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Chaucer's "Lyf of Seynte Cecile"

TOSHINORI HIRA

THE ITALIAN PERIOD

In keeping with the calling of its teller Chaucer assigns the "lyf of Seynte Cecile" to a Nun who is included among the Canterbury pilgrims. The "lyf of Seynte Cecile" told by the Nun is thus entitled the Second Nun's Tale. As the Nun, who is mentioned as chaplain to the Prioress, accompanies her superior in the pilgrimage to Canterbury, so she is known by the name of the Second Nun. Suited to its teller, the "lyf of Seynte Cecile" was not written, originally for the Second Nun. She inappropriately applies to herself the words an "unworthy sonne of Eve" (1. 62) in the "Invocacio ad Mariam" of her Tale. It is beyond question, therefore, that the legend of St. Cecilia had been composed before the Canterbury Tales was begun. It is usually dated shortly after 1373 (but not later than 1382), when Chaucer came back from Italy. On the date between 1375 and 1382 opinion is not divided. The period covers nearly much of the so-called Italian Period (1373-1384), to which belong many of Chaucer's works he himself refers to in the earlier version of the Prologue to the Legend of Good Women (c. 1385), such as religious writings Boece (1377-1381), and the lost "Origenes upon the Maudeleyne," not to mention the "lyf of Seynte Cecile"; such as poems as well, which deal with matters of courtly love—the "Palamon and Arcite" (1382-1385), the House of Fame (c. 1379), the Parliament of Fowls (c. 1382), and Troilus and Criseyde (completed before 1385). To these, works which were written under the influence of Italian writers, and were afterwards used as stories told by the Canterbury pilgrims may be added: the Monk's Tale and the Clerk of Oxford's Tale; and the Tale of Melibeus and the Parson's Tale. Chaucer is much indebted Italian writers, lay and ecclesiastical alike, of this period. He borrows the love story of Palamon and Arcite, and the tale of the double sorrow of Troilus in love from Boccaccio; again he borrows the tale of patient Griseld from Petrarch, and the stories of Adam, Hercules and Nero in the Monk's Tale from Boccaccio, and the story of Ugolino in the same Tale from Dante. The legend of St.
Cecilia from Jacobus de Voragine, who was appointed Archbishop of Genoa in 1292, the treatise on the Sins in the Parson’s Tale from Guilielmus Peraldus and the sermon on Penitence in the same Tale from Raymund of Pennafort. Likewise, Chaucer uses the ideas and expressions of Dante and Boccaccio for several portions of the House of Fame and the Parliament of Fowls. These works of his indicate that he took a warm interest in matters of courtly love and of Christian faith. The same matters of love and faith are characteristic of the works prior to and following the period. He wrote the A B C of the Virgin before 1372, and between 1386 and 1394 was, it seems, at work on “of the Wretched Engendryng of Mankynde” (now lost) mentioned in the Prologue to the Legend (A (G) version, c. 1394) and in the Man of Law’s Tale (c. 1390) as well. A romance like the Book of the Duchess belongs clearly to the French Period (the years before 1372), and a love story like the Franklin’s Tale, which Chaucer derived from Il Filocolo of Boccaccio, to the English Period (the years from 1386 onwards). These works, secular and religious, written throughout the whole period of his literary activity contain the same material on love or faith. However, they reveal in their gradual development the human understanding which he increased as he grew older.

