

Pharisees and False Apostles: Lollardy and Antifraternalism in Fragment III of the
Canterbury Tales

by

Donald Peet

A thesis submitted to the Department of English of the State University of New York

College at Brockport, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

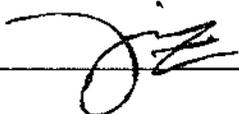
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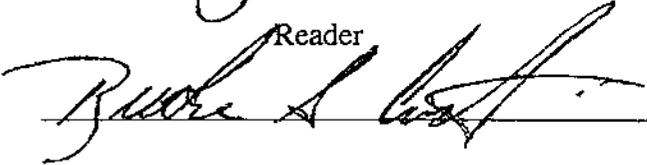
June 5, 2007

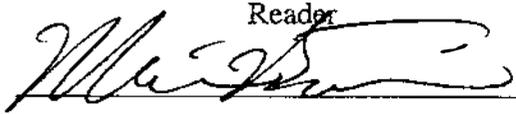
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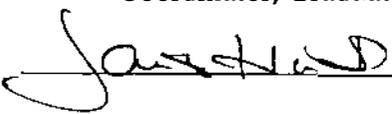
By: Donald J Peet

Approved:  5/23/07
Advisor Date

 5/23/07
Reader Date

 5/23/07
Reader Date

 6/23/07
Coordinator, Graduate Committee Date

 7-3-07
Chair, Department of English Date

I am indebted to Dr. Stefan Jurasinski for the guidance and moral support he offered as my thesis progressed. I am confident that without him this would not have been completed. At every roadblock, he was there with suggestions that make this a success. I am also forever grateful to Dr. Brooke Conti, my “editor,” who, without ever meeting me, was willing to offer help.

I would also like to thank my wife, Lindsey, who listened to my speeches about Lollardy and antifraternalism as I thought my ideas through.

To Dr. Peter Marchant, who made me love Chaucer. Thank you for believing in me and giving me hope. This is for you.

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Abstract

In 1986, Penn R Szittyá finished his groundbreaking composition, The Antifraternal Tradition in Medieval Literature, thus becoming the leading antifraternal writer in Chaucerian scholarship. Prior to Szittyá's novel, very few scholars concerned themselves with the nature of antifraternalism in the Canterbury Tales. Of the critics who wrote on the subject, many could be grouped into two categories, those who felt that the Tales were littered with antifraternalist ideas and those who disputed the presence of antifraternalism. Even today, after the wake of Szittyá's Antifraternal Tradition, critics still fall into the same camps. To the best of my knowledge, none of these critics has dealt with all of Fragment III. They have chosen, rather, to deal only with The Friar's and The Summoner's Tales, failing to take into consideration who drives them into the feud—The Wife of Bath. Looking at Fragment III through an antifraternal lens brings a new aspect into the analysis of the Canterbury Tales. We no longer see, as Szittyá states, "a convention of the pairing in the poetry of fraternal controversies," but a triplet embedded in religious controversy (197).

By focusing on The Wife of Bath as a Lollard and discussing how she is able to further the antifraternal debate between the Summoner and the Friar, we can begin to understand why each of these characters intrude upon the Wife's tale. The explanation that I give is that Alisoun, as a Lollard, gives a Lollard sermon on celibacy in hopes of drawing the Friar into rebuking her tale.

I. Introduction

As the *Canterbury Tales* (CT) are a cross section of Chaucer's medieval society, it is not surprising that the long-held debate between the mendicant orders and the Lollards would show up within the tales. It is surprising, however, where and how this debate shows itself. Fragment III of the CT, long thought to have been the initiation of the marriage debate, seems to have more to do with antifraternality than it does with marriage. The antifraternality debate is initiated when the Wife of Bath (WOB) tells what the Friar calls "a long preamble of a tale" and concludes with the Summoner trading japes with the Friar. Taking a very Wyclif-like attitude, the WOB attacks the clergy and the mendicant orders with precision and succeeds in drawing the Friar and the Summoner into her debate. The ensuing conflict is linked closely to the arguments that stemmed from Wyclif's treatises that were composed during the last five years of his life, including *De apostasia*, *De Eucharista*, and *Fifty Heresies and Errors of Friars*.

Focusing on the Wife of Bath as a representative of Lollard ideals allows a more accurate picture of the nature of antifraternality in *The Canterbury Tales* (CT). There is enough evidence in the volumes written on Chaucer's life to suggest that he was aware of the long standing debate between John Wyclif and the mendicant orders. There is also evidence to suggest that Chaucer may have been connected with some of Wyclif's supporters; most notably among these is John of Gaunt. But, rather than delve into the complete history of Wyclif and the mendicants, I will only offer a brief synopsis of how and why Wyclif chose to attack the mendicant orders. This will

serve as the background for how the Wife of Bath exemplifies Lollard ideals and also how she furthers the antifraternal debate throughout Fragment III.

Like William of St. Armour and Richard Fitzralph before him, Wyclif carried on a tradition of antifraternal ideas. Unlike his predecessors, however, Wyclif did not represent the interests of the secular clergy or the monastic orders. It was late in his career, mainly from 1379-1384, that he began to promulgate numerous doctrines against the church and the mendicant orders. Of these treatises, two drew immediate response from the Friars: *De apostasia* and *De Eucharistia*. Neither of these writings was a grounded attack meant specifically for the mendicant orders; as Szittyá states, "His attacks on the mendicants in his Eucharistic writings were largely peripheral to his main arguments" (154).

Wyclif, in *De apostasia*, writes that there are three manners of apostates, those who practice a private religion, the multitude of emperor's prelates (the secular clergy), and those without the first two. Here, as he does elsewhere, Wyclif makes reference to the mendicant orders when he says those who practice a private religion.¹ He is also able to attack the secular clergy (emperor's prelates) by insinuating that they are as much to blame for the downfall of the church as the mendicant orders.

¹ We can be reasonably sure that this comment is directed at mendicant orders as Wyclif makes reference to those who practice a private religion in his treatise. *Fiftv Heresies and Errors of Friars*. Although the wording is slightly different, the similarities are too acute to overlook. In this treatise, Wyclif states that "freris seyn that hor religioun, founden of sinful men, is more perfite the the religion or ordir to which Crist himself made..." (367) Although he does not state, specifically, "private religion," he is not doubt alluding to the fact that friars practice a religion different from the religion that Christ taught. The friars probably struck back at Wyclif for these comments as they realized that he was naming the mendicant orders apostates and blasphemers. In another treatise, *Simonists and Apostates*, Wyclif attacks friars outright, considering them guilty of simony and hypocrisy for selling "her prechyng, her preying, and her schryvyng" (211).

