The Parson’s Tale
The Portrait of the Parson, the parish priest, from the General Prologue

The parson is the second good cleric we meet on the pilgrimage, after the Clerk. The priest of a small, obscure and poor parish in the country, he has not forgotten the lowly class from which he came. Unlike most of the other pilgrims, he is not physically described, perhaps because he is such an ideal figure.

A good man was there of Religion
And was a pooré PARSON of a town,
But rich he was of holy thought and work.

480 He was also a learnèd man, a clerk,
That Christë's gospel truly wouldë preach.
His parishens devoutly would he teach.
Benign he was and wonder diligent
And in adversity full patient,

485 And such he was y-provèd often sithes.
Full loath was he to cursën for his tithes ¹
But rather would he givën out of doubt
Unto his poor parishioners about
Of his offering and eke of his substance.

490 He could in little thing have suffisance.

He ministers to his flock without any worldly ambition

Wide was his parish and houses far asunder
But he ne lefte not, for rain nor thunder
In sickness nor in mischief, to visit
The furthest in his parish, much and little,

495 Upon his feet, and in his hand a stave.
This noble example unto his sheep he gave
That first he wrought and afterwards he taught:
Out of the gospel he those wordës caught
And this figûre he added eke thereto:

¹ 486: "He was very reluctant to excommunicate a parishioner for not paying tithes," i.e. the tenth part of one's income due to the Church.

The line numbering in this section is that of the General Prologue at the beginning of the Tales.
"That if gold rustè, what shall iron do?"
For if a priest be foul (in whom we trust)
No wonder is a lewèd man to rust
And shame it is, if that a priest take keep,
A shitèn shepherd and a cleanè sheep.

He sets a good example and practices what he preaches

Well ought a priest example for to give
By his cleanness, how that his sheep should live.
He settè not his benefice to hire
And let his sheep encumbered in the mire
And ran to London unto Sainté Paul's

To seekèn him a chantéry for souls
Or with a brotherhood to be withhold,¹
But dwelt at home, and keptè well his fold,
So that the wolf ne made it not miscarry;
He was a shepherd and not a mercenary.

And though he holy were and virtuous,
He was to sinful men not despitous
Nor of his speechè daungerous nor digne,
But in his teaching discreet and benign.
To drawèn folk to heaven with fairness

By good example, this was his business.
But it were any person obstinate,
What so he were of high or low estate,
Him would he snibbèn sharply for the nonès.
A better priest I trow there nowhere none is.

He waited after no pomp and reverence
Nor makèd him a spicèd conscience,
But Christ's lore, and his apostles' twelve
He taught, but first he followed it himself.²

¹ 507-12: The "not" that goes with "set" also goes with "let" and "ran" (508-9). It was not uncommon for a priest in a parish in the country to rent the parish to a poorer priest, and take off to London to look for a better job, like saying mass every day for people who had died leaving money in their wills for that purpose (chantries for souls), or doing the light spiritual work for a brotherhood or fraternity of the kind to which the guildsmen belonged (see above 361-4). Our parson did not do this, but stayed in his parish and looked after his parishioners (sheep, fold) like a good shepherd.

² 527-8: "He taught Christ's doctrine and that of His twelve apostles, but first he practiced it himself."
The Prologue to the Parson's Tale

The Manciple has finished his tale and the day is drawing to an end.

By that the manciple had his tale all ended,
The sunnē from the south line was descended
So low, that he n’as not, to my sight,
Degrees nine and twenty as in height.  
Four of the clock it was tho, as I guess,
For eleven foot, or little more or less,
My shadow was at thilkē time, as there,
Of such feet as my lengthē parted were
In six feet equal of proportion.

10 Therewith the moon’s exaltation,
I meanē Libra, always gan ascend,
As we were entering at a thorpē’s end;

The Host invites the Parish Priest to tell a tale, a “fable”.

For which our host, as he was wont to gye,
As in this case, our jolly company,
Said in this wise: “Lordings every one,
Now lacketh us no talēs more than one.
Fulfilled is my senténce and my decree;
I trow that we have heard of each degree;
Almost fulfilled is all my ordinance.

20 I pray to God, so give him right good chance,
That telleth this tale to us lustily.

“The sir priest,” quod he, “art thou a vicary?”
Or art a parson? say sooth, by thy fay!

1 The line numbering in this section is that of the last manuscript fragment, which begins here.

2 2-11: All the elaborate calculation seems to mean that a man’s shadow is 11 times 1/6 of his height at 4 o clock, as the sun is going down and the moon rising, on April 17, which was Good Friday in 1394, a probable year for the fictional pilgrimage. Chaucer can rarely resist an opportunity to show off his astronomical knowledge.
Be what thou be, ne break thou not our play;  
For every man, save thou, hath told his tale.  
Unbuckle, and show us what is in thy male;  
For, truly, me thinketh by thy cheer  
Thou shouldst knit up well a great matter.  
Tell us a fable anon, for cokkes bones! ”

The priest vigorously refuses, indicating he has no time for fiction (fables) nor for poetry. He will gladly talk about morality and other virtuous matter. They are on a pilgrimage; he will try to guide them on the pilgrimage of life to the celestial Jerusalem.

This parson answered, all atones,  
“Thou gettest fable none y-told for me;  
For Paul, that writeth unto Timothy,  
Reproveth them that waiven soothfastness,  
And tellen fables and such wretchedness.  
Why should I sowen draf out of my fist,  
When I may sowen wheat, if that me list?  
For which I say, if that you list to hear  
Morality and virtuous matter,  
And then that you will give me audience,  
I will full fain, at Christe’s reverence,  
Do you pleasance lawful, as I can.  
But trusteth well, I am a southern man,  
I cannot gest Rum, Ram, Ruf, by letter,  
Nor, God wot, rhyme hold I but little better;  
And therefore, if you list -- I will not close --  
I will you tell a merry tale in prose  
To knit up all this feast, and make an end.  
And Jesu, for his grace, wit me send  
To show you the way, in this viage,  
Of thilke perfect glorious pilgrimage  
That hight Jerusalem celestial.  
And if you vouché safe, anon I shall

1 This is Chaucer’s barb at alliterative verse where several words in a line begin with the same letter & sound, “R...”, for example. It was common in the North of England, not the South, where the Parson and Chaucer live and where rhymed verse is more typical, though the parson has little time for poetry of that sort either.
Begin upon my tale, for which I pray
Tell your advice, I can no better say.
But natheless, this meditation
I put it ay under correction
Of clerkês, for I am not textual;
I take but the senténcê, trusteth well.
Therefore I make protestation
That I will standê to correction. ”

Upon this word we have assented soon,
For, as it seemed, it was for to do
To enden in some virtuous senténcê,
And for to give him space and audience;
And bade our host he shouldê to him say
That allê we to tell his tale him pray.

Our host had the wordês for us all:
“Sir priest,” quod he, “now fairê you befall !
Telleth,” quod he, “your meditation. ¹

But hasteth you, the sunnê will adown;
Be fructuous, and that in little space,
And to do well God sendê you his grace!
Say what you list, and we will gladly hear.”
And with that word he said in this mannêr.

¹ The Host changes his way of addressing the Parson from the less respectful “thou” (l. 22) to the more respectful “you”(68-73), and from the singular imperative of the verb “tell” to the more respectful plural form “telleth.”
The Parson’s Tale

Introduction

The Parson’s Tale is not really a tale, for there is no story line of any kind, although he has promised: “I will you tell a merry tale in prose.” It is in prose certainly, but it is not merry, it is not a tale, it is not even a sermon, and decidedly not a sermon of the kind preached by the Parson’s direct spiritual opposite on the pilgrimage, the Pardoner. That rogue, the biggest scoundrel in the group, preaches a sermon that is still one of the most popular and powerful tales. The Parson, the spiritual model for all priests, produces by contrast, the longest and least lively section in the whole Canterbury Tales, a penitential treatise on the Seven Deadly Sins. Again, the tedium is partly because it is NOT a sermon, for preachers very often, like the Pardoner, enlivened their moral exhortations, and kept the attention of the audience, with *exempla*, interesting narratives long or short within the sermon that illustrated the point the preacher was making. The astute Pardoner knew the value of anecdotes in preaching:

> Then tell I them examples many a one
> Of oldé stories longé time agone
> For lewéd [uneducated] people loven talès old.
> Such thingés can they well report and hold

But the Parson is by his own account deeply distrustful of fiction, of tales that cannot be regarded as “true” or THE TRUTH, “soothfastness.” It is hard to imagine what he made of Christ’s parables, which are fictions but are meant to edify and teach. The Parson is at the most ascetic end of that part of the human race who have always been suspicious of fictitious stories, *lesings* as he might call them, that is, lies. It is an odd irony that his denunciation of fiction in principle and in practice occurs at the end of one of the most distinguished collections of fiction from the Middle Ages, an irony not completely taken away by the fact that Chaucer’s Retraction renounces most of that fiction.

It is impossible realistically to imagine the Parson’s “tale” being told on the pilgrimage. It is quintessentially a piece of *writing*, a treatise which modern readers do not find entertaining, but, as a genre, that kind of writing was by no means uncommon at the period. Indeed Chaucer’s version is, though long, a much condensed version of its Latin sources, some of which are known. I have taken the same liberty as Chaucer, and have shortened his

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1 The seven are: Pride (the root of all the others), Envy, Anger, Sloth, Avarice, Gluttony, Lust.
version by about half.

While it is not entertaining, nor meant to be, the Parson’s production IS instructive for us, in giving us some idea of the most ascetic version of medieval Christianity, the kind practiced by few, but theoretically believed in by many, who are represented by the pilgrims and by the characters in the tales themselves. The pilgrims, worldly and imperfect in varying degrees, do not object when it is the Parson’s turn to tell a tale, even though he makes clear he is not going to entertain them. They feel that it is right, after all the jollification and some ribaldry, to have a little edification. It is a pilgrimage, after all, and they don’t mind being reminded

\[ Of \text{ thilkē perfect glorious pilgrimage } \]
\[ That \text{ hight Jerusalem celestial } \]

Of that is called heavenly J.

So

\[ Upon this word we have assented soon \]
\[ For, as it seemed it was for to do \]
\[ To enden in some virtuous sentence \]

\textit{Sentence:} not a statement with a subject, verb and object, but primarily, of course, sentence in the sense of Latin \textit{sententia}, a piece of writing or talking with a serious theme, and, in the judicial sense, a (self imposed) penalty. With a ruthless thoroughness the “virtuous sentence” ploughs its way through the Seven Deadly Sins, dwelling at most length on lechery, no doubt the most frequently committed and confessed of all the sins. Indeed, one of the few times the Parson rises almost to oratory is in his denunciation of some medieval male clothing fashions which showed too much flesh for his taste:

\[ Alas, some of them show the boss [bulge] and the shape of the horrible swollen members [genitals] that seem like to the malady of hernia ... and eke the buttocks that fare as it were the hinder part of a she-ape in the full of the moon. \]

This appears in the early section under Pride, demonstrating, no doubt, that Pride leads to other sins. And there is some more brimstone of this kind, but it is rare in the rather dry listing of sins and remedies. The sermon makes it seem at times that no matter what one does is a sin of thought or word or deed. The Christian life as described here appears not just as a depiction of an impossible ideal, but a road beset by traps which one could not possibly escape unscathed. Unfortunately there is very little talk of God’s love or love of one’s neighbor in the treatise, which is relentlessly about sin and repentance, threats and
punishment. Even Dante spent as much time on Heaven as he did on Hell, as much in the company of Virtue as of Vice. Not our Parson, though.