It is supposed that Chaucer acquired a clearer conception of both human nature and traditional faith from his two journeys to Italy: the first to Genoa, Pisa and Florence in 1372–1373, the second to Milan in 1378. He was one of the commissioners who were sent to Genoa on the King’s mission to negotiate for the loan of the money necessary for the King’s wars, and to Milan on his mission to treat on military matters with Barnabo Visconti, Duke of Milan. The King’s mission took Chaucer to Padua in 1373 and he may have met Petrarch. Whether or not Chaucer made the personal acquaintance of Petrarch, it is uncertain, but it is not an improbability. Chaucer refers to Petrarch in the Clerk’s Tale. In any case he must have been moved by him. The same may be said of Visconti, to whom Chaucer refers in the Monk’s Tale. His visit to Milan afforded an opportunity of getting acquainted with Visconti. Chaucer learnt much from what he read in Boccaccio, Petrarch and Dante. He shares with these Italians an interest in humanity; it admits of no doubt that his human interest was promoted by them. It may easily be supposed, on the other hand, that Chaucer was influenced by what he saw and what he heard. He may have seen magnificent cathedrals with his own eyes, attended masses, and in saints’ days
heard the lives of some saints being read in churches. It is conceivable that he perceived the authority of the Church which she had exercised over men's minds. Certainly the Church authority so acted on him as to reflect upon matters of the soul. Chaucer formed the translation of Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, and composed the "lyf of Seynte Cecile." Both were religious works popular in the Middle Ages. His legend of St. Cecilia is said to contain most of the traditional account of the saint's life. He derives this legend, for the most part, from Jacobus's *Legenda Aurea*, which was written, between 1260 and 1270, for the name days of the patrons and patronesses of the Church. He again seems to have made partial use of the *Sanctuarium of Simeon Metaphrastes*. I will give an account of the legend of St. Cecilia of Chaucer with a summary; "shortly for to tellen" the saint's life in the words of Chaucer, it may be summarized thus.

THE SECONDE NONNES TALE

Cecilia, who was of Roman blood and of noble birth, was cradled in the teachings of Christ and bore His Gospel in her mind. When she grew to womanhood, she never ceased to love and fear God, praying Him to protect her virginity. Mated with a man named Valerian, she, wearing a hair shirt, attended a wedding. While the organ made its melody, she sang to God in her mind to keep her soul and body unspotted by the world. Night came, and she was to bed with her husband. She seized the opportunity to tell him on a promise of secrecy that a guarding angel would slay him on the spot the moment he would touch or love her ignobly, and that the angel, instead, would love him as much as her if he replaced sensual love by protective one. Chastened as God willed, Valerian answered that he would do as he had been requested to have a protective affection for her on condition of seeing the angel. Cecilia urged upon him the necessity of believing in God and being baptized before he could see the angel. He was well advised to go but three miles along the Appian Way, and tell the poor folk living there that she sent him to them, and to be introduced to Pope Urban and be purged of sin. Valerian went to the place and met Urban who lurked among saints' graves. Valerian told his errand to Urban, and the Pope thanked God, with tears of grateful joy, for sowing the seed of chastity in Cecilia. At these words, appeared an old man in white, with a book in his hand, and stood before Valerian. The old man read from the book about one
Lord, one faith and one baptism, and then asked him if he believed in this thing or not. Given a positive answer, the old man disappeared; Urban christened him in the very place. Valerian came home and saw Cecilia standing in his room with an angel, who bore two coronals of lilies and roses in his hands. The angel gave the lily coronal to Cecilia, and then the rose coronal to her husband. He asked them to cherish with pure soul and unspotted body these coronals which he brought to them from Paradise. He offered to get Valerian anything he wanted. Valerian requested the angel to grant his beloved brother the grace to know the truth. The angel said to Valerian that he and his brother would both bear the palm of martyrdom. With those words, his brother Tiburce came. He smelled the untimely savour of lilies and roses, but wondered as to where it came from. Valerian explained the matter to his brother: Tiburce smelled the sweet savour casted by the coronals at his brother's prayer, and he could see the coronals provided that he accepted the truth. Tiburce was dubious what to do. Valerian told his brother how to know the truth. Tiburce discerned the truth, as his brother guided him towards the renouncement of the idols which enabled him to see the coronals of flowers God sent to them by His angel. Cecilia told Tiburce of the love of Christ which matched her with Valerian and allied his brother with her in the same manner; she advised Him to go with his brother and make himself clean. Tiburce said: he did not know whom he sought for. Valerian replied to Tiburce that he would lead his brother to Pope Urban. Tiburce was afraid of seeking for the Pope who had often been condemned to die. Cecilia instructed him that he did not need to be afraid of being killed, saying that there is, God's Son declared, an after life which never be lost, and that God the Son created all things, and all that were created are endued with souls by the Holy Ghost who proceeded from the Father. Tiburce demanded explanation from her as to her contradictory saying about one God and the triune God. The explanation was given that as a man has three faculties, memory, imagination and intelligence, three Persons can be found in one divine being. Then, she preached to him how God's Son was to be lodged in this world to bring forgiveness to all mankind bound in sin. By the Grace of God, then, Tiburce everyday saw the angel of God.