These comments and doctrines drew immediate, sharp criticism from the mendicant orders. Szittyá states,

In 1381, when the chancellor of the university formed a commission to examine Wyclif's Eucharist doctrine, he packed it with hostile theologians, half of them Friars. In May of 1382, at the famous Earthquake Council called by the archbishop of Canterbury to put an end to Wyclif's scandalous teachings, sixteen of the seventeen doctors of theology assembled were members of the mendicant orders. The condemnations of that council were communicated to Oxford authorities by a Carmelite Friar. (152)

This probably gave Wyclif little chance to defend his position. From this point onward, Wyclif as well as the Wycliffites attacked the mendicants more than other orders because of their rejection of Wyclif's teaching and the role they played in the Earthquake Council.

Due to the nature of this religious debate, we can be reasonably sure that Chaucer was aware of the hostility that flourished amongst the Lollards, the clergy, and the mendicant orders. This certainly seems to be the case when we examine the debate that begins with the *WOB's* prologue. The Wife's prologue is structured around biblical history, glossing, and religious piety. She attacks the clergy and the mendicants with a zealotry seen throughout Wyclif's works. Scholarly opinion suggests that Fragment III is the beginning of the marriage debate, but there is evidence for a new argument that has received little critical attention. Fragment III may very well be the initiation of the Lollard debate. The Wife of Bath serves as a

representative of Lollardy who draws two of Wyclif's enemies, the mendicants and the clergy, into the debate by eschewing the need for confession. All three tales within the fragment revolve, in some way, around confession. The Wife of Bath shows why there is no need for confession to a priest or Friar, and the Friar and the Summoner each illustrate why she may very well be correct. Chaucer uses the Wife of Bath as a vehicle to express the decline of the church, quite possibly aligning himself with Lollardy.

II. The Wife of Bath and Lollardy

Several critics have tried to characterize the *WOB*'s prologue and tale as initiating the marriage debate. These arguments suggest that the *WOB*'s prologue and tale are structured around the need for mutual respect in marriage. These types of analyses fail to view the importance of Lollardy within Fragment III. There are several features of Lollardy inherent in the *WOB*'s prologue and tale that have been ignored or overlooked. It has only been recently that critics such as Alcuin Blamires have tried to examine the features of Lollardy that she exhibits. If we are to consider the *WOB* as an adherent of Lollardy, then the entire logic behind Fragment III needs to be reexamined. I do not feel that the *WOB* starts the marriage debate. In fact, I feel that her prologue and tale have very little to do with marriage. Her prologue and tale seem to have more to do with religion than with marriage.

The *WOB* is the perfect vehicle to further an antifraternal debate. She is a woman, she is rich, and she is experienced. Her money would have allowed her certain opportunities that most of the laity could not afford—mainly obtaining translations of the vulgate Bible. Her experience in marriage gives her a largely male audience. When she tells her tale, she is in control. The control she exercises is exhibited by the tale she tells. The Friar tries to insult her, so she insults the Friar. But even this is too simple. As we have witnessed in her prologue, the Wife is calculating and deliberate. She leads the Summoner and the Friar into the antifraternal debate with Lollard ideas. The *WOB* uses thoughts and ideas very

similar to John Wyclif. She also embodies many of the characteristics associated with the Lollards of the time period.

At the heart of the *WOB*'s prologue is a skewed notion of priestly confession. Alisoun's prologue acts more or less as a personal confession trapped within a sermon. This does not automatically connect her with Lollard beliefs, but it does lay a foundation for numerous other Lollard principles that she clearly exhibits throughout her prologue and tale. Like her spiritual "counterparts," the Friar and the Summoner, she glosses texts that support her lifestyle. It seems that she has something much deeper to say than just describing the "woe that is in marriage." It seems as if her message is religious to the point of being anti-clerical. Her use of the word 'God' throughout her tale suggests either deep piety or a deeper understanding (for a lay person) of the texts she has been reading. As we are given no evidence to suggest that Alisoun is carrying a Bible, we are to assume that she is quoting from memory. Margaret Deanesly writes,

There is evidence that, like the early Waldensians, the Lollards practiced the teaching and learning by heart of the biblical translations. Manuscripts were relatively commoner in the fifteenth century than in the twelfth and thirteenth, and could be owned by less wealthy people: but there are many cases to show that Lollard schools were meeting to hear or learn the biblical text. (352)

Her prologue may, in effect, be her way of confessing that she is indeed a Lollard. She believes that she understands the Bible, but she is a lay person. Where, then, does her understanding of the Bible stem from? She uses the Bible, sparingly,

picking and choosing which sections support her lifestyle, to a degree that suggests that Chaucer may be using her as a vehicle to illustrate the Lollard's view of how priestly confession was tainted.

The *WOB* seems to understand the effect that her confession is going to have on the pilgrims, but mostly on the Friar in particular. She must have been aware that Friars had license to hear confession. Looking back at the Friar's portrait in the *GP* leads us closer to an understanding of why the Friar is insulted by the Wife's comments.⁴ We can reasonably assume that the Friar is insulted because of what we learn of him in his portrait in the *GP*. We are told specifically about his dealings with confession:

Ful wel biloved and famulier was he
 With frankeleyns over al in his contree,
 And eek with worthy wommen of the toun;
 For he hadde power of confessioun,
 And seyde hymself, moore than a curat,
 For of his ordre he was licenciat. (215-219)

We also find out that he gave easy penance when money was involved and that he may have married off women whom he impregnated. The *WOB* seems to allude to the idea of why Lollards held little stock in confession, especially when received by a

² The friar may also feel insulted by the *WOB* because she is attempting to spread her Biblical literacy to the pilgrims. There are numerous areas of her "glossing" that suggests she is being disingenuous which may very well signify the problem associated with laypeople acquiring knowledge of the bible.

hypocrite. William Kamowski offers another explanation as to why confession was shunned by Lollards. He says:

Auricular confession was sometimes viewed as an occasion for sin, in particular when a woman needed to confess to a male priest. Because the confessor needed to know the gravity of a sin and because the gravity of sexual sins, like that of any other offense, depended upon circumstances, it was frequently necessary for the priest to ask about, or for the penitent to offer, some of the details of the transgression. (10) Richard Rex takes much the same stance when he writes,

Contrition alone can secure forgiveness, but only the elect can be truly contrite. There is no need for confession to a priest, because neither priests nor anyone else can tell who is predestined, and thus who is truly contrite; more, even among the contrite, could they possibly know how guilty and how contrite they were. Only Christ could truly absolve, and therefore priestly absolution was a devilish and blasphemous presumption. (47)

If we consider the *WOB*'s sexual freedom, then this may very well be why she chose not to give confession to a priest. By alluding to the nature of confession, the *WOB* brings in a clearly Lollard debate concerning the necessity for confession. There seems to be a deliberate attempt on the Wife's part to engage the members of the clergy with her prologue by attacking the need for confession. By doing this, she is able to play on the mendicants and the secular clergy. Following Kamowski's reasoning, confession to a priest made them (re)live the sexual encounters they heard,

thus exciting them. This certainly makes sense, as the *WOB* adds certain emphasis on her explanation for remarriage when she says, "Bet is to be wedded than to brynne."