Obviously, from our acquaintance with the pilgrims and their tales, the people of medieval Christendom took all this asceticism with a little salt or a lot of syrup. A core of common sense told all of them as it tells all of us, that the body matters also, is God’s creation too, that God does love us all and is not determined to see us all in the pit of Hell for every possible minor fault. The Parson says this, but he does not heed it very much.
Our sweet Lord God of heaven, that no man will perish [who wishes no man to perish] but wills that we come all to the knowledge of Him, and to the blissful life that is perdurable [eternal], admonishes us by the prophet Jeremiah: “Stand upon the ways, and see and ask of the old paths which is the good way. And walk in that way, and you shall find refreshing for your souls.”

Many be the ways spiritual that lead folk to our Lord Jesus Christ and to the reign [kingdom] of glory, of which ways there is a full noble way, which may not fail to man nor to woman that through sin hath misgone from the right way of Jerusalem celestial; and this way is cleped [called] penance, of which man should gladly hearken and inquire with all his heart, what is penance.

Saint Ambrose says that “penance is the ’plaining [regret] of man for the guilt that he hath done, and no more to do anything for which him ought to ’plain.” And some doctor [theologian] says “Penance is the lamenting of man that sorrows for his sin, and pains himself for he has misdone.” Penance is very true [true] repentance of man that holds himself in sorrow and other pain for his guilt. And for he shall be very penitent [to show that he is truly penitent], he shall first bewail the sins that he hath done, and steadfastly purpose in his heart to have shrift [confession] of mouth, and to do satisfaction [make reparation], and never to do thing for which him ought more to bewail, and to continue in good works — or else his repentance may not avail. For as Saint Isidore says, “he is a japer and a gabber, and not very repentant, that eftsoons [soon after] does things for which him ought to repent.”

But nevertheless, men should hope that at every time that man falls, be it never so oft, that he may arise through penance. And he that sins and verily [truly] repents him in his last day, holy church yet hopes his salvation by the great mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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1 Figures like this in parentheses at the beginning of lines indicate the sentence number. We follow the Riverside in numbering sentences rather than prose lines. Because there are some cuts, numbers 158 and 183, for example, may follow each other rather closely.

In the first sentence “will” is a full verb not just an auxiliary, and it means “wishes, wants.”

2 Already he has used three quotations from the Bible or from the church fathers to support his argument, something he does relentlessly throughout. Indeed he will never use one quotation when he can provide two or three. We have cut out many of these throughout also.
The species of penance be three.\(^1\) That one of them is solemn, another is common, and the third privy [private]. That penance that is solemn is in two manners: as to be put out of holy church in Lent for slaughter of children, and such manner thing. Another is when a man hath sinned openly, of which sin the fame [news] is openly spoken in the country and then holy church by judgment distrains [obliges] him for to do open penance. Common penance is that priests enjoin men in certain cases to go peradventure [perhaps] naked [in poor clothes?] on pilgrimage, or barefoot. Privy [private] penance is thilke [that] that men do all day [every day] for privy sins, of which we shrive us privily [confess privately].

Perfect penance stands on three things; contrition of heart, confession of mouth, and satisfaction. Contrition is the very [real] sorrow that a man receives in his heart for his sins, with sad purpose [serious intention] to shrive him [to confess], and to do penance, and never more to do sin.

**The need for repentance**

The causes that ought to move a man to contrition: First, a man shall remember him of his sins. But look that remembrance be to him no delight, but great shame and sorrow for his sins, for before the time that you sinned you were children of God, but for your sin you be waxen thrall [become slaves] and foul; food of the false serpent; perpetual matter for the fire of hell; and for [because] you trespass so oft times, as does the hound that turns again to eat his own spewing, for your long continuing in sin, for which you be rotten in your sins, as a beast in his dung.

The second cause that ought to make a man to have disdain of sin is this, that, as says Saint Peter 'Whosoever does sin, is thrall [slave] to sin.' And lo, what says Seneca in this matter? 'I am born to greater things than to be thrall [slave] to my body.'

O good God! you women that be of great beauty, remember you on the proverb of Solomon, that likens a fair woman that is a fool of her body, to a ring of gold that is worn in the groin of a sow.\(^2\)

**Judgement and Hell**

The third cause that ought to move a man to contrition, is dread of the day of doom

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\(^1\) Here already the author shows his inclination to divide every possible topic into sections and subsections. He does so regularly throughout the piece, but we have eliminated many examples.

\(^2\) Presumably an alternative to a ring in the nose. Chaucer uses this image elsewhere:

A fair woman, but she be chaste also, (A pretty w. unless she)
Is like a gold ring in a sow'se nose.'

(Wife of Bath’s Tale, 784-5)
judgement], and of the horrible pains of hell. For as Saint Jerome says “At every time that me remembers of the day of doom, I quake for, when I eat or drink, or do whatso(ever) I do, [it]
seems [to] me that the trump(et) sounds in mine ears: “Rise you up that be dead, and come to the judgment” whereat no man may be absent; for there avails no excusation; there shall no pleading avail, nor no sleight [tricks]; we shall give reckoning of every idle word. There shall we have a judge that may not be deceived nor corrupt(ed), and under him the horrible pit of hell, and on the left side more devils than any heart may think, for to harry and draw the sinful souls to the pit of hell.

(183) The dark light that shall come out of the fire that ever shall burn, shall turn them all to pain that be in hell. In hell is no honor nor reverence; for certes no more reverence shall be done there to a king than to a knave [servant]. There shall no wight [nobody] serve other, but of [except with] harm and torment. The higher that they were in this present life, the more shall they be abated and defouled in hell.

Against [in place of] the riches of this world shall they have mis-ease of poverty, and this poverty shall be in four things: in default [lack] of treasure and in default [absence] of meat and drink, and in default of clothing, for they shall be naked in body save the fire in which they burn, and other filths. Where be then the gay robes, and soft sheets, and the fine shirts? Lo, what says the God of heaven by the prophet Isaiah: that under them shall be strewed moths, and their covertures shall be of worms of hell.

(199) And furtherover, their mis-ease shall be in default of friends, for he is not poor that hath good friends; and ever each of them shall hate other with deadly hate.

Delights be after [consist in] the appetites of the five wits [senses] sight, hearing, smelling, savoring, and touching. But in hell their sight shall be full of darkness and of smoke, and their eyes full of tears; and their hearing full of waimenting and grinding of teeth. Their nostrils shall be full of stinking and the savoring shall be full of bitter gall; and all their body, shall be covered with “fire that never shall quench, and with worms that never shall die,” as God says by the mouth of Isaiah.

(231) The fourth point, that ought make a man have contrition, is the sorrowful remembrance of the good deeds that he hath left [neglected]. Soothly the good works that he did before he fell in deadly sin be all mortified [nullified] by the oft sinning; the other works that he wrought while he lay in sin, they be utterly dead as to the life perdurable [1] in heaven. Thilke [those] good works that he did while he was in charity, may quicken [come to life] again, and help to have the life perdurable in heaven, when we have contrition, but soothly the good works that men

1 The adjective comes after the noun as in French and often in Latin.
do while they be in deadly sin, forasmuch as they were done in deadly sin, they may never quicken. Well may that man, that no good work doth, sing that new French song, *J'ai tout perdu mon temps et mon labour.* [I have totally lost my time and labor.]

(255) The fifth thing that ought to move a man to contrition, is remembrance of the passion that our Lord Jesus Christ suffered for our sins. For this insolence of sinful man, was Jesus Christ first betrayed; and He was bound that came for to unbind us of sin and of pain. Then was He be-scorned, that should have only been honored. Then was his visage, that ought to be desired to be seen by all mankind, villainously be-spat. Then was He scourged [who] nothing had trespassed [offended]; and finally, then was he crucified and slain. Then were accomplished the words of Isaiah 'He was wounded for our misdeeds, and defouled for our felonies'.

(283) The sixth thing that should move a man to contrition is the hope of three things, that is to say, forgiveness of sin, the gift of grace for to do well, and the glory of heaven. And forasmuch as Jesus Christ gives us these gifts of his largesse [generosity], therefore is he cleped [called] Jesus Nazarenus Rex Judaeorum [Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews].

**Contrition**

Now shall man understand in which manner shall be his contrition. I say that it shall be universal and total; a man shall be very repentant for all his sins. His reason perceives it well that it is sin against the law of God, and yet his reason refrains not his foul delight. There is no deadly sin but that it is [that has not been] first in man's thought, and after that in his delight, and so forth into consenting and into deed. Moreover man ought to sorrow for his wicked words, as well as for his wicked deeds. Furthermore, contrition must be continual, and have steadfast purpose to shrive [confess] him, and to amend him of his life.

(310) And right so as contrition avails not without sad [serious] purpose of shrift [confession] and satisfaction, right so little worth is shrift or satisfaction without contrition. And contrition cleanses the soul of sin, and delivers it from the company of the devil, and from the servage [slavery] of sin.

**Explicit prima pars penitentiae**

[Here ends Part One, about Penance]
Incipit pars secunda.

[Here begins part two]

The second part of penitence is confession, and that is sign of contrition. Confession is very [true, complete] showing of sins to the priest. All must be said, and nothing excused, nor hid, nor for- wrapped [covered up].

The Fall and Original Sin

(322) Of springing [origin] of sins says Saint Paul that by a man sin first entered this world, and through sin death, and the man was Adam, when he broke the commandment of God. And therefore, he that first was so mighty, that he should not have died, became such one that he must needs die, whether he would [wished] or no. And all his progeny in this world, that in thilke [the same] manner (commit) sin, die. Look that in the state of innocence, when Adam and Eve were naked in Paradise, and had no shame of their nakedness, how that the serpent that was most wily of all other beasts, said to the woman:

“Why commanded God that you should not eat of every tree in Paradise?”

The woman answered, “Of the fruit of the trees of Paradise we feed us, but of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of Paradise, God forbade us for to eat, nor to touch it, lest we should die.”

The serpent said to the woman, “Nay, nay, you shall not die of death; for God wot [God knows] in truth that what day that you eat thereof your eyes shall open, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and harm.”

The woman saw that the tree was good to feeding, and fair to the eyes, and delectable to the sight; she took of the fruit of the tree and did eat, and gave to her husband, and he ate and anon the eyes of them both opened, and when they knew that they were naked, they sewed fig-tree leaves in manner of breeches [trousers], to hide their members [genitals].

(331) There may you see that deadly sin has first suggestion of [by] the fiend [devil], as shows here by the adder; and afterward the delight of the flesh, as shows here by Eve; and after that, the consenting of reason, as shows by Adam. Though the fiend tempted Eve, that is to say the flesh, and the flesh had delight in the beauty of the fruit defended 1 [forbidden], yet certes, till Reason, that is, Adam, consented to the eating of the fruit, yet stood he in the state of innocence. 2

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1 From the French “defendre,” to forbid.