Apart from many wonders Christ wrought for the two, their conversion to Christianity came to Almachius's knowledge. This prefect of Rome sought them out to question them. They were to be sent to the idol of Jove. Maximus, one
of the officers of Almachius, who questioned them, listening to them, led them to his house and he and his men, there, were converted to Christianity. The faith of Valerian and Tiburse was sufficient enough to bring them to disown their false beliefs and trust in God. When night fell, Cecilia came with priests and they baptized them all. Morning broke, and Valerian and his brother were called before Jove, but, being confident of being the soldiers of the Lord who put on the armour of righteousness, would by no means do sacrifice. They lost their heads with a steadfast devotion. Seeing their souls go upward to heaven, Maximus wept and many were converted to Christianity. Almachius stroke Maximus with a leaden whip on the ground that he made many conversions, and put him to death. Cecilia buried him beside Valerian and Tiburse. Almachius, who meant to see her and induce her to incense Jove, called Cecilia before him. After having asked her what she was, he directed a question to her religion and faith. She called him a fool; he censured her for her rude remark and denounced punishment upon her. He made a display of his power of life and death which his princes bestowed on him. They ordered, Almachius said, that he should inflict a penalty upon every Christian unless he renounced his belief. Almachius urged her to renounce her faith and do sacrifice. But she gainsaid his mortal power. He demanded that she should retract an insult to his gods, though he would brook the insult she offered him. Far from obeying him she preached down idol worship. She disapproved of his false gods; on the contrary, she pronounced God Almighty in Heaven to be worthy. He was angry at what she had said, and ordered men to burn her to ashes in a bath of her house. They did so as they had been ordered. Notwithstanding all the flame and heat of the bath, she day and night sat there cold and neither felt a pain nor was all of a sweat. Almachius ordered her to be killed by a weapon. The executioner smote her three strokes on the neck, but could not succeed in smiting her head off. Forbidden from smiting the fourth stroke, he left her lying there and went his way. Three days she lived in pain but never ceased to preach the Christian folk. And she bequeathed her goods, movables and her right in everything to them; she committed them to Urban. Said she: “I requested God to grant the delay of three days to me, that I might commend to you these souls I fostered there, and that you might build my house for an enduring church.” Saint Urban and his deacons secretly fetched her body and buried it by night among his other saints. Her house came to be “Saint Cecilia's Church,”
which the Pope hallowed. Thus, Christ and His saint have been honoured in this church to this day.

WOMEN SAINTS' LIVES

Chaucer adopts the legends of Saint Cecilia and of Saint Hugh of Lincoln as evidence of the miracles of the Virgin Mary in the *Canterbury Tales*. The former is assigned to the Second Nun, and the latter to the tender-hearted Prioress, a superior of the Second Nun. Caution is, to be sure, observed in assigning and adopting the legends. The legend of Saint Cecilia is fitted to its narrator who appears to live chastely in her convent, while the legend of boy saint Hugh of Lincoln is by adoption the tale of the Prioress who "modres pitee in hir brest enclosed." Chastity was expected of nuns, who were allowed in a cloistral life, as a rule, with the bow of chastity. Why Chaucer chose the legend of Saint Cecilia among other legends of women saints, such as Saint Katherine and Saint Juliana, is not known, but it seems probable that his choice of the legend of Saint Cecilia is connected with his Italian journey. Both Roman saints, Cecilia and Juliana, were the martyrs for their faith and chastity. They suffered martyrdom with heroism on account of their defence of chastity. Together with the legends of *Saint Margaret* and *Saint Katherine*, we have the early Middle English legend of *Saint Juliana*, which is somewhat inferior, it is said, to that of Cynnewulf (M. Schlauch, *English Medieval Literature*, p. 108). But it is not certain that Chaucer did know of the legend of *Saint Juliana*. Legend of *Saint Cecilia* also is found in the early English verse hagiography (See J. L. Weston ed., *Chief Middle English Poets*, pp. 72-78). It is imagined that he certainly did not know of West Midland alliterative *Sir Gawain*, much less the legend of *Saint Cecilia* written in Northern dialect (Robinson's *Chaucer*, p., 202). Compared with the legend of *Saint Juliana*, nevertheless, the legend of *Saint Cecilia* seems preferable.