True confession required its participant to engage in an act of sincere contrition. In viewing the Friar's portrait, we see that his easy penance led to a lack of sincere contrition, something that the Wife seems to 'understand' intuitively. We are told:

He was an esy man to yeve penaunce,
 Ther as he wiste to have a good pitaunce.
 For unto a povre ordre for to yive
 Is signe that a man is wel yshryve;
 For if he yaf, he dorste make avaunt,
 He wiste that a man was repentaunt;
 For many a man so hard is of his herte,
 He may not wepe, although hym soore smerte. (223-230)

From these lines, we can infer that the more money that was given to the order, the easier the penance received. There is clearly a lack of sincere contrition involved in transactions such as these. The *WOB*, on the other hand, seems to understand the importance of contrition, for in her prologue, we are given numerous references to contrition and its benefits. She tells us:

And neer he cam, and kneled faire adoun,
 And seyde, 'Deere suster Alisoun,
 As help me God, I shal thee nevere smyte!

That I have doon, it is thyself to wyte.
 Foryeve it me, and that I biseke!
 And yet eftsoones I hitte hym on the cheke,
 And seyde, 'Theef, thus muchel am I wreke;
 Now wol I dye, I may no longer speke.'
 But atte laste, with muchel care and wo,
 We fille accorded by us selven two (803-812).

The WOB, in this case, acts as a confessor, receiving confession from her husband. His sin was striking his wife, and his penance was a slap on the cheek. As they were both sincere in their contrition, they are able to carry on in a manner suitable to their needs.

It was the Lollards' view that any person could receive confession. Wyclif felt that confession was an unnecessary aspect of religion. Margaret Deanesly writes that "Lollards rejected the doctrine of Transubstantiation and the discipline of the church as regards to fasting and the necessity of confession" (28). Richard Rex points out much the same finding, "Confession to a priest is rejected in favour of general confession before the community and specific confession to God alone. Indeed, moral rectitude is emphasized at the expense of religious ritual in general"(60). Because of Lollards' deep distrust of the clergy, they rejected many of the clergy's beliefs. This resulted, most importantly, in the idea that any pious individual was allowed to hear confession. Gloria Cigman states that Lollard rejection of clerical belief stemmed from:

A belief that the fundamental precepts of the Scriptures were being betrayed by the contemporary Church: alienation from the Bible is seen as alienation from God. Reform was sought through the dissemination of the Scriptures in the vernacular, so that Christian precepts might be widely known and understood. The clergy was seen as, for the most part, willfully negligent and therefore culpable. (482)

Alisoun may very well be alluding to this idea of the 'clergy as culpable' when she gives her prologue, which can be viewed as a quasi-confession. Alisoun's general confession to the pilgrims, therefore, is that she is unable to remain celibate which may explain why she says,

For soothe, I wol not kepe me chaast in al.
 Whan my husbonde is fro the world ygon,
 For thanne th'apostle seith that I am free
 To wedde, a Goddes half, where it liketh me.
 He seith that to be wedded is no synne;
 Bet is to be wedded than to brynne. (46-51)

Her justification of why she marries is an important issue. She argues that it is a deeper sin to fornicate out of wedlock than it is to marry more than once, which explains why she welcomes her sixth husband. Chaucer may also be using First Corinthians to connect the *WOB* with the Samaritan woman.

The Samaritan woman, in Kamowski's view, was a representation of "the tradition of fallen women recovered by Christ, for immediately after the Samaritan

encountered Christ, she carried a message of His truth to her fellow Samaritans" (3). It is not, however, only the *WOB's* prologue that devalues the need for confession. It is also devalued in her tale, which begins in the old days of King Arthur where Friar's were not yet licensed to hear confession. The *WOB* explains that:

For now the grete charitee and prayers
Of lymytours and othere holy freres,
That serchen every londe and streem,
As thikke as motes in the sonne-beem,
Blessyng halles, chambers, kichens, bourse,
Citees, burghes, castels, hye toures,
Thropes, bernes, shipnes, dayeryes—

This maketh that ther been no fayeryes. (865-872)

This truly sets the groundwork for her distrust of confession. It is interesting that the *WOB* is connected with the Samaritan woman because she, too, carries her message, the gross distrust of confession, to the pilgrims. Chaucer may be using the *WOB* as a representative who was lost in religion, but saved by Lollardy.

Prior to moving into her tale, the *WOB* uses examples from the Bible to lend credibility to her numerous marriages. Here, just as Wyclif does elsewhere, the *WOB* uses the Bible as a guide to history. She glosses Paul and St. Jerome and also makes mention of Salomon, Lameth, Abraham, and Jacob. By echoing St. Paul, she is diminishing the ideal aspect of chastity by saying that Paul: "Dorste nat comanden, atte leeste/ A thyng of which his maister yaf none heeste" (73-74). We are brought

back, once more to her reasoning—"myn entente nys but for to pleye" (192). Even if her intent is jovial, she is undoubtedly using a gloss of the Bible that is strikingly similar to Wyclif's beliefs. She treads on ground similar to Wyclif's five philosophical understandings. Richard Rex describes these, stating that: "One of Wycliffe's five philosophical 'understandings' was "the eternity of God, that is a realization that God exists outside time, so that past and future are to him the same as present" (33). This becomes an important idea for Alisoun's prologue. We see numerous instances where she alludes to figures in the Old Testament who practiced polygamy, such as Solomon, which add weight to her arguments. She is, in essence, arguing over the authority of the male dominated church and using the Bible as a guide to history, just as Wyclif does. Wyclif also contested the authority of the church, but it was what he called, the "visible" church. Szittyta states that Wyclif felt that "The only true church was invisible and consisted of those predestined for salvation. The visible church, with its papal aggrandizements, had authority only insofar as its individual priests were saved. The visible sacraments and rites of the church had, for Wyclif, no automatic claim to authority" (153). The *WOB*, therefore, denies St. Paul and the visible church the right to establish a credo that holds no biblical foundation. This may very well explain why the *WOB*'s prologue makes a distinction between experience and authority.³ It may also help explain her belief concerning the remarriage of widows.