2 The idea is that Eve represents the body and its desires; Adam represents the intellect which should control the body. There is no sin in being tempted, only in the consent to the temptation. Adam’s offense is therefore in failing to keep control.
We are all born with original sin and its lasting consequence: temptation

(333) Of thilke [from that same] Adam took we sin original; from him fleshly [physically] descended we all, and engendered of vile and corrupt matter, and when the soul is put in our bodies, right anon is contracted original sin; and that that [which] was erst [before] only pain of concupiscence [sensual desire] is afterward both pain and sin, and therefore we be all born sons of wrath and of damnation perdurable [eternal], if ne were [if there were no] baptism, which benims us [takes away from us] the culpe [the blame]. But the pain dwells with us as temptation, which pain hight [is called] concupiscence [desire]. This concupiscence, when it is wrongfully disposed in man, makes him covet fleshly sin by sight of his eyes, and also covetise of highness [high position] by pride of heart.

(337) Now as to speak of the first covetise, that is concupiscence after the law of our members, [by the law of our bodies] that were lawfully made, and by rightful judgment of God, I say that all the while that a man hath within him the pain of concupiscence, it is impossible but he be [not to be] tempted sometimes, and moved in his flesh to sin. It [i.e. concupiscence] may well wax [grow] feeble by virtue of baptism, and by the grace of God through penitence; but fully ne shall it never quench. For lo, what saith Saint Paul? “The flesh covets against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh.” The same Saint Paul said: “Alas! I caitiff [wretched] man, who shall deliver me from the prison of my caitiff body?” And Saint Jerome, when he long time had dwelled in desert, where he had no company but of wild beasts; where he had no meat but herbs, and water to his drink, nor no bed but the naked earth, wherefore his flesh was black as an Ethiopian for heat, and nigh destroyed for cold, yet said he that the burning of lechery boiled in all his body. Wherefore I wot well sikerly [I know well & truly] that they be deceived that say they be not tempted in their bodies. Witness Saint John the Evangelist, “If we say that we be without sin, we deceive ourselves, and truth is not in us.” (50)

And if a man withstand the first enticing of his flesh, and of the fiend [devil], then it is no sin. And if he do not, then feels he anon a flame of delight, and then it is good to beware, or else he will fall anon to consenting of sin, and then will he do it, if he may have time and place.

Two kinds of sin: mortal and venial, i. e. major and minor.

(358) Sin is in two manners, either it is venial [minor], or deadly sin. Soothly [truly], when a man loves any creature more than Jesus Christ our Creator, then it is deadly sin; and venial sin it is if a man love Jesus Christ less than him ought. The more that a man charges [loads] his soul with venial sins, the more he is inclined to fall into deadly sin. A great wave of the sea comes sometimes with so great a violence, that it drenches [inundates] the ship, and the same harm do sometimes the small drops of water that enter through a little crevice in the thurrok [ship’s hold], and into the bottom of the ship, if men be so negligent that they discharge them not by [in] time. And therefore, although there be difference betwixt these two causes of drenching, algates [still]
the ship is dreint [submerged]. Right so fares it sometime of deadly sin, and of anoyous [harmful] venial sins, when they multiply in man. Deadly sin, as says Saint Augustine, is, when a man turns his heart from God which that [who] may not change, and gives his heart to thing that may change and that is every thing, save God of heaven.

Some venial sins:
(371) Now then is it covenable [appropriate] to tell of sins which that many a man deems no sins, and shrives him not [does not confess] of the same: Every time that man eats and drinks more than suffices to the sustenance of his body, in certain he does sin; eke [also] when he speaks more than it needeth, he doth sin; eke when he hearkens not benignly [doesn’t hear kindly] the complaint of the poor; eke when he is in health of body, and will not fast when other folk fast; eke when he sleeps more than needeth, or when he comes by that encheson [reason] too late to church, eke when he uses [has sex with] his wife without sovereign [primary] desire of engendrure [intention of begetting children], to the honor of God, or for the intent to yield his wife his debt of his body [sexual obligation]; eke when he will not visit the sick or the prisoner, if he may; eke if he love wife or child or other worldly thing more than reason requireth; eke if he flatter or blandish more than him ought for any necessity; eke if he amenuse [reduce] or withdraw the alms of the poor; eke if he apparel his meat [garnish his food] more deliciously than need is, or eat it too hastily by likorousness [gluttony]; eke if he talk vanities in the church, or at God's service, or that he be a teller of idle words of folly or villainy; eke when he behight [promises] or assures to do things that he may not perform; eke when that he by lightness of folly mis-says or scorns his neighbor; eke when he hath any wicked suspicion of thing, where he ne wot [doesn’t know] of it no soothfastness [full truth]: — these things, and more without number, be sins.

Men may put away venial sin by receiving worthily the precious body of Jesus Christ; by receiving eke of holy water; by alms-deed; by general confession of Confiteor at mass, and at prime, and at compline1; and by blessing of bishops and priests, and by other good works.

De septem peccatis mortalibus
About the seven deadly sins

(387) Now it is behovely [appropriate] to tell which be deadly sins. The root of these sins, then, is pride, the general root of all harms. For of this root spring certain branches as ire [anger],

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1 Prime and compline were forms of prayer for particular times of day.
envy, accidie or sloth, avarice or covetousness, gluttony, and lechery and each of these chief sins hath his [its] branches and his twigs:

**De superbia**  About Pride

(390) Though no man knows utterly the number of the harms that come of pride, yet will I show a part of them. There is inobedience, avaunting [boasting], hypocrisy, despite [contempt], arrogance, impudence; swelling of heart, insolence, elation, impatience, strife, contumacy [insubordination], presumption, irreverence, pertinacity, vain-glory, and many other twigs that I cannot declare.

There is a privy species [concealed kind] of pride, that waits to be saluted [greeted] first ere he will salute; and eke he waits to sit, or to go above him in the way, or go to offering before his neighbor,¹ and such semblable [similar] things, a proud desire, to be magnified and honored before the people.

**Prideful lavishness in clothing**

And this is in many things as in speech and countenance [looks], and outrageous array of clothing; for certes, if there had been no sin in clothing, Christ would not so soon have noted and spoken of the clothing of that rich man in the gospel. Alas! may not a man see in our days the sinful costly array of clothing, and namely in too much superfluity [excess], or else in too disordinate scantness?

(416) As to the first sin in superfluity of clothing, which makes it so dear, to the harm of the people, not only the cost of the embroidering, the degise [elaborate] indenting, or barring, ounding [waving], paling [stripes], winding, or banding, and semblable [similar] waste of cloth in vanity; but there is also the costly furring in their gowns, so much punching of chisel to make holes, so much dagging of shears, with the superfluity in length of the foresaid gowns, trailing in the dung and in the mire, on horse and on foot, as well of man as of woman, that all that trailing is verily wasted, consumed, and rotten with dung, rather than given to the poor, to great damage of the foresaid poor folk; and if they would give such pownsoned [punched] and dagged clothing to the poor people, it is not convenient to wear for their estate [rank], nor sufficient to beet [supply] their necessity to keep them from the distemperance [severity] of the firmament [weather]. ²

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¹ Exemplified by the Wife of Bath. See General Prologue, 449-50.

² That is, even if rich people gave away such clothing to the poor, the poor would not be able to wear it because they would feel stupid wearing elaborate clothes that were so obviously appropriate only to rich people,
The opposite: prideful and immodest scantiness in clothing

Upon that other side, to speak of the horrible disordinate scantness of clothing, as be these cutted slops or hanselins, [short coats and jackets] that through their shortness cover not the shameful members [private parts] of man, to wicked intent. Alas, some of them show the boss [bulge] and the shape of the horrible swollen members that seem like to the malady of hernia, in the wrapping of their hose, and eke the buttocks that fare as it were the hinder part of a she-ape in the full of the moon. And moreover the wretched swollen members that they show through departing [dividing] of their hose in white and red, seems that half their shameful privy members were flain [skinned]. And if so be that they depart their hose in other colors, as is white and blue, or white and black, or black and red, and so forth, then seems it, as by variance of color, that the half part of their privy members be corrupt by the fire of Saint Anthony [erysipelas], or by chancre, or other such mischance. Of the hinder part of their buttocks it is full horrible for to see, for certes, in that part of their body there as they purge their stinking ordure, that foul part show they to the people proudly in despite of honesty [decency].

Now as to the outrageous array [clothing] of women, God wot, that though the visages [faces] of some of them seem full chaste and debonair [gentle] yet notify they [they show] in their array of attire likerousness [wantonness] and pride. I say not that honesty [decent elegance] in clothing of man or woman is uncovenable [inappropriate], but certes, the superfluity or disordinate scarcity [scantiness] of clothing is reprovable.

Over-elaborate horse trappings

Also the sin of ornament, or of apparel, is in things that appertain to riding, as in too many delicate horses, that be holden for delight, that be so fair, fat, and costly; in curious [elaborate] harness, as in saddles, cruppers, petrels, and bridles covered with precious cloth and rich, barred and plated of [with] gold and silver. These folk take little regard of the riding of God's Son of heaven, when he rode upon the ass [donkey], and had no other harness but the poor clothes of his disciples.¹ I speak this for the sin of superfluity, and not for honesty [decent elegance], when reason it requireth.

Excessive retinues for show

And, moreover, certes, pride is greatly notified [shown] in holding of great meinie [retinue], when

¹ The Parson is referring to the gospel story of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey on what we call Palm Sunday, shortly before his death by crucifixion.
they be of little profit, or of no profit, and namely, when that meie is felonous and damageous to
the people by hardiness [arrogance] of high lordship; for certes, such lords sell then their lordship
to the devil of hell, when they sustaine [support] the wickedness of their meie. Or else, when
these folk of low degree, as they that hold hostellries [inns], sustaine [support] theft by their
hostellers [servants], and that manner of folk be the flies that follow the honey, or else the
hounds that follow the carrion.

Feasting
(444) Pride of the table appears eke full oft; for certes, rich men be cleepe [invited] to feasts,
and poor folk be put away and rebuked; and (there is) excess of diverse meats and drinks,
bake-meats and dish-meats, burning of wild fire [flaming brandy ?], and painted and castled with
paper. And eke in too great preciousness of vessels, and curiosity [elaborateness] of minstrelsy,
by which a man is stirred to the delights of luxury [lechery].

Causes of Pride
Now might men ask, whereof that pride sourds [originates] and springeth. I say that sometimes
it springeth of the goods of nature, sometimes of the goods of fortune, and sometimes of the goods
of grace. The goods of nature stand either in the goods of the body or of the soul. The goods of
the body be health of body, strength, deliverness [agility], beauty, gentry [high birth], franchise
[freedom]. The goods of nature of the soul be good wit, sharp understanding, subtle engine
[ingenuity], virtue natural, good memory. Goods of fortune be riches, high degrees [rank] of
lordships, and praisings of the people. Goods of grace be science [knowledge], power to suffer
spiritual travail [trouble], benignity, virtuous contemplation, withstanding of temptation, and
semblable [similar] things of which it is a great folly a man to pride him(self) in any of them all.

