

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

HUBERD AND THE PHARISEES:  
CHAUCER'S ANTIFRATERNALISM  
IN THE FRIAR'S TALE

BY

GARY GLEN PETSNIK

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## ABSTRACT

Fraternal Orders during the Middle Ages contributed to the world such great philosophers and teachers as Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, Roger Bacon and Duns Scotus, but to the realm of literature the friars bequeathed an image of hypocrisy satirized by numerous writers. So popular was this antifraternial criticism that by the time of Chaucer a literary stereotype of friars had evolved, and it is this stereotype rather than actual contemporary friars which serves as the model for Chaucer's creation of Friar Huberd in the Canterbury Tales. Chaucer closes his portrait in the General Prologue with an ironically simple statement: "This worthy lymytour was cleped Huberd" (269). Considering the catalogue of morally objectionable actions attributed to the Friar, Chaucer's choice of the word "worthy" satirically undercuts Huberd's own view of his worth, while the title of "lymytour" emphasizes with equally effective satire the Friar's selfish mendicant activities rather than his religious ministrations. Finally, the Friar's name alludes to Hubert the kite, the hypocritical confessor from the Old French Renart cycle. These subtly succinct words about Huberd summarize the main charges levelled against friars in the Middle Ages and reveal Chaucer's antifraternial sentiment.

Since a close relationship exists between Chaucer's pilgrims and the stories which they relate, it is imperative that the Friar's Tale be interpreted with regard to its hypocritical narrator. Scholars investigating anti-fraternal literature, though, have focused upon the Summoner's Tale and largely neglected Huberd's tale because it exhibits no overt evidence of antifraternalism. Nevertheless, this thesis shows that the Friar's Tale occupies an important place in the antifraternal literary tradition. Through his artistic adaptation in the Friar's Tale of imagery originated by the great critic of friars, William of St. Amour, Chaucer builds upon the antifraternal structure, although his plainest criticism of friars follows in the Summoner's Tale.

To demonstrate Chaucer's role in the antifraternal tradition it is necessary first to examine the rise of the tradition itself. Through his imagery William of St. Amour responded to a number of historical developments affecting in particular the University of Paris, but also the clergy throughout Europe. The first chapter of this thesis summarizes events which precipitated William's attack, presents the rudiments of his antifraternal imagery, and shows how subsequent critics such as FitzRalph and Wyclif were influenced by his work.

The second chapter illustrates the transfer of William's imagery to literature and the accompanying

amplification of his ideas. Foremost among the works examined is Jean de Meun's Roman de la Rose since Chaucer's Huberd bears significant resemblance to Jean's Faux-Semblant. The remainder of the chapter analyzes anti-fraternal details incorporated into Huberd's portrait.

Chapter III explores the Friar's Tale to show that Huberd's vicious attack of summoners contradicts the display of Christian charity proper to a friar and to suggest that Huberd is himself deserving of condemnation. In the tale Chaucer extends William's primary source for antifraternal imagery, Matthew 23. Not only does Chaucer imply, like William, that friars are as hypocritical as the Pharisees from this Scriptural text; he further suggests that they, like the Pharisees, block the path to salvation for themselves and others, and illustrates this notion imaginatively in Huberd's tale.

For such infernal activity the friars merit hell, and this damnable residence becomes the dominant image in the Summoner's Tale, briefly discussed in the Conclusion to the thesis. The Friar's Tale, ultimately, is linked inextricably to the antifraternalism expressed in Huberd's portrait and the Summoner's Tale, and it presents Chaucer's artistically unique contribution to the realm of anti-fraternal literature.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	Page
I. THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF MEDIEVAL ANTIFRATERNAL IMAGERY . . . . .	1
II. THE TRANSFER OF WILLIAM'S FRIAR-PHARISEES TO LITERATURE . . . . .	20
III. THE <u>FRIAR'S TALE</u> : BLOCKING THE WAY TO SALVATION . . . . .	45
CONCLUSION . . . . .	74
NOTES . . . . .	84
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	92