*Saint Cecilia* draws strength from the description that Cecilia, wife of Valerian, retained her virginity, converted her husband and his brother Tiburce to Christianity, to whom Pope Urban administered baptism, strongly advocated the Christian faith, and was put into a boiling bath.

Married to Valerian, Cecilia who was faithful to God decided to protect her virginity. Her determined resolution to defend her chastity is found in her prayer to God: "O lord, my soule and eek my body gye (guide) / Unwemmed
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(Unspotted), lest that I confounded (destroyed in soul) be, “Skeat’s Chaucer 136-137. Valerian was advised to keep his wife clean: “I (i.e. Cecilia) have an angel which that loveth me, / That with greet love, wher-so I wake or slepe, / Is redy ay my body for to kepe….And if that ye in clene love me gye, / He wol yow loven as me, for your clennesse, / And shewen yow his Ioye and his brightnesse,” 152-161. Moreover, she persuaded her husband of the advantage of having belief in the Christian faith.

On the other hand, the young, beautiful heroine of Saint Juliana, faithful to God, wanted to keep her chastity, but she was betrothed to Heliseus, a pagan official of Nicomedia, who had fallen in love with her. Her father Africanus betrothed her to him. She could marry Heliseus only on condition that he should profess Christianity. But she could not obtain his consent by persuasion. On the contrary, turned over to Heliseus for judgment by her father who had been protested to by Heliseus and expostulated with her in vain, Juliana was persuaded to yield and to renounce the Christian faith by her betrothed. The chastisement to which she was subjected is no less heavier than the punishment Cecilia suffered, although both saints, guarded by God, did suffer no pain. Juliana, stark-naked, was thrashed and then was hung by the hair on a tree. After having been induced to yield by a devil transformed into an angel, Juliana was put into a vat of boiling lead. But Juliana is surpassed in the defense of Christianity by Cecilia. Certainly Juliana suffered much to keep her virginity and defend the Christian faith. She is advised to yield to Heliseus's wishes: “this is the biginnunge / of the sar (suffering) that tu schalt ant of the scheome (shame) drehen (suffer) / if thu nult to ure wil buhen ant beien (submit). Ah yet / thu maht (can) if thu wult burhe (protect) the seolfen. ant / if thu mare (further) with seist (refuse)? alre monne (all men) wurthe (deserve) / him wurst (worst) of wa (woe) ant of wontreathe (hardship) the ne wurche (behave shockingly) the meast (most),” d'Ardenne's Edition, Bodley Text 34 216-222. (The spelling of the quotation is partially normalized.) And she refused to accept his advice about to shift her worship in favour of idol-worship: “Haldeth (Hold) longe / ne leaue (abandon) ye neauer (never). for nulle ich leauen his / luue (love). thet ich on leuue (believe). ne for luue. nowther (neither) ne / for luther (wicked) eie (fear),” 231-234. On the other hand, Cecilia militantly advocates the Christian faith. Disputing with Almachius who vainly boasts of his worldly power, Cecilia sets forth her argument by
saying that “It is a shame that the peple shal / So scorne thee, and laughe at thy folye; / For comunly men woot it wel overal, / that mighty god is in his hevenes hye, / And thise images, wel thou mayst espye, / To thee ne to hem-self mowe nought profyte, / For in effect they been nat worth a myte,”

505-511.

UNWORTHY SONNE OF EVE

Perhaps Chaucer may have forgotten to change “unworthy sonne of Eve” to “unworthy doghter of Eve.” As for the words “Preestes thre” he seems to have failed to change “thre” for “a” priest. He does not portray each of three. Among them he assigns a tale only to a Nun’s Priest. The Canterbury Tales remains unfinished; so that two other priests may have been intended to be story-tellers. It seems likely that an Invocation to the Virgin Mary was meant for Chaucer himself, not for the Second Nun in the latter half of 1370’s when Chaucer originally wrote the Legend of Saint Cecilia. Unchanged by the author the words “unworthy sonne of Eve” were assigned to the Second Nun. He would have had a chance to change “sonne” for “doghter,” if he had finished the Canterbury Tales. From the linguistic viewpoint Skeat identifies “sonne” with “doghter.” He comments on the word “sonne,” saying that “sonne was probably still feminine in English in Chaucer’s time” and draws the example of the old use of “sonne” from Chaucer’s Astrolabe (Complete Works of Chaucer, vol. V, p. 404): “To fynde the degree in which the sonne is day by day, after hir cours a-boute.”