Pride in one’s body
(457) Now as for to speak of goods of nature, God wot [knows] that sometimes we have them
as much to our damage as to our profit. Health of body, truly it passes full lightly, and also it is
full oft encheason [cause] of sickness of the soul, for the flesh is a great enemy to the soul, and
therefore, the more that the body is whole, the more we be in peril of falling ; and eke for to pride
him(self) in the strength of body, it is a great folly, for the flesh covets against the spirit.

Pride in one’s birth
Also to have pride of gentry [noble birth] is right great folly; we be all of one father and of one
mother, and all we be of one nature rotten and corrupt, both rich and poor. Now be there
general signs of gentleness, as eschewing of vice and ribaldry and sin, in word and in work and
countenance; and using virtue, courtesy, and cleanness, and to be liberal, that is, large by measure
[generous in moderation]; for that which [sur]passes measure [moderation] is folly and sin.\(^1\) Another is to remember him of bounty that he of other folk hath received. Another is to be benign to his subjects; wherefore says Seneca: “There is nothing more covenable [fitting] to a man of high estate than debonairty [gentleness] and pity and therefore these flies that men clepe [call] bees, when they make their king, they choose one that hath no prick wherewith he may sting.”

**Spiritual pride**

(470) Now certes, a man to pride him in the goods of grace is an outrageous folly for these gifts of grace that should have turned him to goodness and to medicine [remedy], turns him to venom and confusion.

**Pride in Possessions**

Certes also, whoso(ever) prides him in the goods of fortune, he is a great fool, for sometimes is a man a great lord by the morrow [in the morning], that is a caitiff [captive] and a wretch ere it be night. And sometimes the richness of a man is cause of his death and sometimes the delights [pleasures] of a man be cause of grievous malady, through which he dieth. Certes the commendation of the people is full false and brittle for to trust; this day they praise, to-morrow they blame.

**Remedium [contra peccatum] Superbiae.**

The remedy against the sin of pride

**Humility of All Kinds**

(476) The remedy against pride is humility or meekness; that is, a virtue through which a man hath very [true] knowledge of himself, and holds of himself no dainty [dignity], nor no price, as in regard of his deserts [what he deserves], considering ever his frailty. Now be there three manner of humilities; as humility in heart, in the mouth, and in works.

The humility in heart is in four manners: 1. when a man holds himself as nought worth before God of heaven 2. when he despises no other man; 3. when he recks not though men hold [consider] him nought worth [worthless]; 4. when he is not sorry of his humiliation.

Humility of mouth is in temperate speech; in humility of speech; and when he beknows [acknowledges] with his own mouth that he is such as he thinks that he is in his heart. Another is

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\(^1\) This idea is that true nobility ("gentry, gentleness") is a matter of spirit and virtuous behavior, not of birth. It is essentially the position taken by the hag in the Wife of Bath’s tale, lines 1109 ff.
when he praises the bounty of another man and nothing thereof amenuseth.[diminishes].

Humility in works is in four manners: 1. To put other men before him; 2. to choose the lowest place of all; 3. gladly to assent to good counsel; 4. to stand gladly to the award [accept the judgement] of his sovereign [superior].

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**De Invidia.** Envy [The second of the seven Deadly Sins]

(484) The foul sin of envy is sorrow of other men's prosperity; and joy of other men's harm. Certes, then, is envy the worst sin, for soothly all other sins be sometimes only against one special virtue, but envy is against all manner virtues and all goodness; for unneth [hardly] is there any sin that it ne has some delight in itself, save only envy, that ever has in itself anguish and sorrow.

**Various examples of Envy**

The species of envy be these. There is first, sorrow of other men's goodness and of their prosperity. The second is joy of other men's harm. Of these two species comes backbiting or detraction. Some man praises his neighbor by a wicked intent, for he makes always a wicked knot at the last end; always he makes a “but” at the last end, that is digne of [amounts to] more blame than is worth all the praising.

The second species is, that if a man be good, or does or says a thing to good intent, the backbiter will turn all that goodness up-so-down to his shrewd [nasty] intent.

The third is to amenuse [devalue] the bounty of his neighbor.

The fourth is this: if men speak goodness of a man, then will the backbiter say, “Parfay [Indeed] such a man is yet better than he”.

The fifth species is for to consent gladly to hearken the harm that men speak of other folk.

(499) After backbiting comes grutching or murmurance [grumbling & complaining], against the pain of hell, or against poverty, or loss of chattel [property] or against rain or tempest, or else grutches that shrews [bad people] have prosperity, or else that good men have adversity. Sometimes comes grutching of avarice, as Judas grutched against the Magdalene, when she anointed the head of our Lord Jesus Christ with her precious ointment. Murmur also is oft among servants, that grutch when their sovereigns [superiors] bid them do lawful things; and forasmuch as they dare not openly withsay [contradict] the commandment of their sovereign, yet will they say harm and grouch and murmur privily [privately] for very despite; which words they call the devil's Pater Noster, though the devil had never Pater Noster, but that lewd [simple] folk
give it such a name.

Then comes bitterness of heart, through which every good deed of his neighbor seems to him bitter and unsavory. Then discord that unbinds all manner of friendship. Then scorning of his neighbor. Then accusing, as when a man seeks occasion to annoy his neighbor. Then comes malignity, through which a man annoys his neighbor privily if he may, as for to burn his house privily, or poison him, or slay his beasts, and semblable [similar] things.

**Remedium Invidiae** Remedy for envy

(515) First is the love of God principally, and loving of his neighbor as himself. Thou shalt comfort him in his annoys [troubles], and pray for him with all thy heart. And in deed thou shalt love him in such wise that thou shalt do to him in charity as thou wouldst that it were done to thine own person and therefore thou ne shalt do him no damage in wicked word, nor harm in his body, nor in his chattel [property], nor in his soul by enticing of wicked example. Thou shalt not desire his wife, nor none of his things.

Understand eke that in the name of neighbor is comprehended his enemy. Certes man shall love his enemy for the commandment of God. For Christ says, 'Love your enemies, and pray for them that speak you harm, and for them that chase and pursue you; and do bounty to them that hate you.’ Forsooth, nature drives us to love our friends, but parfay [indeed] our enemies have more need of love than our friends, and they that more need have, to them shall men do goodness.

**De Ira:** Anger

(533) After envy will I describe the sin of ire [anger] for soothly whoso hath envy upon his neighbor, anon he will commonly find matter of wrath in word or in deed against him to whom he hath envy.

And as well [also] comes ire of [from] pride as of envy, for soothly he that is proud or envious is lightly' wroth [easily angered]. This sin of ire, after the describing of Saint Augustine, is wicked will to be avenged by word or by deed. Ire, after [in the opinion of] the philosopher, is the fervent [hot] blood of man quickened in his heart, through which he would [do] harm to him that he hates: for the heart of man by encaifing [heating] and moving of his blood waxes [grows] so troubled, that it is out of all judgment of reason.

**Good Anger**

But ye shall understand that ire is in two manners: The good ire is by jealousy of goodness,
through which man is wroth with [angry at] wickedness. And therefore saith the wise man, that ire is better than play. This ire is wroth without bitterness: not wroth against the man, but wroth with the misdeed of the man, as saith the prophet David, Irascimini, et nolite peccare. [Be angry, and sin not].

**Bad anger**

(541) Now understand that wicked ire is in two manners, that is to say, sudden ire or hasty ire without advisement and consenting of reason [when] the reason of a man consents not to that sudden ire, and then it is venial [sin]. Another ire that is full wicked comes of felony of heart, advised and cast [thought out] before, with wicked will to do vengeance, and thereto his reason consents: and this is deadly sin. [545] This ire is a full great pleasance to the devil, for it is the devil's furnace, that is eschafed [heated] with the fire of hell. Look how that fire of small gleedes [coals] that be almost dead under ashes, will quicken [come to life] again when they be touched with brimstone; right so ire will evermore quicken again when it is touched with pride that is covered [hidden] in man's heart. There is a manner [kind of] tree, as says Saint Isidore, that when men make a fire of the said tree, and cover the coals of it with ashes, soothly [truly] the fire thereof will last all a year or more: and right so fares it of rancor, when it is once conceived in the heart of some men, it will last peradventure [perhaps] from one Easter day until another Easter day, or more.

(554) In this foresaid devil's furnace there forge three shrews [3 rascals work]: pride, that aye [ever] blows and increases the fire by chiding and wicked words; then stands envy, and holds the hot iron upon the heart of man with a pair of long tongs of long rancor; then stands the sin of contumely or strife, and batters and forgets by vile reprovings. Soothly almost all the harm or damage that man does to his neighbor comes of wrath. Alas, it benimeth [takes] from man his wit and reason, and it reaves [deprives] him the quiet of heart, and subverts his soul.

Of ire comes hate, that is old wrath; discord, through which man forsakes his old friend that he hath loved long; and then comes war, and every manner wrong that a man doth to his neighbor in body or in chattel.

Of this cursed sin of ire comes eke manslaughter ¹ that is in diverse wise [various ways].

**Anger the cause of Spiritual Manslaughter**

Spiritual manslaughter is in six things. First, by hate, as saith Saint John, 'He that hates his brother is an homicide.' Homicide is also by backbiting; as wicked it is to benime [take away] his good

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¹ The meaning of manslaughter in this section is stretched beyond the breaking point.
name as his life. Homicide is also in giving of wicked counsel by fraud, as for to give counsel to
areise [establish] wrongful customs [customs duties] and talages [taxes]; of which saith Solomon,
“A lion roaring and a bear hungry be like to cruel lords”. [Homicide is also] in withholding or
abridging of the hire or of the wages of servants, or else in usury, or in withdrawing of the alms of
poor folk.

Physical Manslaughter
(570) Bodily manslaughter is when thou slayest him with thy tongue, as when thou commandest
to slay a man, or else givest counsel to slay a man.
Manslaughter in deed is in four manners: one is by law, right as a justice damns [condemns] him
that is culpable to the death; but let the justice beware that he do it rightfully, and that he do it not
for delight to spill blood, but for keeping of righteousness.
Another homicide is done for necessity, as when a man slays another in his defence, and that
he ne may no otherwise escape from his own death.
But certainly, if he may escape without slaughter of his adversary, and slays him, he doth sin.
Also if a man by cas [chance] or adventure shoot an arrow or cast a stone with which he slays a
man, he is an homicide. And if a woman by negligence overlies her child in her sleep, it is
homicide and deadly sin. Also when a man disturbs conception of a child, and makes a woman
barren by drinks of venomous herbs, through which she may not conceive, or slays her child by
drinks, or else puts certain material thing in her secret place to slay her child, or else doth unkind
[unnatural] sin, by which man sheds his nature [semen] in place there as a child may not be
conceived; or else if a woman hath conceived, and hurts herself, and by that mishap the child is
slain, yet is it homicide. What say we eke of women that murder their children for dread of
worldly shame. Certes, it is an horrible homicide. Eke if a man approach to a woman by desire of
lechery, through which the child is perished [destroyed], or else smites a woman wittingly
through which she loses her child; all these be homicides, and horrible deadly sins.