³ Mary Carruthers offer an excellent analysis of the distinction between authority and experience in her article "The Wife of Bath and the Painting of Lions." Although I do not agree fully with her arguments, I do agree that "Allisoun has often been characterized as attempting to do away with authority altogether, as setting up a heterodox doctrine of marriage based on female supremacy to

The *WOB* ridicules the clergy by refusing to accept their teachings concerning the remarriage of widows. She clearly connects herself, through her own experience, with the Samaritan Woman who was also married several times. The *WOB*, in all of her experience, has never heard mention of a law dictating how many times she may remarry. She offers a persuasive argument, citing St. Paul in First Corinthians to illustrate how his words can seem contradictory. She knows that Paul's message is clear—marriage neutralizes passion and prevents fornication—but she also knows that celibacy is only an ideal; as she tells us, “that gentil text kan I wel understonde” (29). Paul proclaims that celibacy equals purity; the Wife states that it is her duty to “wexe and multiplie.” She then turns her attention outward, to the clergy in general when she says, “Bet is to be wedded than to brynne” (51). She turns the words of St. Paul onto the visible church, in this case, to the clergy in general. She is implying that the clergy is polluted whether they remain chaste or not. This leads us back to the argument Kamowski made when discussing auricular confession and it also turns our attention to the General Prologue where we read of the Friar who would give absolution for a good tithe and who also “maad ful many a marriage/ of yonge womme at his owene cost” (*GP* 212-213).

There is certainly no evidence that the Friar had heard a Lollard sermon prior to this point, but perhaps he understands exactly where the Wife is leading the debate, which may explain why he intrudes upon her prologue. The intrusion of the

replace the traditional medieval view, sanctioned by the church fathers and by common law, that wives should be humble, obedient, and submissive to their husbands in all things” (209). This is clearly demonstrated in her fifth marriage, to Jankyn, whom she refuses to submit to until she has burned his book.

Pardoner into Alisoun's tale is also important. The Pardoner interjects what critic Alcuin Blamires calls a 'jest' (230), but there is evidence to suggest that the pardoner was merely curious. Blamires states:

[...] while we contemplate the Wife as a 'noble prechour' or (retrospectively in the Friars prologue) as a dabbler in 'scole-matere.' The condescending tone contrived at these points, by pilgrims who are responding to the Wife as a prospective competitor, is reminiscent of Knighton's mock-enthusiasm for the way in which, thanks to Lollardy, both men and women were suddenly transformed into doctors of evangelical doctrine [...] (230)

There is no 'jest' made at the Wife. The Pardoner seems merely curious about what to do for his upcoming marriage. This Pardoner tells Alisoun, "Ye been a noble prechour in this cas." What evidence do we have that he makes a jest? Blamires goes on to state:

Since the ground the wife treads implies more acquaintance with vernacular Scripture than would at that juncture seem meet for a lay person, she would have struck some contemporaries as treading dangerously. The provocation doubles in that she is a woman; worse still, a woman aping preaching techniques. (230)

Lollardy, as opposed to other sects of Christianity at the time, was not against women preachers. It was unconventional, yes, but not out of the norm for Lollards to have women as preachers. And the Wife certainly has no lack of experience from which to draw! The pardoner seems to understand this, as he asks of her, "What sholde I bye it

on my flesh so deere? (167), and then interjects again: "Telle forth youre tale, spareth for no man,/And teche us yonge men of youre praktike." (183-187)

Again, nowhere in this set of remarks do we see a jest made by the Pardoner. It appears that he is being more genuine than the Friar who interrupts her at the end of her prologue. It could be that this Pardoner is congratulating her for making such a speech, knowing that the other pilgrims had no desire to hear from a Lollard preacher. Blamires also seems to forget that the Summoner is moved to her cause when he rebukes the Friar for interrupting her tale as well.

That the Pardoner refers to Alisoun as a 'noble prechour' brings in an important aspect of Lollard vernacular that needs further discussion. Certain words and phrases used throughout her prologue exemplify the Lollards' use of language. Jeremy Catto says that "It [Lollardy] had a literature; indeed, the written and spoken words were its lifeblood; but the rich symbolic language by which the religious feeling of the age was everywhere expressed passed it by" (46). Blamires suggests that the use of the word, 'expres' shows a typically Lollard 'sectarian vocabulary' (226). Other words and phrases that are considered Lollard in appearance include 'trewe prechours,' 'knowun men,' and 'groundli' (Catto 49). Noble and true seem to be interchangeable at this juncture, perhaps illustrating another way in which The Wife is associated with Lollardy. Gloria Cigman has suggested that the Lollards did not invent vocabulary, but used concepts for their own purposes. One of these purposes was to outline the idea of "light confronting the darkness of sin" (485). The

most apparent image of contrasting light and dark occurs when Alisoun burns Jankyn's book.

Jankyn's book can be understood as the words that he uses against Alisoun, in this case St. Jerome; words that she does not agree with, hence the burning of the page. The friction that we see between these two is very similar to the friction between the Lollards and the Friars. Deanesly states, "they [Friars] pride themselves on having graduated at the university, and then preach flashy instead of simple discourses," (244) and this may explain why Chaucer has the Friar interrupt her tale. Lee Patterson says that "the Wife's response to this critique demonstrates her uncontrite ingenuity. She allows the Friar a place in her tale by devising yet another preamble in which the Friars malevolence is disarmed" (680). She is able to give the Friar two distinct hits, one in her tale and the other at Jankyn.

When the Wife burns Jankyn's book, she, in essence, takes away his manhood. She also, as Blamires states, "has literally destroyed the targeted doctrine in the flames, she abruptly cancels discussion of religious authorities, reverting to an England predating the Church's ubiquitous influence" (6). When Alisoun burns Jankyn's book, an image is created that outlines this "manifestation of light confronting the darkness of sin." Prior to its burning, the book is referred to as "cursed." When the book is thrown into the fire, an immediate image of flames leaping up around the pages creates a striking image of light overpowering darkness. It also brings in an allusion to the Pentecost. The "curse" has been lifted and after this point, Alisoun is free from the book and from her husband. Looking back at an

earlier comment, Alisoun has become a “noble prechour,” and the Pardoner was genuine. The Friar’s remark seems, here, to be more like a jest than what the Pardoner says. The Friar was mocking the length of her prologue, perhaps making a jest about her feminine ramblings. The Summoner also seems to understand that the Friar is out of line and takes aim at him also:

Lo, Goddes arnes two!

A frere wol entremette hym everemo.

Lo, goode men, a flye and eek a frere

Wol falle in every dyssh and eek mateere. (833-836)

If the *WOB* was in fact being sincere when she said that her intent was only to play, then the way in which the Friar and Summoner respond to each others tales is certainly not just to play. They attack each other with vehemence, but it is only because of the Wife that these two begin their tales. The Summoner certainly gains the upper hand in the debate, and, drawing from the Wife’s tale, incorporates many of Wyclif’s other doctrinal beliefs into his tale, including the Pentecost, in order to parody the Friar’s beliefs and way of life.⁴ This leads me to believe that it is no mere coincidence that the Wife tells her tale.