## CHAPTER I

### THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF MEDIEVAL ANTIFRATERNAL IMAGERY

Undercurrents of tension and ill-concealed malice pervaded the atmosphere at the University of Paris throughout much of the mid-thirteenth century. The Dominican Friars had established schools independent of the university, and the Franciscans followed suit after 1225. Although St. Francis had warned his early disciples that scholarly pursuits posed the threat of the sin of pride,<sup>1</sup> the greater body of friars had come to realize that the process of winning souls for Christ often demanded skill in the powers of intellectual persuasion, an accomplishment which could be attained through extensive theological instruction and practice in the art of disputation. Dedicated to their goal of self-improvement through scholastic learning, the friars instituted rigorous training programs which became the envy even of budding scholars bound for university. So popular were lectures by the friars that attendance at other colleges diminished, and secular masters began to feel a tug at their purse strings as tuition fees increasingly eluded them.

Students were not alone in flocking to the friars, though, for "in 1225 four doctors of the university took the



[Franciscan] habit, including the Englishman Haymo of Faversham,"<sup>2</sup> followed shortly by Alexander of Hales; while the Dominicans acquired the services of John of St. Giles.<sup>3</sup> The doctors' act of switching allegiance seriously threatened the control exercised by the secular masters over university affairs; for while fraternal schools were independent of the university, the friars had, through an early kinship and subsequent affiliation with the faculty of theology, been granted the right to vote on issues pertaining to the university as a whole.<sup>4</sup> With the loss of their doctors, the seculars also lost voting power in the faculty of theology, where by 1254 only three of fifteen chairs remained to secular masters. Intensifying the seculars' concern over their waning powers, a decree by Pope Innocent IV on May 30, 1250 commanded the chancellor of the university to confer a licence in theology on all qualified students including those who neglected to apply. Since many friars had until this time been interested primarily in the education they received rather than in the degree licensing them to participate in the business of the university, the papal statute now provided for an influx of fraternal power to the extent that the friars could freely chair the faculty without interference from the seculars.

In addition, the secular masters, fighting on behalf of their students in constant disputes with the town over uncomfortable living conditions and extortionate market prices, faced the foe alone; for the friars refused to cooperate with

the seculars by suspending lectures as a pressure tactic against the townspeople. When the friars failed to support the university in a similar clash with the town in 1253, they were expelled by the seculars, but reinstated by Innocent IV. The Pope granted one concession to the seculars by finally endorsing "the right of the university to raise money to support William of St. Amour, its proctor in Rome, by a pro rata tax on all masters and scholars."<sup>5</sup> This victory for the seculars, however, was short-lived since Alexander IV subsequently voiced papal support for the friars by declaring that in future a two-thirds majority vote by each of the faculties would be mandatory on decisions to suspend lectures. Through their numbers in the faculty of theology the friars possessed power of veto on all university issues, including the mighty threat of suspension which constituted the seculars' main lever on the townspeople. Amid threats by the seculars to dissolve the university in retaliation against the papal statute which awarded such undue control to a minority group, riots ensued. The friars, who in theory remained outside the jurisdiction of the university proper, in reality frequently found themselves victimized along with seculars by hostile townspeople. By attempting over a long period to enjoy their independence at the university, the friars succeeded only in provoking the wrath of the seculars who questioned the worth of retaining a second body of educators, especially a body whose insurgent power

threatened the prestigious position formerly enjoyed by the seculars alone.

Sharing the seculars' wrath and inveighing against the worth of the friars who seemed always to curry papal favour, parish clergy throughout Europe also protested against usurpation of rights. The friars had been awarded power to hear confession and give absolution, lucrative privileges, and these activities began to disrupt the flow of money into parish coffers. Harboring equally profound fears about the alarming increase in the number of churches under construction by friars, and about the friars' refusal to pay tithes on their land, a group of German bishops appealed to Pope Gregory, who replied in support of the friars with his bull Nimis iniqua of August 28, 1231.<sup>6</sup> Although the suffering clergy openly voiced the belief that a second organized religious body, such as that of the friars, was redundant, they could do little to alter the decisions of popes who sanctioned the activities of their minions.