Then comes also of ire attrry [poisonous] anger, when a man is sharply admonished in his shrift
[confession] to leave his sin, then will he be angry, and answer hokerly [scornfully] and angrily to
defend or excuse his sin by unsteadfastness [weakness] of his flesh; or else he did it for to hold
company with his fellows; or else he saith the fiend enticed him; or else he did it for [because of ]
his youth; or else his complexion is so courageous [his nature is so passionate] that he may not
forbear; or else it is his destiny unto a certain age; or else he saith it comes him of gentleness of
his ancestors, and semblable [similar] things. No wight [person] that excuses himself wilfully of

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1 The author seems unable or disinclined to distinguish between death by accident on the one hand, and
death by abortion, infanticide or violence against the woman. He even thinks of masturbation or onanism a kind
of manslaughter.
his sin, may be delivered of his sin, till that he meekly beknow [acknowledge] his sin.

**Swearing**

(587) After this then comes swearing that is express against the commandment of God: and that befalls often of anger and of ire. God saith, 'Thou shalt not take the name of thy Lord God in idle.' And if it be that the law compel you to swear, then rule you after the law of God in your swearing, as saith Jeremiah, 'Thou shalt keep three conditions; thou shalt swear in truth, in doom [judgement] , and in righteousness.' What say we eke of them that delight them in swearing, and hold it a gentry [well bred] or manly deed to swear great oaths? And what of them that of very usage [our of habit] ne cease not to swear great oaths, all be the cause not worth a straw?

**Swearing by magicians and fortune tellers**

But let us go now to that horrible swearing of adjuration and conjuration, as do those false enchanters and necromancers in basins full of water, or in a bright sword, in a circle, or in a fire, or in a shoulder-bone of a sheep: They do cursedly and damnable.

What say we of them that believe on divinals [soothsaying], as by flight or by noise of birds or of beasts, or by sort of geomancy [seances], by dreams, by chirking of doors, or creaking of houses, by gnawing of rats, and such manner wretchedness? Certes, all these things be defended [prohibited] by God and Holy Church. Charms for wounds, or for maladies of men or of beasts, if they take any effect, it may be peradventure that God suffers [allows] it, for folk should give the more faith and reverence to his name.

(608) Now will I speak of lesing [lying] which generally is false significance of word in intent to deceive his even [fellow] Christian. Some lesing is of which there comes no advantage to no wight [person]. Another lesing comes of delight for to lie in which delight they will forge a long tale and paint it with all circumstances, where all the ground of the tale is false.  

**Flattery**

(612) Let us now touch the vice of flattery. Flattery is generally wrongful praising. Flatterers be the devil's enchanters, for they make a man to ween [think] himself be like what he is not. They be like to Judas, that betrayed God; and these flatterers betray man to sell him to his enemy, the devil. Flatterers be the devils chaplains, that ever sing Placebo.  

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1 Presumably the Parson is talking about a congenital liar who concocts tall tales that purport to be true, which are, in fact, simply a pack of lies. But he might just as easily be describing what seems to be his own attitude to professed fiction, “fables,” as they are called in his prologue. He probably sees no distinction.

2 “Placebo” is the first word of a psalm in Latin, and means “I will please”. Hence it is used ironically of the Yes-man who says whatever will please his listener. It is the name that Chaucer gives to the Yes-man in the Merchant’s Tale. Today “placebo” is used to indicate a harmless concoction given by a physician to placate a patient who insists that he needs medicine.
Speak we now of such cursing as comes of irous [angry] heart. Over all thing men ought eschew [avoid] to curse their children and [avoid] to give to the devil their engendrure [offspring].

**Reproving, name-calling, nagging**

(624): And take ye keep now that he that reproves his neighbor reproves him either by some harm of pain that he hath upon his body; as “Mesol,” [leper] “Crooked harlot,” [crippled scoundrel], or by some sin that he doth. Now if he reprove him by harm of pain then turns the reproof to Jesus Christ: for pain is sent by the righteous send[ing] of God and by his sufferance, be it mesolry or maim or malady. If he reprove him uncharitably of sin [lecher], “Thou drunken harlot “ and so forth, then appertains that to the rejoicing of the devil, which ever hath joy that men do sin.

Look that when any man chastises another that he beware from chiding or reproving: he may full lightly quicken the fire of anger and of wrath, which he should quench: and peradventure slay him that he might chastise with benignity [graciously]. And though that chiding be a villain's thing betwixt all manner folk, yet it is certes most uncovenable [inappropriate] between a man and his wife, for there is never rest. And therefore says Solomon, “A house that is uncovered and dripping, and a chiding wife be like [are alike]” A man which is in a dripping [leaky] house in many places, though he eschew [avoid] the dripping in one place, it drips on him in another place. So fares it by a chiding wife; if she chide him not in one place, she will chide him in another: and therefore, 'Better is a morsel of bread with joy than a house filled full of delices with chiding” saith Solomon.

**Backstabbing (verbal)**

(642) Now comes the sin of them that make discord among folk, the sin of double tongue, such as speak fair [politely] before folk, and wickedly behind [their backs]; or else they make semblant [pretense] as though they spoke of good intention, or else in game and play [jokingly], and yet they speak of wicked intent.

**Remedium Irae** Remedy for Anger

The remedy against ire is a virtue that is cleped [called] mansuetude [gentleness], that is debonairtee [kindness], and eke another virtue, that men clepe patience or sufferance. A man suffers four manner of grievances in outward things, against the which four he must have four manner of patience.

1. The first grievance is of wicked words.
2. That other grievance is to have damage of thy chattel.[property]. 
3. The third grievance is a man to have harm in his body.
4. The fourth grievance is in outrageous labor in works: wherefore I say, that folk that make their
servants to travail [work] too grievously, or out of time, as in holy days, soothly [truly] they do great sin.

(670) A philosopher upon a time, that would have beaten his disciple for his great trespass [offence], for which he was greatly moved [annoyed], and brought a yard [rod] to beat the child; and when this child saw the yard, he said to his master,

'What think ye to do?'
'I will beat thee,' said the master, 'for thy correction.'
'Forsooth,' said the child, 'ye ought first correct yourself, that have lost all your patience for the offence of a child.'
'Forsooth,' said the master, all weeping, 'thou sayest sooth [truth]: have thou the yard, my dear son, and correct me for mine impatience.'

De Accidia  Sloth

(677) Now will I speak of the sin of accidie or sloth. He does all things with annoy[ance], and with wrawness [perverseness], slackness, and excusation, with idleness and unlust [unwillingness].

Some of the other Sins caused by Sloth:
Wanhope is despair of the mercy of God, that comes sometimes of too much outrageous sorrow, and sometimes of too much dread, imagining that he hath done so much sin, that it would not avail him though he would repent him and forsake sin. ¹ This horrible sin is so perilous, that he that is despaires, there is no felony, nor no sin, that he doutes [fears] for to do, as showed well by Judas.... Soothly [truly] he that despair him is like to the coward champion recreant [craven], that says “Creant !” [surrender] without need. Certes the mercy of God is ever ready to the penient, and is above all his works. Alas! cannot a man bethink him on his Gospel whereas Christ says that there shall be joy in heaven upon a sinful man that does penitence, as upon ninety and nine rightful men that need no penitence? Look further, in the same Gospel, the joy and the feast of the good man that had lost his son, when his son returned with repentance to his father. Can they not remember them also how that the thief that was hung beside Jesus Christ said, 'Lord, remember on me when thou comest into thy regne [kingdom].'
'Forsooth,' said Christ, 'I say to thee. To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.'
Certes, there is no sin of man so horrible, that ne may be destroyed [wiped out] by penitence,

¹ Wanhope (Despair) is treated again almost at the end of the treatise.
through virtue [power] of the passion [suffering] and of the death of Christ. Alas! what needs man then to be despaired, since that His mercy is so ready and large? Ask and have.

(706) Then comes somnolence, that is sluggy slumbering, which makes a man heavy and dull in body and in soul, and this sin comes of sloth. Then comes negligence or recklessness. Then idleness, that is the gate of all harms. An idle man is like to a place that hath no walls where devils may enter on every side.

Then comes the sin that men clepe tarditas [slowness, tardiness], as when a man is tarrying ere he will come to God.

Then lachesse [laziness], that is, so that when he begins any good work, anon he will forlet [abandon] it and stint [quit].

Then comes the sin of worldly sorrow such as is cleped [called] tristitia; thereof comes that a man is annoyed of his own life. Such sorrow shorts full oft the life of the man, ere his time be come by way of Kind [Nature].

Remedium Accidia Eric Remedy for Sloth.

(728) Against this horrible sin of accidie, and his [its] branches of the same, there is a virtue that is called fortitudo or strength; [and] magnanimity, that is to say, great courage.1

De Avaritia Avarice

Saint Paul saith: 'The root of all harms is covetousness.'2

Definition

(741) Avarice, after [according to] the description of Saint Augustine is a likerousness [passionate desire] in heart to have earthly things. Some other folk say that avarice is for to purchase many earthly things and to give nothing to them that have need. Avarice stands not only in land or catel [property], but sometimes in science [knowledge] and in glory [fame], and in every manner of outrageous thing. And the difference between avarice and covetousness is this: covetousness is for to covet such things as thou hast not, and avarice is to withhold and keep such thing as thou hast, without rightful need. Saith Saint Paul, that an avaricious man is in the thralldom [grip] of

1 There follows a long list of virtues that spring from these two and which combat accidia, but it is not clear just how one acquires any of them.

2 The Latin version of this is the basic text of the Pardoner for all his sermons: Radix malorum est cupiditas. As he boasts, an avaricious man like himself makes all his money preaching against the same vice that he practices assiduously. See Pardoner’s Tale 333-4 and 423 ff.
idolatry.

What difference is there betwixt an idolater and an avaricious man, but that an idolater per-adventure hath not but [has only] one maumet [idol] or two and the avaricious man hath many. For every florin [coin] in his coffer is his maumet. The sin of maumetry is the first that God defended [forbade] in the Ten Commandments: 'Thou shalt have no false gods before me, nor shalt thou make to thee no graven thing.'

Social Ills resulting from Avarice
( 752) And through this cursed sin of avarice and covetousness comes these hard lordships, through which men be distraigned by tallages [oppressed by taxes], customs [c. duties], and carriages [charge for transport], more than their duty or reason is: and they [i.e. lords] take of their bondmen [serfs] amercement [fines], which might more reasonably be called extortions than amercement. Of which amercements of bondmen, some lords' stewards say that it is rightful, forasmuch as a churl hath no temporal thing that it not is his lord's. But certes, these lordships do wrong that bereave [deprive] their bondmen of things that they never gave them. The condition of thralldom [servitude], and the first cause of thralldom was for sin, (Genesis v.) Thus may you see that Guilt deserved thralldom, but not Nature. Wherefore these lords should not too much glorify them in their lordships since that they by natural condition be not lords of their thralls [servants], but that thralldom came first by the desert [punishment] of sin. And furtherover the law says that temporal goods of bondfolk be the goods of their lords, but not to rob them, nor to reave [deprive] them. Therefore saith Seneca, 'Thy prudence should live benignly with thy thrall.” Those that thou clepest thralls, be God's people: for humble folk be Christ's friends.