The Wife seems to enact a type of inward religion which is closely related to Wyclif’s idea that true religion was an inward feeling and not an outward show. Her prologue illustrates a skewed notion of the ideal life, but she clearly believes that she

⁴The *WOB* alludes to this in her tale, but does not venture into any analysis. The image of Jankyn’s book burning does bear some resemblance to the Pentecost. The image of the smoke rising with two individuals, one of them a cleric, sitting around an open flame is similar to treatment of the Pentecost

is living a religious life. Her idea of the religious life is different from that of the other pilgrims, but she is able to make an impact on the Friar and the Summoner. It makes no difference that the impact on the Friar is negative, as that seems to have been her intent. Her prologue consists mainly of glosses of Paul, which also seems to be more than coincidence, as Wyclif used Paul as the basis for his eschatological prophecies. That the Friar is insulted and chooses to tell his tale after the *WOB* is fitting. It is also fitting that a mendicant, who has the power of confession, tells his tale directly after the *WOB* gives her general confession to the pilgrims.

in other Medieval artistic renderings. It also connects her to Wyclif's refusal to submit to signs as a

III. The Friar's Response to Lollardy

Jill Mann takes an interesting stance on Fragment III. She agrees that the fragment has little to do with marriage, but insists that it deals mostly with the idea of patience. This makes sense for the Friar and Summoner, but not for the *WOB*. The Summoner in the Friar's Tale has little patience to wait for "true meaning," and the Friar in the Summoner's Tale gives a sermon on ire which he fails to take to heart. But, Mann's analysis fails to incorporate the *WOB* as the figurehead of the fragment. She only offers a brief commentary on the *WOB*'s tale: "The Wife of Bath's tale, which begins the group, shows a masculine example of patient acceptance of 'aventure' in the knight who is transformed from a rapist into a husband who meekly surrenders 'gouvernaunce' to his wife" (211). Mann merely glosses over the role that the Wife plays in driving the Summoner and Friar into an antifraternal debate, which is at the heart of the fragment.

The Friar does try to redeem himself with his tale. The *WOB* has illuminated how the basic function of his mendicancy is worthless, so the Friar attacks the clergy in the only way he can. He sets the Summoner and the clergy out to be liars and thieves in hopes of redirecting the criticism onto them. Although his tale is not an outward confession, there are certain points within his tale which need to be examined more closely. The Friar's Tale is, in essence, a 'false-confession.' The Friar is trying to reestablish why there is a need to confess to the mendicant orders. It

source of knowledge.

is interesting that he chooses to do this by illuminating many of the arguments that were used against his order by Wyclif, Fitzralph, and others.

When the Friar begins his tale, he attacks the Summoner with an anticlerical fervency that echoes Wyclif's anticlerical sentiment. The mediating Host seems to understand exactly where the argument is heading, which explains why he tries to compel the Friar and the Summoner to be "hende/And curteys, as a man of youre estaat"[...] That the Summoner refuses to allow the host to intervene suggests that he has already readied his attack. This suggests that the Summoner knows the type of tale that the Friar is going to tell. He even tells the host and the pilgrims of his intent:

Nay, lat hym seye to me

What him so lyst; whan it comth to my lot,

By God, I shall him quiten every grot.

I shal hym tellen which a greet honour

It is to be a flaterynge lymytour,

And of the many othere manere cryme

Which nedeth nat rehercen at this tyme;

And of his office I shal hym telle, ywis. (1289-1297)

The Friar opens his tale with an analysis of an archdeacon that is meant to further the animosity between the clerics and the Friars. He alludes to the jurisdictional struggle between the mendicants and the clergy when he states: "We been out of his correccioun/They han of us no jurisdiccoun/Ne nevere shullen terme of all hir lyves" (1329-1331). Arnold Williams writes, "The main attack of the

seculars was against the confessional power of the Friars and their freedom from discipline by the hierarchy.” The Friar touches upon this idea which only infuriates the Summoner. Chaucer, in what is probably no coincidence, echoes one of Wyclif’s treatises during this treatment of the Friar and the Summoner. Although the Friar is trying to outline how the Summoner is guilty of being a simonist, he outlines the very argument that Wyclif uses against the Friars. In his treatise, *Simonists and Apostates*, Wyclif lays a foundation that the Friar builds upon. Wyclif writes:

p̄r b̄n two maner of h̄retikis of whiche Englonde shuld be purged, and symonieris ben .pe first. And alle sicche ben symonieris .pat occupien bi symonye .pe patrimonye of Crist,—be .pei popis, be .pei bishopis, curates, or provendereris. And lite prestis or none ben clene of .pis symonye...freris sellen her prechyng, her preyng, and her shryvyng, .pe symonye is .pe worse in sicche ypocritis. (211)

To my knowledge, no one has explored the Friar’s motives. Szittyta does so in *The Green Yeoman*, but does not venture into an analysis of the anti-clerical thought in the Tale. Neither the Friar nor the Summoner offers any conclusive evidence that supports their vocation; they rely solely on arguments that have been used against them for centuries. The use of Wycliffe’s treatise is certainly no different.

The Friar, possibly for the sake of parodying the *WOB*, uses this treatise in order to insult the Summoner.⁵ He has done the same thing as the *WOB*; he has used

⁵ In his article, “The Green Yeoman as Loathly Lady,” Penn R. Szittyta offers another analysis of how the Friar parodies the *WOB*’s tale. He writes, “The Hag’s metamorphosis results from her attaining marital sovereignty over the *sumonour*, who gives away the freedom of his soul by his vindictive

a gloss—leaving out the part that would make him as vile as the Summoner—in order to support his mendicancy. The Friar also draws upon the legacy of antifraternalism in order to strike at the Summoner. Interestingly enough, the Friar does not change the basic argument; he merely substitutes a Summoner for a Friar. The Friar tells us of the archdeacon and his Summoner:

That boldely dide execucion
 In punysshynge of fornicacioun,
 Of wicchecraft, and eke of bawderye,
 Of diffamacioun, and avowtrye,
 Of chirche reves, and of testamentz,
 Of contractes and of lakke of sacramentz,
 Of usure, and of symonye also. (1303-1309)

Directly after these statements, the Friar insists that the Summoner punished most harshly the failure to pay as it hindered him from stealing (1312-13). Looking back at

greed. Finally, the physical metamorphosis of these shapeshifters serve to signal the radical changes in perception in the protagonists, toward women on the one hand and toward hell on the other” (389).

Although I agree with the idea of the metamorphosis, I would like to take that analysis one step further. Could it also be that each of these tales outlines an *idea* about the metamorphosis of the Church, which illustrates where this mockery stems from? The Wife’s tale takes place before friars tainted the church, the Friar’s tale taints the church by relating it to the function of a brothel, and the Summoner’s tale outlines exactly how the church is/was tainted by friars, i.e., the Pentecost. The argument seems circular—all centered around how friars have changed the church into what it is/was.