Whether the invocation “unworthy sonne of Eve” is employed to mean fictitious Chaucer or the narrator of the Legend of Saint Cecilia makes little difference. It can be imagined that judged from the glorious legend which the Second Nun tells us of Saint Cecilia, the narrator is a devout nun, although the author does not depict the narrator as a pious nun nor as a corrupt one. Where her tale of the woman saint is concerned, this conjecture respecting its narrator is correct. However, conjectures vary between noble and disreputable characters. It can be interpreted that the Second Nun is a nun of the same sort as her superior the Prioress. The Prioress, whom she was chosen to accompany on the way to Canterbury, is a fine nun, ostensibly a pious nun, but the author deliberately makes fun of her. Without directing keen ridicule against her Chaucer makes her say something that will excite ridicule. It can readily be
imagined that she said to fictitious Chaucer that she makes “Amor vincit omnia” her motto to the cloistral life. But we feel a difficulty in proving that she dedicates her life to the celestial love. The jest lies in the motto. Chaucer might have interpreted “Amor” as earthly love. She does not act on the motto that the celestial love conquers all. Nun as she is the Prioress herself does not keep the cloistral rule. On the contrary, she takes the utmost pains in imitating a court lady. Earthly love as well as courtly manners is regarded as matters of her chief concern. This suggestion is supported by her creator’s description of the Prioress corresponding to court ladies of medieval romances. The Prioress “of hir smylyng was ful symple and coy.... / Hir nose tretys, hir eyex greye as glas, / Hir mouth ful smal, and therto softe and reed; / But sikerly she hadde a fair forheed; / It was almoost a spanne brood, I trowe; / For, hardily, she was nat undergrowe,” Prologue to the Canterbury Tales 119-156. Granting that the prioress, who is presumably the lord of manors in the neighborhood of her convent without mentioning the head of her convent, delights in courtly manners, she is a subject for satire as an elegant lady described in romances. Her motto supplies a ground for her longing for profane love (cf. A. W. Hoffman, Chaucer’s Prologue to Pilgrimage, E. Wagenknecht ed., Modern Essays in Criticism, p.39 ). Medieval literature gives us not a few of corrupt regular clergy, both monks and nuns. A good example of nuns’ love is the Court of Love, in which nuns complain of control of their own fire of love: “we fayn perfeccion, / In clothes wide, and lak our libert; / But all the sin mote on our frendes be. / For, Venus wot, we wold as fayn as ye, / That ben attired here and wel besene, / Desiren man, and love in our degree, / Ferme and feithfull, right as wold the quene: / Our frendes wikke in tender youth and grene, / Ayenst our will made us religious; / That is the cause we morne and wailen thus;” 1104-1113. The same complaint made by monks and friars appears in 1128-1134: “We serve and honour, sore ayenst our will, / Of chastité the goddes and the quene; / Us leffer were with Venus byden still, / And have reward for love, and soget been / Unto thise women courtly, fressh, and shene. / Fortunè, we curse thy whele of variaunce! / There we were wele, thou revest our plesaunce.” Of course Chaucer was well aware of the degraded clergy. Without mentioning the description of many a “gentil” churchman who is ironically portrayed, we can see a considerable satire in that of the ideal priests when Chaucer gives no hint of satire to them. If the phrase “unworthy sonne of
Eve,” though “sonne” was forgotten to be changed to “doughter,” is intended for the Second Nun, it can not easily be imaginable that she as a chaplain to her superior lives an abstemious life worthy of a nun (cf. H. E. Thomas, *Medieval Skepticism and Chaucer*, p. 97). Apart from the narrator of the Legend of Saint Cecilia, if the word “sonne” is interpreted to be meant for the author of the *Second Nun's Tale* as was originally meant for the same author, the word can be meant for a joke, his favourite joke. Chaucer treats serious matters humorously or amusedly. On the other hand, he treats frivolous matters with a serious face. Or he, by implication, looks upon serious matters ironically when he deals with them seriously. He tells us serious matters innocently but it is in the light of the context of the matters expressed that we see the joke (as is seen, for instance, in the description of ideal Canterbury pilgrims). The truth is that he employs serious matters as a subject of satire (cf. H. R. Patch, *On Rereading Chaucer*, pp. 155f.). It may probably be conceivable, therefore, that he innocently put his Legend of Saint Cecilia into the Second Nun's mouth but concealed satire in the glorious legend. It can of course be imaginable, at the same time, that he took a consideration of the effect of contrast between religious and non-religious tales (see M. Chute, *Geoffrey Chaucer of England*, p. 305). According to the best MSS classified by Skeat as available, the blasphemious *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* comes next to the pious *Second Nun's Tale*.