Lords and Serfs are both human
(761) Think also, that of such seed as churls spring, of such seed spring lords; as well may the churl be saved as the lord. The same death that takes the churl, such death takes the lord. Wherefore I rede [advise], do right so with thy churl as thou wouldst that thy lord did with thee if thou were in his plight. Every sinful man is a churl to sin; I rede thee, thou lord, that thou rule thee in such wise that thy churls rather love thee than dread thee. Wot [know] well that there is degree above degree, as reason is, and skill is [it is reasonable] that men do their devoir [duty] there as it is due: but extortion and despite [contempt] of your underlings, is damnable. And furthermore understand well, that these conquerors or tyrants make full oft thralls of them that be born of as royal blood as be they that conquer them. This name of thralldom was never erst couth [before known] till that Noah said that his son Ham should be thrall to his brethren for his sin.

(767) What say we then of them that pill [pillage] and do extortions to Holy Church. The sword
that men give first to a knight when he is newly dubbed signifies that he should defend Holy Church and not rob it nor pill it.

Now, as I have said, since so is that sin was first cause of thralldom\(^1\) [enslavement], then is it thus, that at the time that all this world was in sin, then was all this world in thralldom: but certes, since the time of grace came, God ordained that some folk should be more high in estate and in degree, and some folk more low, and that each should be served in his estate and his degree. And therefore in some countries there as they buy thralls, when they have turned them to the faith, they make their thralls free out of thralldom. The Pope clepes [calls] himself servant of the servants of God. But forasmuch as the estate of Holy Church ne might not have been, nor the common profit might not have been kept, nor peace nor rest in earth but if [unless] God had ordained that some men have higher degree and some men lower; therefore was sovereignty ordained to keep and maintain and defend underlings or subjects (with)in reason, as farforth it lies in their power, and not to destroy.

\textit{Simony: the buying of Church Offices}

(781) Spiritual merchandise is properly simony that is, attentive desire to buy things spiritual, that is things which appertain to the sanctuary of God and to the care [care] of the soul.\(^2\) Simony is cleped of [named after] Simon Magus, that would have bought for temporal catel [goods] the gift that God had given by the Holy Ghost to Saint Peter and to the apostles.\(^3\) And he that sells and he that buys things spiritual are called simonials, be it by catel, be it by procuring [services rendered ?], or by prayer of his fleshly [family] friends or spiritual [church] friends. Soothly, if they pray [intervene] for him that is not worthy and able, it is simony, if he take the benefice; and if he be worthy and able, then is none. When man or woman, prays [lobbies] for folk to advance them only for wicked fleshly affection which they have unto the persons, and that is foul simony. For, as saith Saint Damascene, it is the greatest sin that may be after the sin of Lucifer and of Antichrist: for by this sin God for-loses [loses completely] the church and the soul which he be bought with his precious blood, by them that give churches to them that be not digne [qualified]. For they put in thieves that steal the souls of [from] Jesus Christ, and destroy his patrimony. By such undigne [unworthy] priests and curates have lewd men [laymen] less reverence of the sacrament of holy church: and such givers of churches put the children of Christ out, and put into churches the devil's own sons.

\(^1\) God to Adam after the Fall: ‘Cursed is the earth in thy work ; in labor and toil shalt thou eat thereof all the days of thy life.’ Genesis III, 17.

\(^2\) That is, ecclesiastical office.

\(^3\) For the biblical incident see Acts of the Apostles 8: 18-24.
Gambling
Now comes hazardry with his [its] appertenants as tables [backgammon?] and raffles[-dice games] of which comes deceit, false oaths, chidings, and all raving, blaspheming, and reneying [denying] of God, hate of neighbors, waste of goods, misspending of time, and sometimes manslaughter.

Lying
(795) Of avarice come lesings [lies], theft, false witness, and false oaths. False witness is in word and in deed: in word, as for to bereave [rob] thy neighbor's good name by thy false witness, or bereave him his catel [property] or his heritage by thy false witnessing, when thou for ire, or for meed [money], or for envy, bearest false witness, or accusest him, or excusest thyself falsely. Beware, ye questmongers [inquest officials] and notaries. For false witnessing was Susanna in full great sorrow and pain, and many another more. ¹

Theft
(798) Temporal theft is as for to take thy neighbor's catel [property] against his will, be it by force or by sleight [trickery] by false indictments upon him; and in borrowing of thy neighbor's catel in intent never to pay it again. Spiritual theft is sacrilege, that is to say, hurting of holy things. Also they that withdraw falsely the rents and rights that belong to holy church.

Remedy for Avarice
Now shall ye understand, that relieving of avarice is misericord [mercy] and pity. Misericord is a virtue, by which the courage [spirit] of man is stirred by the mis-ease [distress] of him that is mis-eased. Upon which misericord follows pity, in performing and fulfilling of charitable works of mercy, helping and comforting him that is mis-eased.
(811) Another manner of remedy against avarice is reasonable largesse [generosity]. Men ought for to avoid and eschew fool-largesse which men clepen [call] waste. Soothly [truly], what thing that he gives for vain-glory, as to minstrels and to folk that bear [spread] his renown in the world, he hath done sin thereof, and no alms.

De Gula Gluttony
After Avarice comes Gluttony. This sin corrupted all this world, as is well showed in the sin of Susanna.

¹ Susanna was falsely accused of adultery by two old men whose sexual advances she had repelled. See Book of Daniel, chap. 18
Adam and of Eve. Look also what saith Saint Paul of gluttony: "Many go," saith he, "of which I have oft said to you, and now I say it weeping, that they be enemies of the cross of Christ, of which the end is death, and their womb [stomach] is their God and their glory." 1 He that is usant [accustomed, addicted] to this sin of gluttony, he may no sin withstand, he must be in servage [bondage] of all vices. This sin has many species.

Drinking

(822) The first is drunkenness, that is the horrible sepulture of man's reason; when a man is drunken, he has lost his reason; and this is deadly sin. But soothly, when that a man is not wont [accustomed] to strong drink, and peradventure knows not the strength of the drink, or has feebleness in his head, or has travailed [laboured], through which he drinks the more, all be [although] he suddenly caught with drink, it is no deadly sin, but venial.

Eating

The third species of gluttony is, when a man devours his meat, and has no rightful manner of eating.

Remedium contra peccatum Gulae: Remedy for the sin of Gluttony

(831) Against gluttony the remedy is abstinence, as saith Galen 2. Saint Augustine wills that abstinence be done for virtue, and with patience. Abstinence, saith he, is little worth, but if [unless] a man have good will thereto, and but it be enforced by patience and by charity, and that men do it for God's sake. The fellows [associates] of abstinence be temperance; and shame, that eschews [avoids] all dishonesty [indecency, impropriety]; sufficiency, that seeks no rich meats nor drinks; measure [moderation]; soberness.

1 Notice the way the Pardoner puts this sentiment in his sermon:

The Apostle weeping says full piteously:

"There walken many, of which you told have I (I say it now, weeping with piteous voice),
That they be enemies of Christ's cross,
Of which the end is death. Womb is their God."

O womb! O belly! O stinking cod! (Pardoner’s T. 529-534)

Phil iii, 18-19.

of whom

Belly.

2 An author on medicine often quoted in the Middle Ages.
De Luxuria  About Lust

(836) After gluttony comes lechery, for these two sins be so nigh [near] cousins, that oft time they will not depart.[separate]. For the sin of lechery God dreint [drowned] all the world, and after that he burnt five cities with thunder-lightning, and sank them into hell. {Sodom and Gomorrah}

Adultery: Breach of the Sacrament of Marriage

(840) Now let us speak of the stinking sin of lechery, that men clepen avoutrie [call adultery], that is, if that one of them be wedded, or else both. Saint John saith that avouterers shall be in hell in a stank [lake] burning of fire and of brimstone, in fire for their lechery, in brimstone for the stench of their ordure [filth]. The sacrament [of matrimony] was made of God himself in paradise, and confirmed by Jesus Christ, as witnesses Saint Matthew in the Gospel, 'A man shall let [leave] father and mother, and take him to his wife, and they shall be two in one flesh.' This sacrament betokens the knitting together of Christ and holy church.

Control of one's own thoughts

And not only that God forbade avoutrie in deed, but also He commanded that thou shouldest not covet thy neighbor's wife. Lo, what saith Saint Matthew in the Gospel, that whoso sees a woman to covet of his lust, he hath done lechery with her in his heart. Not only the deed of this sin is forbidden but eke the desire to do that sin. And if it be a foul thing a man to waste his catel on women, yet is it a fouler thing when that for such ordure women dispend upon men their catel and their substance.

The Stages of Sexual Attraction

(852) This is that other hand of the devil, with five fingers, to catch the people to his villainy. His first finger is the fool[ish] looking of the fool[ish] woman and of the fool[ish] man, that slays right as the basilisk slays folk by venom of his sight. The second finger is the villain's touching in wicked manner. And therefore saith Solomon, that whoso touches and handles a woman, he fares like the man that handles the scorpion, which stings and suddenly slays through his envenoming; or as whoso that touches warm pitch it shends [soils] his fingers. The third is foul words, which fares like fire, which right anon burns the heart. The fourth finger is kissing: and truly he were a great fool that would kiss the mouth of a burning oven or of a furnace; and more fools be they that kiss in villainy, for that mouth is the mouth of hell; and namely those old dotards holours, which will kiss, and smatter[defile] themselves, though they may nought do [can’t do anything]. Certes they be like to hounds; for a hound when he comes by the rosor [rosebush] or by other bushes, though so be that he may not piss, yet will he heave up his leg and make a countenance to piss.
Sex Within Marriage
And for that many a man weens [thinks] that he may not sin for no likerousness [sexual practice] that he doth with his wife, truly that opinion is false. God wot [knows] a man may slay himself with his own knife, 1 and make himself drunk of his own tun [cask]. A man should love his wife by discretion, patiently and attemprely [temperately], and then is she as though it were his sister. The fifth finger of the devil's hand is the stinking deed of lechery, and with his five fingers of lechery he grips [man] by the reins [loins] for to throw him into the furnace of hell, there as they shall have the fire and the worms that ever shall last, and weeping and wailing and sharp hunger and thirst and grimness of devils. Of lechery sourden [spring] divers species: as fornication, that is between man and woman which be not married, and is deadly sin, and against nature.

Rape
(868) Another sin of lechery is to bereave [rob] a maid of her maidenhead [virginity], for he that so doth, certes he casts a maiden out of the highest degree that is in this present life. For certes no more may maidenhead be restored than an arm that is smitten from the body may return again and wax [grow]. She may have [get] mercy, this wot [know] I well, if that she have will to do penitence, but never shall it be that she n’as [was not] corrupt.2

Adultery again
Avoutrie [adultery], in Latin, is for to say, approaching of another man's bed, through which those, that whilom [once] were one flesh, abandon their bodies to other persons. Of this sin, follow many harms: first, breaking of faith. This sin also is theft. Certes, this is the foulest theft that may be, when that a woman steals her body from her husband, and gives it to her holor [lover] to defoul it; and steals her soul from Christ, and gives it to the devil. This is a fouler theft than for to break a church and steal away the chalice, for these avouterers [adulterers] break the temple of God spiritually, and steal the vessel of grace; that is, the body and the soul. Soothly of this theft doubted [feared] greatly Joseph, 3 when that his lord's wife prayed him of villainy, when he said, “Lo, my lady, how my lord hath taken to me under my ward [control] all that he hath in this world, nor nothing of his is out of my power, but only ye that be his wife: and how should I then do this wickedness, and sin so horribly against God, and against my lord? God it forbid.”