It may also very well illustrate the metamorphosis of the mendicant orders. During the *GP*, we are told that the friar:

was nat lyk a cloysterer
 With a thredbare cope, as is a povre scoler,
 But he was lyk a maister or a pope.
 Of double worstede was his semycope,
 That rounded as a belle out of the presse. (259-263)

Arnold Williams writes, “Doubtless the general purpose of the passage is to set up an antithesis between the friars’ profession of absolute poverty and their actual wealth...the spiritual wing used expensive clothing as a symbol of the departure of the order from the ideals of its founder” (118).

the *GP*, however, we can see that the Friar may be speaking from his own experience, as we are told that “His purchas was wel bettre than his rente” (256).

Following on this line of reasoning, the Friar continues to attack the Summoner with what seems to be arguments used against him by Wyclif. The Friar says:

And right as Judas hadde purses smale,

And was a theef, right swich a theef was he;

His maister hadde but half his duetee.

He was, if I shall yeven him his laude,

A theef, and eek a sumnour, and a baude.

He hadde eek wenchis at his retenue... (1350-1355)

These statements show us two things: that the Friar is using a historical debate to attack the Summoner, and that he is a hypocrite. Looking back at the *GP* we are told that “He hadde maad ful many a marriage/ Of yonge women at his owene cost” (212-213). These comments may very well explain why the Summoner intrudes so passionately upon the beginning of the Friar’s Tale: “Peter! So been wommen of the styves,/ yput out of oure cure!” Here, the Friar tries to insinuate that the church has profited from the function of brothels. The Friar’s stance is an interesting one. He argues that he is separate from, and therefore not responsible for, the perversion of the church. As we have seen earlier, however, he has used his position in order to fornicate with young women. It is, in essence, an admission from the Friar that he

practices a private religion separate from the organized church, but it is also a way for the Friar to insist that he is not culpable for the church's corruption.

The Friar unwittingly traps himself within a religious conundrum when he makes these statements. He would have us believe that he is not responsible for the moral decline of the church, yet based on eschatological exegesis many believed that the Friars were responsible for this decline or were biblically forecasted signs of the decline of the church. Wyclif believed that part of this decline stemmed from the Friars' worship of sacraments. Wyclif felt that sacraments were nothing but signs that individuals worshipped for the sake of seeming pious. Szittyá writes,

One of the distinguishing marks of Wyclif's antifraternal vocabulary is the identification of his mendicant enemies with the fostering of "signs." They are sign worshippers (*cultores signorum*), teachers of signs (*doctores signorum*), and "adulterous generation seeking signs" (*generacio adultera querens signa*, Matt. 12:39, 16:4); they live by "sensible signs" (*signus sensibilibus*), that is, signs perceptible to the senses, and by outward signs (*signus extrisecis*) [...] (155).

Judging from what we know of this Friar, he too, values signs as an outward show of religious piety when he has none. He lives his life at the very opposite end of the spectrum from the *WOB*.

IV. The Summoner's Response to the Friar

There is no question that anger drew the Summoner to attack the Friar, but it is interesting how he is able to mount a more formidable attack as the tale moves forward. The Summoner begins with a list of general, probably "stock" references to the type of heresy that the Friar is guilty of and then moves on to more specific charges. This leads me to believe that the Summoner is attempting to connect all friars into the same category. Possibly drawing from the *WOB*'s prologue and tale, the Summoner also relies on Wyclif and other antifraternalsists to attack the Friar.

If there is any doubt that antifraternalsism exists within Fragment III, then the Summoner's Tale should end the discussion. Immediately after hearing the Friar tell his tale, the Summoner uses his prologue to connect the friars with the devil at length. The Summoner, in his prologue, says:

And er that half a furlong wey of space,
 Right so as bees out swarmen from an hyve,
 Out of the develes ers ther gone dryve,
 Twenty thousand freres on a route,
 And thurghout helle swarmed al aboute,
 And comen again as faste as they may gon,
 and in his ers they crepten everychon. (1692-1698)

This connection to the devil is reminiscent of many of the eschatological writings that have surfaced in antifraternals writings. Many of these eschatological writings were drawn from biblical glosses found within Matthew 23-24 and elsewhere. By

reconnecting the Friar with the devil, the Summoner is able to redirect the arguments that were used against him in the Friar's Tale. Both tales have a deep connection to eschatological writings that stemmed from Wyclif, Fitzralph and St. Armour. The Friar, although less convincingly than the Summoner, tries to establish the relationship between the Summoner and the devil. This may allude to the Friar believing that the prophecies in the Bible concerning the end of days hinged upon the breakdown of clerical religion, but it is probably another way in which the Friar tried to redirect arguments made against him and his order. The Friar's only mistake is that he chose to tell his story first, and the Summoner bests him with eschatological prophecies and well known doctrine.

The Summoner's first step is to redirect the criticism away from the church and onto the Friar, who has already declared that he is out of its jurisdiction. The Summoner aptly directs some biblical exegesis at the very heart of the Friar's way of life, his mendicancy. We are told:

Whan folk in chirche had yeve him what hem leste,

He wente his wey; no lenger wolde he reste.

With scrippe and staf, ytukked hye,

In every hous he gan to poure and pry,

And beggeth mele and chese, or elles corn.

His felawe hadde a staf tipped with horn,

A pair of tables al of yvory,

And a poyntel polysshed fetisly,

And wroot the names alwey, as he stood,
 Of all the folk that yaf hym any good,
 Ascaunces that he wolde for hem preye [...]
 And whan that he was out at dore, anon
 He planed away the names everichon. (1734-1758)

The Summoner seems to have struck a certain chord with the Friar, who is only able to reply with a vehement: "Nay, ther thou lixt, thou Somonour!" It is interesting that the Friar offers absolutely no proof for his rejoinder. Certainly the pilgrims must have wondered what it was that the Summoner "lied" about. We are only left to assume that, although the Friar begged from these people and lived well by it, he never tore up the names of those he had received donations from. It is interesting that he does not deny other elements of the Summoner's story. The Friar does not deny that he went his way, "With scrippe and tipped staf, ytukked hye," or that he had "a peyre of tables al of yvory" (1740-1741). The Summoner is undoubtedly trying to show the pilgrims how the Friar fails to live up to his apostolic creed with an historical antifraternel attack. The Summoner echoes Wyclif, who says that friars flatter the people with clever sermons in order to live on in their sins. Wyclif writes,

Also freris schewen not to po puple hor grete synnes stably as God bides, and
 namely to mighty men of po world, bot flatren hom and glosen and norischen
 hom in synne...For by flatryng and fals byheestis, pei leten men lyve in hor
 lustis and counforten hom perinne...And pus for po money pei sellen mennis
 soulis to Sathanas. (377)

The Summoner is clever in his jape in that he is able to allude to the fact that the Friar's sermonizing and the prayers he would give were worthless. It also correlates directly to the Friar's Tale, which the Summoner suggests was of the same brand as his meaningless words. This point is clear when the Friar begins his sermon on anger:

Lo irous Cirus, thilke Percien,
 How he destroyed the river of Gysen,
 For that an hors of his was dreynt therinne,
 Whan that he wente Babilogne to wynne.
 He made that the river was so small
 That wommen myghte wade over it al.
 Lo, what seyde he that so wel teche kan?
 'Ne be no felawe to an irous man,
 Ne with no wood man walke by the weye,
 Lest thee repente;' I wol no ferther seye.
 "Now, Thomas, leeve brother, lef thyn ire;
 thou shalt me fynde as just as is a squyre.
 Hoold nat the develes knyf at thyn herte—
 Thyn anger dooth thee al to soore smerte—
 But shewe to me al thy confessioun. (2079-2093)

Just as the Friar's words were unable to save Thomas's son, his own words are unable to keep him from anger:

This frere cam as he were in a rage,
 Where as this lord sat etyng at his bord;
 Unnethes myghte the frere speke a word,
 Til atte laste he seyde, "God yow see!" (2166-2169)

Although not a gloss of biblical exegesis, this is certainly very similar to Matthew 23, which warns that Pharisees fail to practice what they preach. The hypocrisy pointed out by the Summoner is also strikingly similar to that which Wyclif wrote in his treatise, *Fifty Heresies and Errors of Friars*. Wyclif writes,

Freris comen in under the name of seyntis, and forsaken the seyntis reule and lyve, and putten hor owne errors to the seyntis, and sclaundren both hom and God. For if men speken of Frauncey's he usid and taugte myche mekenesse, povert, and penaunce, and Menoures now usen the contrarei...And so ypocrisie regnes, and synne is mayntened by coloure of holynesse. (375)

We know that the Friar comes into this house under the guise of holiness as he says:

But herkne now, Thomas, what I shal seyn.
 I ne have no text of it, as I suppose,
 But I shal fynde it in a maner glose,
 That specially oure sweete Lord Jhesus
 Spak this by freres, whan he seyde thus:
 Blessed be they that povere in spirit been.
 And so forth al the gospel may ye seen,
 Wher it likker oure professioun,

Or hirs that swymmen in possessioun. (1918-1926)

And we also know that the Friar puts his own errors onto the saints by claiming to live the saintly life. The Friar claims in two passages that the life he lives is as saintly, or more so, than those apostles who lived the way of Christ. The Friar says:

I am a man of litel sustenance;

My spirit hath his fostryng in the Bible.

The body is ay so redy and penyble

To wake, that my stomak is destroyed.

I prey yow, dame, ye be nat annoyed,

Though I so freendly yow my conseil shewe. (1844-1849)

The Friar also tells Thomas:

I ne have no text of it, as I suppose,

But that I shal fynde it in a maner glose,

That specially oure sweete Lord Jhesus

Spak this by freres, whan he seyde thus:

'Blessed be they that povere in spirit been.

And so forth al the gospel may ye seen,

Wher it be likker oure professioun.

Fy on hire pompe and on hire glutonye!

And for hir lewednesse I hem diffye. (1919-1928)

Following this line of hypocrisy that the Friar lives by, there are also three instances where the Friar is called “master.” After the third time he is referred to as master, he says,

No maister, sire, but servetour,

Thogh I have had in scole that honour.

God liketh nat that ‘Raby’ men us calle

Neither in market ne in youre large halle. (2185-2188)

However, we can be reasonably sure he has only scoffed at the title because he is consorting with another member of his order. When Thomas’s wife refers to him as master, twice, no reference is made as to why he should not accept the title. The audience would surely realize that this is, as Szittyá states, “false modesty taken directly from Matthew 23 warning them against the hypocrisy of religious men like the Pharisees” (241).

Almost everything that this particular Friar does reflects upon historical antifraternalism. It is the Friar’s own greed and lying that makes the parody of the Pentecost particularly fitting for this tale. The Summoner is most convincing when parodying the Pentecost during the end of the tale; it is also where he is most closely associated with John Wyclif.

As was already touched upon, John Wyclif felt that Friars spent too much time worshipping signs. Wyclif did not disagree with the the fact of transubstantiation, but rather, with the nature of it. Szittyá writes, “Everyone agreed that the consecrated host was the body of Christ; nevertheless it remained to all outward appearances,

bread...the substance of the bread changed at consecration, but the accidents of shape, texture, color, flavor, crust and so forth, did not" (156). Wyclif's contention with the friars and the Eucharist was that they maintained that the host was an accident without a substance. Wyclif felt that this reduced the Eucharist to a sign and was, therefore, blasphemous. Wyclif writes,

Bot agenynis is grutches Anticrist, .pat .pis sacrament shulde togedir be bread and Gods body. Bot, as he feynes, when .pat Gods body bygynnes to be .pere, .pen bread turnes to nouzt, and accident leeves...Bot feythe of .po gospel techis us to trowe .pat .pis is verey bred after .po sacringe, for Crist himself seis, .pis bred is my body; bot what foole con not se .pat ne .pen hit is bred? (404)

It was because of his writing on the Eucharist that the mendicant orders attacked Wyclif as heretical. Both the Eucharist and the Pentecost were viewed as signs by Wyclif, so it is particularly fitting that Chaucer would end Fragment III with a parody of the Pentecost. It is also worth noting that during this parody, there are numerous allusions to the Eucharist.

The parody begins when the Friar is told by Thomas to share a fart equally amongst his order:

Now well, and somewhat shall I yive
 Unto youre hooly covent while I lyve;
 And in thyn hand thou shalt it have anon,
 On this condicioun, and oother noon,
 That thou departe it so, my deere brother,

That every frere have also muche as oother.

This shaltou swere on thy professioun,

Withouten fraude or cavillacioun. (2128-2136)

The Summoner, perhaps illustrating how greedy this friar truly is, has the Friar grope around Thomas's buttocks in search for the gift. It is another clever allusion to the beginning of the tale where we are told that friars dwell in the antichrist's anus. But, it also illustrates how a friar can turn a relatively good man towards sin. By turning Thomas to wrath, the Friar has fostered the evil that he has come to "destroy." This seems to be another reference to Wyclif's *Fifty Heresies* where we are told that Friars preach clever sermons in order to let men live on in their sins:

And when men ben hardid in soch grete synnes, and wil not amende hom,
 freris schulden fle hor homely cumpanye, bot they do not thus, lest they leese
 wordly frenschip, favoure, or wynyng. And thus for tho money they sellen
 mennis soulis to Sathanas. (377)

The Friar, when he tries to exact revenge for his 'gift', unwittingly makes himself the butt of the joke once again. He is now forced to live to his word; he must share the fart equally amongst his order. The Friar has literally forced himself to submit to the will of a layman.

