself. And what is worse is the fact that he does not act in ignorance. He knows and shows us that he knows:

And Jhesu Crist that is oure soules leche
 So graunte yow his pardoun to receyve,
 For that is best; I wol yow nat deceive. (Pd'sT, 916-918)

The Pardoner might have been caught unawares; but it is in moments like these that the real *moi-même* asserts itself. Our Pardoner with all his '*spezzatura*' might be violently suppressing the voice of his own conscience. But Christ's pardon is free, and if he were to dispense this he would soon reduce himself to the position of the Parson - a saint, perhaps, but socially of very little consequence. The Pardoner's call to Christ's pardon is sincere. Between the two pardons lies a gulf - a gulf created by greed, by *cupiditas*, our Pardoner is a living sin of simony. He dispenses grace for money. But the sin touches only him; it does not touch his congregation. In some mysterious way this degenerate minister is still the vehicle of Grace. Christ's true pardon is the one preached by the Parson and by Chaucer's contemporary, Langland. While Piers in Langland accepted what the theologians teach that pardons from the

Pope save souls, yet he held that salvation was outside the scope of quaestors and their indulgences. When Piers receives the pardon - the true pardon - he decides that:

I shal cessen of my sowyng, ' quod pieres' and swynk
nou3t so harde,
Ne about my bely-ioye so bisi be namore!
Of prayers and of penaunce my plow shal ben
her-after,

And wepen whan I shulde slepe 3ough whete-bred me
faillie. (passus VII. 119-122)

Not so our Pardoner and shaking himself from his weakness he is soon back to his old self, peddling his 'reliques' and his pardons. With extreme impudence he tells the pilgrims the real reason for his concern:

Or elles taketh pardoun as ye wende,
Al newe and fressh at every miles ende,
So that ye offren, alwey newe and newe,
Nobles or pens, whiche that be goode and trewe.

(Pd's T, 927 - 930)

His presence in the company is a distinct honour for them, because accidents may happen to anyone, but he

May assoile yow, bothe moore and lasse,
Whan that the soule shal fro the body passe.

(Pd's T, 939 - 941)

Absolution he can give even if for the wrong reason; but the rest is all tongue in cheek. Then he turns to the Host and half jestingly advises him to be the first to avail himself of his services since surely he is the most immersed in sin. But for the tetchy Host this is going too far, as Roger the Cook said on another occasion:

But 'sooth pley, quaad pley' as the Flemyng seith.
And therefore, Harry Bailly, by thy feith,
Be thou nat wrooth, er we departen heer,
Though that my tale be of an hostilier.

(Ck's T, 4357-4360)

'True jest, bad jest' is what the Flemings say according to Roger. And what is truer than the fact that the Host is an inveterate sinner? He had been swearing all along the road with a growing crescendo of obscenities. He preferred stories 'that sownen into synne' to tales of sentence. He had indulged far too much in 'moyste and corny ale'. The sensitive Host must have seethed with anger as the Pardoner caught his eye and pointedly said:

A lecherous thyng is wyn, and dronkenesse
 Is ful of stryving and of wrecchednesse.
 O dronke man, disfigured is thy face,
 Sour is thy breeth, foul artow to embrace...
 Thou fallest as it were a styked swyn;
 Thy tonge is lost, and all thyn honeste cure;
 For dronkenesse is verray sepulture
 Of mannes wit and his discrecioun. (Pd's T, 549 – 556)

The Pardoner had done it deliberately to tease the Host. The Pardoner had listed all those who had seriously come to grief because of wine. He speaks about wines as if he were the connoisseur. The Host soon finds his tongue and his wit. He speaks in anger and pays back the Pardoner in his own coin. The Pardoner cannot simply shrug it off, as the Host had asked the Monk to do when he had tackled the Monk rather robustly:

But be nat wrooth, my Lord, though that I pleye
 Ful ofte in game a sooth I have herd seye!