1 In the Merchants Tale January says:
“A man may do no sinnē with his wifē,
Nor hurt himselfen with his ownē knife” (1839-40)

2 This is a particularly ugly example of blaming the victim. That it comes from an otherwise impeccable source only makes the assigning of blame more deplorable.

3 A reference to the Old Testament story of Joseph in Egypt. The wife of his master Putiphar tried to seduce him sexually, and when he refused, she accused him of sexual assault.
Some Social I1ls from Adultery

(882) God made marriage in Paradise in the estate of innocence, to multiply mankind to the service of God. Of which breaking come false heirs oft time, that wrongfully occupy folk's heritages. Of this breaking comes eke oft time that folk unaware [unknowingly] wed or sin with their own kindred.

Harlots, that haunt bordels [brothels] may be likened unto a common gong [public toilet] where as men purge their ordure [waste]. What say we also of putours [pimps] that live by the horrible sin of puterie [prostitution], and constrain [force] women to yield them a certain rent from their bodily puterie, yea, sometimes {he forces} his own wife or his child.

Understand also, that avoutrie is set in the ten commandments between theft and manslaughter, for it is the greatest theft; it is theft of body and of soul, and it is like to homicide, for it carves a-two [in two] and breaks a-two them that first were made one flesh. And therefore by the old law of God they should be slain, but the law of Jesus Christ is the law of pity, when he said to the woman that was found in avoutrie, and should have been slain with stones, as was their law; “Go,' said Jesus Christ, 'and have no more will to do sin”

Sexual Sin of those in Holy Orders who have vows of Chastity

(891) Yet be there more species of this cursed sin, as when that one of them is religious ¹, or else both, or of folk that be entered into orders [holy orders, i.e. priests], or hospitallers ²: and ever the higher that he is in orders, the greater is the sin. The things that greatly agregge [aggravate, i.e. make worse] their sin, is the breaking of their vow of chastity. Holy orders is chief of all the treasury of God and his special sign and mark of chastity, which is the most precious life that is; and these ordered [ordained] folk be specially titled [consecrated] to God, and of the special meiniie [fellowship] of God: for which (reason), when they do deadly sin, they be the special traitors of God and of his people; for they live by the people to pray for the people, and whiles they be such traitors, their prayers avail not to the people. Priests be as angels, by the dignity of their mystery. Soothly, the priest that haunts [practices] deadly sin, he may be likened to an angel of darkness transformed into an angel of light: he seems an angel of light, but forsooth [in truth] he is an angel of darkness. Them thinks [it seems to them] that they be free, and have no judge, no more than hath a free bull that takes which cow that him likes [pleases

¹ Member of a religious order.
² Members of a religious knightly order of laymen which had been founded to take care of the sick in the Holy Land, but who took part in crusades, and who sometimes also had made vows of chastity like priests or members of regular religious orders.
him] in the town. So fare they by women, for right as one free bull is enough for all a town, right so is a wicked priest corruption enough for. all a parish, or for all a country. These shrews [rascals] hold them not apaid of [not satisfied with] roasted flesh and sodden [boiled] with which the people feed them in great reverence, but they will have raw flesh, as folk's wives and their daughters;
and therefore have such priests and their lemmans [mistresses] also the malison [curse] of the court Christian [C. community], till they come to amendment.

 Immigration again
(904) The third species of avoutrie is sometimes betwixt a man and his wife, and that is when they take no regard in their assembling [intercourse] but only to their fleshly delight, and reckon that because they be married, all is good enough. But in such folk hath the devil power, for in their assembling they put Jesus Christ out of their heart, and give themselves to all ordure.¹

 Incest
The fourth species is of them that assemble [have sex with] with their kindred, or else with them with which their fathers or their kindred have dealt [sexually] in the sin of lechery. Parentale [kinship] is in two manners: either ghostly or fleshly: ghostly is for to deal with [have sex with] his godsibs [godparents or godchildren].

 Involuntary sexual manifestations
(912) Another sin appertains to lechery, that comes in sleeping, and this sin comes often to them that be maidens, and eke to them that be corrupt; and this sin men call pollution, which may not be without sin.²

 Remedium Luxuriae: Remedy for Lust
(915) Now comes the remedy against lechery, and that is generally chastity and continence that restrains all disordinate movings that come of fleshly talents [desires]; and this is in two manners: that is to say chastity in marriage, and chastity in widowhood.

¹ This is one of the more absurdly ascetic notions: that married people are committing some form of adultery if they have sexual intercourse for the relief and pleasure it gives both parties. They should always have something else, something “higher”, in mind. Some theologians, like Thomas Aquinas, did point out the absurdity of this view, clearly produced by a celibate cleric. But the idea persisted among some.

² Presumably the preacher means involuntary nocturnal emissions which occur during sleep. So even involuntary motions in sleep are not free from sin in his opinion. This is perhaps his most extreme judgement.
**Duties of Married Couple to each other**

Matrimony is lawful assembling of man and woman, that receive by virtue of this sacrament the bond through which they may not be departed [separated] in all their life. This is a full great sacrament. God made it (as I have said) in paradise, and would himself be born in marriage: and for to hallow [bless] marriage he was at a wedding where he turned water into wine, which was the first miracle that he wrought. The true effect of marriage cleanses fornication, and replenishes holy church of [with] good lineage, for that is the end [purpose] of marriage, and changes deadly sin into venial sin between them that be wedded. This is very marriage that was established by God: one man should have but one woman, and one woman but one man.

(922) Marriage is figured [betokens the union] betwixt Christ and holy church; and a man is head of the woman; — algate [at least] by ordinance it should be so;— for if a woman had more men than one, then should she have more heads than one, and that were an horrible thing before God; and also a woman might not please many folk at once: and also there should never be peace nor rest among them, for evereach [everyone] of them would ask his own right. And furthermore, no man should know his own engendrure [offspring] nor who should have his heritage.

(925) Now comes how that a man should bear him [conduct himself] with his wife, and namely in two things: in sufferance [tolerance] and in reverence, and this showed Christ when he first made woman. For he ne made her of the head of Adam, for she should not claim too great lordship; for there as the woman hath the mastery, she makes too much disarray. There need no examples of this. The experience that we have day by day ought enough suffice. Also certes, God made not woman of the foot of Adam, for she should not be holden [regarded] too low, for she cannot patiently suffer; but God made woman of the rib of Adam, for woman should be fellow unto man. Man should bear him [conduct himself] to his wife in faith, in truth, and in love, as saith Saint Paul, that a man should love his wife as Christ loved holy church, that loved it so well that he died for it; so should a man for his wife, if it were need.

Now how that a woman should be subject to her husband, that telleth Saint Peter; first in obedience. She should also serve him in all honesty, and be attempre [moderate] of her array

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1 Again it is hard to see how he could hold two such contradictory positions at once: that marriage is a sacrament, that is, a sanctifying thing, yet it permits and promotes sin, even if it is venial sin. Even though marriage has been, as he says, created by God and marked as a sacrament by the Church, theologians of his mind were determined to hold on to the idea that sex even within marriage is somehow wrong,. The Wife of Bath has scant respect for this point of view, and through her, Chaucer clearly voiced another viewpoint within the Church.

2 The Wife of Bath has a great deal to say about this too, and holds exactly the opposite view.
[clothes]. Saint Jerome saith, 'Wives that be appareled in silk and precious purple, ne may not clothe them in Jesus Christ.'

**Sex in Marriage again**
Then shall men understand, that for three things a man and his wife fleshly may assemble [copulate]. The first is, for the intent of engendrure [engendering] of children, for certes that is the cause final of matrimony. Another cause is, to yield each of them to other the debts of their bodies ¹. The third is, for to eschew [avoid] lechery. For she hath merit of chastity that yields to her husband the debt of her body, yea though it be against her liking, and the lust [desire] of her heart. Truly, scarcely may any of those be without venial sin, for the corruption and for the delight thereof. 'If they assemble only for amorous love, and for to accomplish their burning delight, they reck not how oft, soothly it is deadly sin.'²

**Chaste Widowhood**
(944) The second manner of chastity is for to be a clean[chaste] widow, and eschew the embracing of a man, and desire the embracing of Jesus Christ. These be those that have been wives, and have foregone [lost? given up?] their husbands, and eke women that have done lechery and been relieved [forgiven] by penarice. And certes, if that a wife could keep her(self) all chaste by license [permission] of her husband, so that she gave no cause nor no occasion that he aguilted ³, it were [would be] to her a great merit.

**Virginity**
The third manner of chastity is virginity, and it behoves that she be holy in heart, and clean of body; then is she the spouse of Jesus Christ. Virginity bore our Lord Jesus Christ, and (he) was himself virgin.

**Avoiding temptation**
(951) Another remedy against lechery is specially to withdraw such things as give occasion to that villainy, as ease [idleness], eating, and drinking. Sleeping long in great quiet is also a great nurse to lechery.

Another remedy against lechery is, that a man or a woman eschew [avoid] the company of them by which he doubts [expects] to be tempted. No man should trust in his own perfection, but [unless] he be stronger than Samson or holier than David or wiser than Solomon.

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¹ The church taught that in matrimony each partner owed the other sexual satisfaction when called upon. This is the debt.

² See n.2, p.38 above.

³ Provided that depriving him of sex at home does not drive him to commit sin elsewhere.
Now, after that I have declared you as I can of the seven deadly sins, and some of their branches, and the remedies, soothly, if I could, I would tell you the ten commandments, but so high doctrine [teaching] I let to divines [I leave to theologians].

Sequitur secunda pars Penitentiae

[Here follows the second part of Penance.]

How to make a full Confession or Shrift

(958) The second part of penitence stands in confession of mouth for sin in heart, in mouth, and in deed by the five Wits [senses], which be sight, hearing, smelling, tasting or savoring, and feeling [touch]. Thou shalt consider what thou art that dost the sin, whether thou be male or female, young or old, gentle or thrall [high born or low], free or servant, whole or sick, wedded or single, ordered or unordered,¹ wise or fool, cleric or secular[layman]; if she be of thy kindred, bodily or ghostly ²; if any of thy kindred have sinned with her or no, and many more things; whether it be done in fornication, or in avoutry [adultery], incest; with a virgin or not, and how long thou hast continued in sin.

The third circumstance is the place there thou hast done sin, whether in other men's houses, or in thine own or in church dedicated. For if the church be hallowed, and man or woman spill his kind [seed] within that place, by way of sin or by wicked temptation, the church is interdicted till it be reconciled by the bishop; and if it were a priest that did such villainy, the term of all his life he should no more sing mass; and if he did, he should do deadly sin every time.

The fourth circumstance is by which mediators, as by messengers, or to bear company with fellowship [out of good fellowship]; for many a wretch, to bear fellowship, will go to the devil of hell. Wherefore, they that egg {on} or consent to the sin, be partners of the sin, and of the damnation of the sinner.