There are two distinct reasons for why Chaucer has his Friar submit to a layman, each of which relates back to the *WOB* and John Wyclif. In one view, the Friar is forced to submit to a layman who gives back the only gift he has received from the Friar, hot-air. This could certainly be viewed as the order of friars

submitting to a lay preacher, i.e. the *WOB*. In the second view, the Friar is forced to submit to a lay preacher, as the Friar is to kneel in order to receive his gift. It is a complete reversal of the Pentecost. Following Wyclif's reasoning the order of friars will not receive the Holy Spirit; they will only receive the air from Satan's bowels. This miserable Friar brings on his own downfall as he asks Thomas to become a lay member of his order and later says he gave the letter of fraternity to Thomas's wife.

A more pressing issue brought forth by the parody of the Pentecost is Wyclif's idea about the nature of transubstantiation and the friars' belief in accidents without substance. The mendicant orders insisted that the presence of a sign meant the presence of God. With this in mind, then, the parody of the Pentecost bears a striking resemblance to an accident without a substance. We see this outlined in the following situation:

The noble usage of freres yet is this,
 The worthy men of hem shul first be served;
 And certainly he hath it weel disserved.
 He hath to-day taught us so much good
 With prechyng in the pulpit ther he stood,
 That I may vouche sauf, I sey for me,
 He hadde the firste smel of fartes thre;
 And so wolde his covent hardily,
 He bereth hym so faire and holily. (2278-2286)

When the fart leaves Thomas's bowels it will certainly not change in its fundamental essence. It will remain a "gift" that must be shared with the congregation while being a fart. Thomas, who has been filled with the Friar's blasphemy literally embodies this gift until it can be consecrated. He acts as a minister to the friars who are congregated, kneeling, around the spokes of the wheel.⁶ The Eucharistic joke is further played out by the nature of the Friar's anger. Thomas only repays him with what he has received—worthless, hot air. This fart may have the appearance of a fart, but following the mendicant's idea, it is not a fart; it is something entirely different. In this case, it is payment for the Friar's service. It is, in essence, a tithe which Thomas pays to the mendicant. Wycliffe felt that tithes were an unnecessary aspect of religion, hence the parody.

Although the Pentecost did not bear the brunt of Wyclif's censure, there is a certain connection between the two. If Chaucer were worried about portraying himself as a Lollard supporter, then using a Parody of the Pentecost would allow him to attack a fundamental precept of the Catholic Church without saying it outright. Both the Pentecost and the Eucharist deal with the issue of subject and accident. It becomes a matter of faith as to whether or not one agrees with either.

⁶ Critic Isamu Saito offers an excellent analysis of the importance of kneeling in the Summoner's tale. He says, "kneeling, rather than standing, was the most characteristic attitude of prayer. Friar John as a would be follower of the apostles, said that he was diligently asking for alms for the benefit of his convent" (58).

By kneeling around the wheel, the friar is submitting his religious authority to a layman. Thomas is then given the upper hand. Following Saito's analysis, Thomas may very well become a symbol of John Wyclif's elect. He is certainly given more authority, in this case religious authority, than the friar who is forced to re-receive his own hot air.

There is another parody inherent in this tale that has received little, if any, criticism. When the Friar begs from Thomas, and fails to get anything from him, he resorts to begging for a confession. The Friar gives his sermon on ire to figure out why the sick man is angry; in essence, he is looking for a confession. The Friar seems to be reasonably sure that he will be able to gather some sort of monetary donation from Thomas if he is able to get him to confess. The Friar tells Thomas:

O Thomas, *je vous dy*, Thomas! Thomas!

This maketh the feend; this moste ben amended.

Ire is a thyng that hye God defended,

And therof wol I speke a word or two. (1832-1835)

The Friar becomes a parody of his own sermon when he realizes what Thomas donates to his order. By begging for a confession, he has done more harm to his order than good. The Friar, then, goes and confesses to another in his order, which is why he is stuck within the conundrum of the second parody:

Sire ye woot what is to Doone.

Distempre yow noght; ye been my confessour;

Ye been the salt of the erthe and the savour.

For Goddes love, youre pacience ye holde!

Tel me youre grief. (2194-2198)

The Friar then gives his auricular confession, which makes him relive the embarrassment of the fart. It is the Summoner's clever way of indicating that the

Friar should keep his mouth shut. The Friar certainly loses this battle, as there is too much ammunition to be used against him.

V. Conclusion

Penn R. Szittyia may have stumbled onto something much more remarkable than the history of antifraternalism in *The Antifraternal Tradition*. He may have stumbled onto Chaucer's intent for Fragment III of the *CT*. Szittyia, when discussing Wyclif's polemic, writes:

Wyclif is unique among fourteenth-century antifraternal writers because he does not represent the vested interests of the secular clergy or the monastic orders. Fitzralph, Uthred, Thomas De Wilton, and Jean d'Anneux all spoke from positions of authority within the ecclesiastical establishment. They urged reform, not destruction, of the fraternal orders, the revocation of their privileges, their submission to Episcopal control, the dissolution of mendicancy as a way of life. (153)

This passage may very well outline why there is no conclusive evidence as to what position Chaucer espoused. Like Wyclif, Chaucer focuses on the causes of the decline of the church. This may very well explain why neither the Friar nor the Summoner really defend the positions they hold, either in society or the religious establishment in general.

But, if Chaucer's intent was to outline the church's corruption, why would he use a woman to lead his charge? The answer, although not simple, lie in the nature of Lollardy. Lollards believed that God gave grace to those that did what was within them. The *WOB* certainly did what was within her, and she seems to feel that she has lived a pious life. She is certainly not in the class of sinner as the Friar or the

Summoner. She may very well believe that she is one of the elect, that is, one who is predestined for heaven. Szittyá writes,

As his anticlericalism became more and more extreme, he [Wyclif] finally denied the authority of the entire "visible church." The only true church was "invisible" and consisted of those predestined for salvation. The visible church with its property and endowment, its corrupt priests, its papal aggrandizements, had authority only insofar as its individual priests were saved. The visible sacraments and rites of the church had, for Wyclif, no automatic claim to authority. (153)

This seems to mirror what the *WOB* tries to establish in her prologue and tale. She lives as if the church has no authority over her being, and although mere coincidence, there is no visible church in her prologue; there is only a woman trying to live by scripture.

The Lollard belief that the church had no authority created problems for the 'visible' church as it was an institution that depended on tithes and donations from its members. As Wyclif and Richard II held similar views on church property, he and other 'heretics' were left largely unscathed. When Richard II was dethroned, previously protected heretical sects were open for persecution. Wyclif and his fellow Lollards furthered the belief that religion could be personal and that the Bible should be accessible to every individual. The Wife of Bath is, therefore, the perfect medium for Lollardy. She is rich, and:

In al the parisshe wif ne was ther noon

That to the offrynge before hire sholde goon;

And if there dide, certeyn so wrooth was she

That she was out of alle charitee. (449-452)

Perhaps the *WOB's* beliefs, coupled with her money, could save the visible church from the corruption it faced.

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