However we have many things we know to the contrary. Chaucer himself came to be an “unworthy sonne” as he grew old. About the same period as his assigning the Legend of Saint Cecilia to the Second Nun he was skeptical over the traditional beliefs. He takes a somewhat skeptical view of the revealed truth in the opening lines of the *Legend of Good Women*. It seems to me probable that he presents as evidence of his questionings about ideal courtly love his skepticism over established beliefs. In the later version, not in the earlier version, he lets Queen Alceste say that he probably became a “renegat” from love faith, by suggesting that “Men shal not wenen every thing a lye / But yf himself yt seeth, or elles dooth; / For, God wot, thing is never the lasse sooth, / Thogh every wight ne may it nat ysee. / Bernard the monk ne saugh nat all, pardee!” 12-16. The god of Love and God are interchangeable in courtly love. Religion of the god of Love has many a echo of Christian faith. Why Chaucer did tell of such glorious legends of good women who were faithful to the god of Love when he was making plans for the *Canterbury Tales* is not known; it is
because he seemed to take a consideration of the King's (or the Queen's) patronage. In fact Chaucer was doubtful of the ideal love current in court circles. (Cf. I. Robinson, *Chaucer and the English Tradition*, p. 285. His criticism on love, whether for court lady or for God, is based on the modern view of human love, but in so far as he regards seriousness as real attitude towards criticism on life, he does not accept as valid a courtly entertainer's light-heartedness.) He raised the questionings about it in the *House of Fame*; he introduced into the *Parliament of Fowls* the realistic view of bourgeois love which was contrary to the ideal view of courtly love. The Goose says: "She wol love hym, lat hym love another," 567. And Criseyde forsook Troilus for Diomede in *Troilus and Criseyde*. So he showed a tendency to value "experience" above "auctoritee."

Where established beliefs are concerned, Chaucer makes, for reasons not known, a kind of a formal retraction of what he told against God at the end of the *Canterbury Tales*. But his own skepticism, from the secular point of view, is at any rate proved by the retraction. He proves to have been an "unworthy sonne of Eve," and a "renegat" in the religious sense of the word (cf. B. Ten Brink, *History of English Literature*, vol. II, p. 57). There can of course be no conclusive proof as to Chaucer's flat denial of belief and faith. Taking the side of a doubter he does not denounce the immorality of churchmen, nor does he give an explicit expression to unorthodox doctrines. Contrary to our expectation he always detaches himself from the controversial matters, both political and religious, of his time. Chaucer was a court official as well as a court poet. So he must have been cautious of giving offence to his patrons. Apart from love matters in which Christian faith is reflected, he, by implicit, alludes to social realities, by suggesting that he does not know who his Merchant is, agrees with his Monk who is of opinion that he cares nothing for studying and labouring as "Austyn bit," or for the requirements of "seint Maure or of seint Beneit," the "thilke text" having no use for "the world," or notices his Franklin hanging at his girdle an "anlaas" (dagger) and a "gipser" (purse) of the kind worn by a man of the gentry class. Thus he individualizes most of his Canterbury pilgrims as they appeared to him, although he observes great caution in introducing to us each individual pilgrim who is not connected with the vital problems of the time. He seems to participate in his court readers' feelings. Courtiers comprised in his readers were supposed to be heterogeneous members of society — knights and clerics raised from humble birth, wealthy merchants
and franklins, and the sergeants of law or doctors of physic, not to mention aristocrats. These gentry were used for various offices. The King was under the dire necessity of raising up forces and defraying war expenses. The chronic war with France and the dreadful visitations of pestilence resulted in the so-called bastard feudalism in the fourteenth century. The middle-class men's way of thinking seems to have an echo in the Canterbury pilgrims' views of things. The Monk is no great exception. It seems likely that Chaucer deals personally with the Monk's skeptical views but his skepticism connects him with the wide-spread skepticism of the time. Chaucer's questionings about orthodox faith can be seen by reference to the tendency of the time.