(969) The fifth circumstance is, how many times that he hath sinned, if it be in his mind [can remember], and how oft he hath fallen. For he that oft falls in sin, waxes [grows] the more feeble to withstand sin, and sins the more lightly [easily], and the later [slower] ariseth, and is more slow to shrive [confess], and namely [especially] to him that has been his confessor. For folk, when they fall again to their old follies, either they forlete [abandon] their old confessor

¹ In a religious order or not.

² If she is related to you by blood; or by baptism i.e. godparent or godchild.
all utterly, or else they depart [divide] their shrift in divers [different] places; but soothly such departed shrift deserves no mercy of God for their sins.

The sixth circumstance is if he sin with a woman by force or by her own assent; or if the woman, maugre her head [against her will] have been enforced or no, this shall she tell, and whether it were for covetousness or poverty, and if it were by her procuring or no.

The seventh circumstance is in what manner he has done the sin, or how that she has suffered [permitted] what folk have done to her. And the same shall the man tell plainly, with all the circumstances, and whether he has sinned with common bordel [whorehouse] women or no, or done his sin in holy times, or in fasting times, by whose help or whose counsel, by sorcery or craft [trickery], all must be told. (so that) the priest that is thy judge, may the better be advised of his judgment in giving of penance, and that shall be after [according to] thy contrition.

For understand well, that after a man has defouled his baptism by sin, if he will come to salvation, there is no other way but by penance and shrift and satisfaction.

**Four Necessary conditions for a good, valid Confession**

(982) Then shall a man look and consider, that if he will make a true and a profitable confession, there must be four conditions. First, sorrowful bitterness of heart, and this condition of bitterness has five signs: The first is that confession, must be shamefast, not to cover nor hide his sin.

Another sign is humility in confession: of which saith Saint Peter, “Humble you under the might of God”. The hand of God is mighty in confession, for thereby God forgives thee thy sins, for he alone has the power. And this humility shall be in heart, and in sign outward; for right as he has humility to God in his heart, right so should he humble his body outward(ly) to the priest that sits in God’s place. Since that Christ is sovereign, and the priest mediator betwixt Christ and the sinner, then should not the sinner sit as high as his confessor, but kneel before him or at his feet, but if [unless] malady disturb [prevent] it. A man that has trespassed to a lord, and comes for to ask mercy and make his accord, and settes him down anon by the lord, men would hold him outrageous, and not worthy so soon for to have remission nor mercy.

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1 The author / translator does not have complete control of his pronouns at times, skipping from he to thou when speaking of the same person; and, as here, from he to she without adequate warning that there is a switch from talking of a man to a woman.

2 In Lent, for example, or on holy days.
The third sign is, that the shrift should be full of tears, if men may weep. Such was the confession of Saint Peter; for after he had forsaken Jesus Christ, he went out and wept full bitterly. The fourth sign is, that he lett not [not be prevented] for shame to show his confession. Such was the confession of Magdalene, that ne spared for no shame of them that were at the feast, to go to our Lord Jesus Christ and beknow [acknowledge] to him her sins. The fifth sign is, that a man or a woman be obedient to receive the penance that is enjoined.

The second condition of very [true] confession is, that be hastily [without delay] done: for if a man had a deadly wound, ever the longer that he tarried to warish [cure] himself, the more would it corrupt and hasten death, and also the wound would be the worse for to heal. And right so fares sin, that long time in a man is unshowed. Certes a man ought hastily [promptly] to show his sins for the longer that he tarrieth, the further he is from Christ. And if he abide to his last day, scarcely may he shrive him or remember him of sins or repent him, for the grievous malady of his death.

Shrift (requires) that he have in his mind the number and the greatness of his sins, and how long he has lain in sin; and that he be in steadfast purpose (by the grace of God) never eft [again] to fall into sin; and flee the occasions of sin to which he is inclined. Also, thou shalt shrive thee of all thy sins to one man, and not parcelmeal [piecemeal] to one man, and parcelmeal to another for shame or dread.

Also, the very [true] shrift asks certain conditions: that thou shrive thee by thy free will, for it is reason, that he that trespasses by his free will, that by his free will he confess his trespass;

Thou must also show thy sin by thy proper [own] mouth, and not by letter: for thou that hast done the sin, thou shalt have the shame thereof. Thou shalt not paint thy confession to cover the more thy sin; for then beguilest thou thyself, and not the priest: thou must tell it plainly, be it never so foul nor so horrible. Thou shalt eke shrive thee to a priest that is discreet to counsel thee: And certes, once a year at the least way, it is lawful to be houseled [to take communion], for soothly once a year all things in the earth renovelen.[renew themselves]

Explicit secunda pars penitentiae et sequitur tertia pars

Here ends the second part of penance and part three follows.

Making Satisfaction or Amends for Sin

The third part of Penance is satisfaction, and that stands most generally in almsdeeds
and in bodily pain. Now be there three manner of alms. A man has need of these things
generally: he has need of food, of clothing and of herberow [shelter]; he has need of charitable
counselling and visiting in prison and in malady, and sepulture [burying] of his dead body. ¹ And
if thou mayest not visit the needful in prison in thy person, visit them with thy message and thy
gifts.

Almsgiving
This alms shouldest thou do of thy proper [personal] things, and privily [privately] if thou
mayest; but nevertheless, if thou mayest not do it privily, thou shalt not forbear [neglect] to do
alms, though men see it, so [provided] that it be not done for thanks of his world, but only to
have thank of Jesus Christ. For, as witnesses Saint Matthew: 'A city may not be hid that is set
on a mountain, nor men light not a lantern to put it under a bushel, but set it upon a candlestick,
to light the men in the house: right so shall, your light lighten before men, that they may see your
good works, and glorify your Father that is in heaven.'

Prayer
(1038) Now as for to speak of bodily pain, it stands in prayers, in wakings [vigils], in fasting,
and in virtuous teaching of orisons [prayers].
In the orison of the Pater Noster [Our Father] ² has Jesus Christ enclosed most things; it is more
digne [worthy] than any other prayer: for that [because] Jesus Christ himself made it; and it is
short, for it should be could [learned] the more lightly [easily], and to hold it the more easy in
heart. When thou prayest that God should forgive thee thy guilts, as thou forgivest them that
have aguilted thee, be well ware that thou be not out of charity. This holy orison amenuses eke
[also diminishes] venial sin, and therefore it appertains specially to penitence.

Fasting
(1049) Ye shall understand also, fasting stands in three things: in forbearing [doing without]
bodily meat [food] and drink ³, in forbearing of worldly jollity, and in forbearing of deadly sin.
And thou shalt understand also, that God ordained [prescribed] fasting, and to fasting appertains
four things. Largeness[generosity] to poor folk; gladness of heart spiritual; not to be angry nor
annoyed, nor grouch for he fasts [because he is/you are/ fasting]; and also reasonable hour for to

¹ The usual meaning of alms is giving some of one’s goods to the poor. The author extends it to include several of
the so called Corporal Works of Mercy, like visiting the sick and prisoners and burying the dead.

² The reference is to the Lord’s Prayer.

³ Fasting generally meant, not abstaining from food entirely, but cutting down strictly and for an extended
period on the amount eaten, or on the number of meals per day, or the kinds of food eaten; for example, abstaining
from flesh meat or eggs in Lent. Here, of course, the preacher is extending the meaning of fasting rather
arbitrarily. The syntax is also a little clumsy.
eat by measure, that is to say, a man shall not eat in untime [between meals?] nor sit the longer at the table.

**Bodily Discipline**

Then shalt thou understand, that bodily pain stands in discipline [severe bodily self punishment]: in wearing of hair[shirts] or [either] of stamin [coarse cloth] or of habergeons [mail shirts] on their naked flesh, for Christ's sake; but 'ware thee well [be v. careful] that such manner penances ne make not thine heart bitter or angry ; for better is to cast away thine hair[shirt] than to cast away sweetness of our Lord Jesus Christ. And therefore saith Saint Paul: ‘ Clothe you[rselves] in hearts of misericord [mercy], debonairty [kindness], sufferance [patience], and such manner of clothing.” of which Jesus Christ is more pleased than with the hairs or habergeons.

Discipline is eke [also] in scourging with yards [rods], in kneeling, in tribulation, in suffering patiently wrongs that be done to thee, and eke in patient suffering of maladies, or losing of worldly catel [property], or wife, or child, or other friends.

**Things that impede Penitence**

(1057) Then shalt thou understand which things disturb penance, and this is in four manners; that is dread, shame, hope, and wanhope, that is, desperation [despair]. And for to speak first of dread, for which he weens [thinks] that he may suffer [endure] no penance, thereagainst is remedy for to think that bodily penance is but short and little at regard of [compared to] the pain of hell, that is so cruel and so long that it lasts without end.

(1060) Now against the shame that a man has to shrive him [confess], should a man think, that he has not been ashamed to do foul things, certes him ought not to be ashamed to do fair things, that is, confessions. A man should also think that God sees and knows all his thoughts, and all his works, and to Him may nothing be hid nor covered. Men should eke remember them of the shame that is to come at the day of doom [judgement], to them that be not penitent in this present life; for all the creatures in heaven, and in earth, and in hell, shall see apertly [openly] all that they hide in this world.

Now for to speak of the hope of them that be negligent and slow to shrive them: that stands in two manners. One is, that he hopes for to live long and for to purchase much riches for his delight, and then he will shrive him: and, he may, as him seems [seems to him] , then timely enough come to shrift. Another is, the surquedrie [presumption] that he has in Christ's mercy. Against the first vice, I shall think that our life is in no sikerness [certainty], and that all the riches in this world be in adventure [at risk], and pass as a shadow on a wall.

Wanhope [despair] is in two manners. The first wanhope comes of that he deems [because he
thinks] that he has sinned so greatly and so oft and so long lain in sin, that he shall not be saved. Certes against that cursed wanhope should he think that the passion of Jesus Christ is more strong for to unbind than sin is strong for to bind. Against the second wanhope he shall think, that as often as he falleth, he may arise again by penitence and though he never so long has lain in sin, the mercy of Christ is always ready to receive him to mercy. Against that wanhope that he deems he should not long persevere in goodness, he shall think, that he (the sinner) shall have strength of the help of Jesus Christ, and of all his church, and of the protection of angels, if him list [if he wishes].

**The Rewards**

(1076) Then shall men understand what is the fruit of penance; and after the words of Jesus Christ, it is an endless bliss of heaven; there joy has no contrariosity of woe nor grievance; there all harms be passed of this present life; there is sikerness [safety] from the pains of hell; there is the blissful company that rejoice them evermore each of other’s joy; there the body of man, that whilom [once] was foul and dark, is more clear than the sun; there the body that whilom was sick and frail, feeble and mortal, is immortal and so strong and so whole that there ne may nothing appeire [impair] it; there is neither hunger, nor thirst, nor cold, but every soul (is) replenished with the sight of the perfect knowing of God. This blissful regne [kingdom] may men purchase by poverty spiritual; the glory by lowliness; the plenty of joy by hunger and thirst, and rest by travail [work]; and life by death and mortification of sin.

Here Takes the Maker of this Book his Leave

Chaucer’s Retraction immediately follows