(Mk's T. 3153–4)

It is the Pardoner who now invites the Host 'in pleye' and who speaks 'sooth'. The Pardoner has made a *faux pas*. He has grossly miscalculated.

The Pardoner who had just felt the bliss of success with the thirty–two faces turned up to him, moved by his own eloquence, feeling his power, and oblivious of his problems, is suddenly jolted back to his own deformed self. He who had unstintedly tried to impress those around him, now finds himself the laughing stock of all the company. He feels exposed, isolated, threatened and our 'Bel Ami' loses his bonhomie. He becomes angry. As our Parson later reminds us in his sermon:

'This synne of Ire, after the discryving of Seint Augustine, is wikked wil to ben avenged by word or by dede. Ire after the philosophre, is the fervent blood of man yquyked in his herte, thurgh which he wole harm to hym that he hateth ... (and) is out of alle juggement of resoun.' (Pars. T 535-539)

And the Host quite rightly:

'Now', quod oure Host, 'i wol no lenger pleye
 With thee, ne with noon oother angry man '

(Pd'sT, 958-959)

The Pardoner knew that the Host was in a position to exploit his mistake. One must remember that when the Host had first proposed the game in the *General Prologue*, he had asked and obtained *carte blanche* from all the Pilgrims:

'And whoso wole my juggement withseye

Shal paye al that we spenden by the weye.
 And if ye vouche sauf that it be so,
 Tel me anon, withouten wordes mo,
 And i wol erly shape me therefore'.
 This thyng was graunted, and oure othes swore
 With ful glad herte, and preyden hym also
 That he wolde vouche sauf for to do so
 And that he wolde been oure governour,
 And of oure tales juge and reportour,
 And sette a soper at a certeyn pris;
 And we wol reuled been at his devys,
 In heigh and lough; and thus, by oon assent,
 We been acorded to his juggement. (GP,805-818)

One might argue that this was all done in jest; but the language is legal and binding. From the high hopes of being awarded 'a soper at their allercost', the Pardoner is now faced with the possibility of having to pay all that was spent on the way which, with the Host's drinking, must have been quite considerable. This was adding insult to injury. The prospect alone must have bewildered the Pardoner.

And now the Knight, the very antithesis of all that was villainous, steps in to rescue the company from the moment of awkwardness, and the Pardoner out of his misery. The Knight might even have been motivated by the fact that the Pardoner, for all his turpitude, is still the representative of the Church, and as such he, as a Knight, was in duty bound to defend him.

Whether Chaucer wished us to recognize in the Pardoner the general malady of the Church at the time is and will remain a debatable point. What is certain, however, is that our 'noble ecclesiaste' fits in nicely into the general picture of the company that left the Tabard for Canterbury. However, it is significant that it is the Parson, whom Chaucer recognizes in *The General Prologue* as that 'better preest i trowe that nowhere noon ys', who brings the Canterbury Pilgrimage to a close and opens the way to the true pilgrimage to the Celestial Jerusalem with his prose sermon. The fun is over and forgotten and instead we have contrition and penance:

In knokkyng of thy brest, in scourgyng with yerdes,...
 in suffryng patiently wronges that been doon to thee, and
 eek
 in pacient suffraunce of maladies, or lesyng of worldly
 catel, or of wyf, or of child, or othere frendes. (Ps T, 1055f.)

Chaucer who had been carried away by the general festive spirit and had gone along with the wordliness and venality of his friends, soberly takes stock of his own situation in the light of eternity. He meditates on the vanity of the world and his own iniquity, embraces the 'preest over alle preestes, that boghte us with the precious blood of his herte', abjures those same 'tales of Caunterbery that sownen into synne', and beseches grace of 'verray penitence, confesioun and satisfaccioun'. By opting for the Parson's way, uncompromising and cathartic, Chaucer turns his back on the merry company and rejects the easy panaceas peddled by our 'noble ecclesiaste' and his compeers.