The established belief so long widely prevalent was now threatened with skepticism due to the realistic and human way of thinking. The Church's precepts were certainly contrary to the middle-class men's way of thinking. The Church's precepts prevented ordinary people from putting their lofty ideal into practice. A sermon on the deadly sins, for instance, was edifying, but in as far as good control over human passions is required of people, it is hardly practiced. Ordinary people must have found the preaching difficult of access. Even preachers themselves were contrary to their preachings; they were sinners while they should warn their parishioners against sins. Many common people may have felt that they could hardly expect help from corrupted priests. They suffered miseries from those repeated visitations fo pestilence, the chronic war with France or poverty. Miracles were not wrought. They prayed in vain for God's mercy. Langland denounces the illiterate who believe no longer in the teaching of the Church: "Now is the manere atte mete · when mynstralles ben stytte, / The lewed a-yens the lered · the holy lore to dispute, / And tellen of the trinite · how two slowe the thridde, / And brynge forth ballede resones · and taken Bernarde to witnesse, / And putteth forth presompcions · to preouen the sothe," C xii 35-39. And it was felt by the illiterate that, the world compensating for this miserable world was not the other world that they were taught to believe in. No one had ever been to there. Nothing could prove the existence of it. People's criticism of the idea of hell, not of heaven, appears in A Literary Middle English Reader (p. 283): "many men wenen that ther is no helle of everelastynge peyne, but that God doith but threten us, and not to don it in dede — as is pleyinge of myraclis in sygne, and not in dede." Experience is valued above revealed truth. Whether people reject the idea of heaven or they
reject that of hell will not be much the matter. They believed in what they saw and what they heard as was suggested in Chaucer's *Legend*. Much reliance could, they must have felt, be placed on the evidence of their own eyes. There must of course have been many good men and women who believed, for all that, in what the Church taught them to do.

Going with the sceptical spirit which was prevalent in the times heresy spread widely. Lollards who, eagerly following Wyclif's heretical views on the Church authority, muttered against the uselessness of the Church services and the sinfulness of the preachers found support in various classes of society. Wyclif, though at first advocated the reform in the Church on the lines of her ideal stand, proceeded, in 1380, to reject the miraculous performances of the Church services and the worship of idols and saints as formal and absurd. He dropped the formality for the substance. To him the Eucharist presented, as it were, the shadow, not the substance. He was certain Eucharistic bread was not changed into Christ's flesh by sinful priests. He was assured of the presence of the body. In the same way he refused to accept image-worship and saint-cult. Errors were, he believed, caused by such worship. He regarded canonisation in a ceremony-loathing spirits (see F. D. Matthew ed., *The English Works of Wyclif*, p. 469). Langland attributed priests' ignorance of saints' lives to their indolence, saying: "I (Sloth) have be prest and parsoun . passyng thrëtten wynter, / Yete can I neither solfe ne syng . ne seyntes lyues rede, / But I can fynde in a felde . or in a fourlounge an hare." B v 422-424. Later Middle Ages were not an age of Christianity propagation when heroes or heroines of the cross made martyrs of themselves for their faith. Saints' insensibility to their physical sufferings from tortures must perhaps have been made incomprehensible by the miracles God worked. People must beyond doubt have felt certain that saints' personalities and deeds were to be praised by all ages, but it could not be almost unbelieved that various tortures left saints unharmed. At the same time the Church's precepts were neglected; many priests are said to have hardly known the Ten Commandments and to have delighted in hare hunting, caring nothing for their spiritual duty. Wyclif thus planned on rendering the Bible into the vernacular; he is said, in reality, to have translated only the New Testament or part of it, and the rest of the Biblical translation was done by Nicholas Hereford. For Wyclif translated the English rendering of the Bible as the spiritual link connecting an individual soul and God, not by means of sinful
priests and absurd Church services, but by the Scriptures. Says he: "It semyth first that the wit of Goddis lawe shulde be taught in that tunge (English) that is more knowun, for this wit is Goddis word" K. Sisam ed., *Fourteenth Century Verse & Prose*, p. 117. It may be regarded certain that with the rise of middle-class men the literate Englishmen, citizens and country gentlemen alike, grew gradually in number. Among courtiers who comprised many middle or lower class men the English language was adopted in place of French. *Arthur and Merlin* (G. H. Mcknight, *Modern English in the Making*, p. 6) says: "Many noble ich have yseighe / That no freynsch couthe seye." The English language seems to have established itself in royal circles by the end of the fourteenth century. It was adopted as a literary language, as was shown by John Gower in his *Confessio Amantis* (Macaulay ed., *English Works of John Gower*) Prologus 22-24, 48-55: "And for that fewe men endite / In oure englissh ,I thenke make / A bok for Engelondes sake.... He hath this charge upon me leid, / And bad me doo my besynesse / That to his hihe worthinesse / Som newe thing I scholde boke, / That he himself it mihte loke / After the forme of my writynge."

Apart from the rise of the English language, the authority of the medieval Church was threatened by Wyclifites who brought about the vernacular Scriptures for the moral instruction of people and also by mystics who were certain that they intended for direct contact with God by their own personal religious experience. Mysticism finds its specific expression of direct union with God by contemplative experience, for instance, in the *English Writings of Richard Rolle of Hampole* and the *Book of Margery Kempe*. Less heretical than Wyclifites were mystics; they were rather orthodox in their belief. In terms of personal religious experience they meditated on the Passion, saw visions and sought for direct communication with God without connection with the Church hierarchy and her spiritual observances. Sings Rolle of his religious sentiments: "Langyng es in me lent (aright), for lufe that I ne kan lete," *A Song of Love-longing to Jesus* 25. Margery makes a report on her spiritual experiences that she was spoken to by Christ, the Virgin and saints, and that she saw the Virgin, Christ, Saint Magdalene and the Apostles in a vision. "Sche saw in hir sowle owr Lady, Seynt Mary Mawdelyn, & the xii apostelys. And than sche be-held wyth hir gostly eye how owr Lady toke hir leue of hir blysful Sone, Crist Ihesu, how he kyssed hir & alle hys apostelys & also hys trewe louver, Mary Mawdelyn. Than hir thowt it was a swemful partyng & also a joyful partyng.... Sche felt many
an holy thowt in that tyme whech sche oowde neuyr aftyr. Sche had forgetyn alle erdly thyngys & only ententyd to gostly thyngys," ed. Meech and Allen p.174. Mystics value their own mystical experience above Church "auctoritee." There seems to have been a general tendency that experience, "though noon auctoritee / Were in this world, is right ynoygh" in common people and in courtiers as well, as is complained of in Walsingham's Historia Anglicana (quoted from Thomas's Medieval Skepticism, p.60): "Some ascribed the cause of evils to the sins of the lords, who lacked faith in God; for certain of these believed, as it was claimed, there was no God, there was no Sacrament of the altar, there was no resurrection after death; but that, as the animal dies, so also ends man." Both mysticism and Wyclifism were beyond doubt suspected of heretical tendencies. They were both grounded on the same evaluation of the individual, doubtings and questionings having been had as to the clerical degeneration and the miraculous performances of services. Chaucer deliberately avoids referring to these. There are nevertheless some doubtful points in his remarks on the Parson's emphasis upon Christ's teaching and on the Cook's reference to substance and accident in the Pardoner's Tale. It can not be altogether unimaginable that Chaucer might insidiously have suggested that the Parson was a Wyclifite poor parson and the subject of substance and accident bore reference to Wyclif's doctrines. It may be probable in the same way that Chaucer might specifically have made a critical reference, in another form, to saint-worship. He may probably have done it by writing saint-worship as it ought to be. At any rate it may at least be said with certainty that the legend of Saint Cecilia was seriously taken by its author, and being far from the comprehension of the day, miraculous legends showed a downward tendency.