The friars, however, trod on less solid theological ground with their practice of selling letters of fraternity which permitted layfolk to be buried in fraternal habit and supposedly to be assured of a place in heaven.<sup>7</sup> Invariably, legacies from benefactors increased, again to the financial detriment of parish clergy. If the friars' special friendship with the pope provoked clerical animosity, their claimed ambassadorship to God and stewardship of His

heavenly mansion could arouse only suspicions of pride and hypocrisy verging on heresy. Innocent IV felt obliged in 1254 to impose "extensive restrictions on the mendicants' rights of preaching, hearing confessions, celebrating mass, and officiating at burials,"<sup>8</sup> but Alexander IV, always the friend of the friars, removed the restrictions when he took office. Resentment and antagonism towards the friars prevailed among secular masters and clergy allied in a common cause against an upstart group which threatened the supremacy which they claimed through historical precedence and painstaking labour. Had the friars presented a unified front they might have continued to escape the severest thrusts of opponents who challenged their worth, but contention was rife amongst the friars themselves.

Of the four main orders of friars in medieval Europe--Austinians, Carmelites, Dominicans and Franciscans--the Franciscans arouse most interest and demand most attention due to their colourful and stormy history. In contrast to St. Dominic, the staid, capable administrator and founding father of the Dominicans, St. Francis exhibited an overtly passionate nature and idealistic spirit which refused, impractically, to acknowledge the human needs and shortcomings of his followers. Subjected to Francis' nigh impossible demands--his insistence upon absolute poverty to the point of undue physical hardship and his injunction against learning--the Franciscan Order necessarily faced internal discontent and placed itself in danger of

criticism for its decaying standards. The basic premises upon which Francis founded his order were long the occasion for bitter disputes among the friars, and it was only a matter of time before enemies from without mercilessly seized upon the same issues to challenge the friars' very right to exist.

Facilitating the cause of the friars' later opponents, several papal bulls of the thirteenth century neatly circumvented Francis' argument for maintaining poverty as a primary condition of the Franciscan Rule. In 1229, a mere twenty years after papal approval was granted for the founding of the Order, Pope Gregory IX issued the bull Quo elongati relaxing the first Rule by allowing "spiritual friends" to hold property on behalf of the friars and by arguing that the friars' "use" of goods did not contravene the stipulation against "possession" or ownership.<sup>9</sup> A series of similar documents followed, culminating in the decree Ordinem vestrum of November 14, 1245, in which Innocent IV extended fraternal privileges to permit the holding of money by the friends for the friars' "necessity" and "convenience."<sup>10</sup> Subsequent bulls were issued after a serious controversy arose concerning the theological and scriptural evidence for and against the notion of Christ's complete poverty.

Opposed to papal interference and determined utterly to adhere to the spirit of Francis' original precepts, a number of discontented friars banded together into a sect

known as the Spiritual Franciscans, an extreme action which threatened to create a lasting rift in the Order. The Spirituals were aided in their efforts by the strong leadership of John of Parma, Minister General of the Franciscans from 1248 to 1257, but the remaining majority of friars advocated further relaxation of the Rule and continuance of fraternal privileges. Although John's humility and genuine concern for the well-being of the whole Order prevented his being branded a radical, his allegiance to and promulgation of the controversial doctrines of Joachim of Fiore guaranteed his decline in popularity.<sup>11</sup> With the publication at Paris in 1254 of the Introductorius in Evangelium Eternum, a Joachist tract written by the Franciscan Spiritual Gerard of Borgo San Donnino, the Spiritual movement was clearly demonstrated as bordering on heresy.

Joachim developed his new theology before the end of the twelfth century, prior to the founding of the fraternal orders. Interpreting history tropologically as consisting of three phases correspondent to the three Persons of the Trinity, Joachim's Eternal Evangel conformed to traditional interpretation of the Scriptures in associating Old Testament events with the age of the Father, and New Testament times, including the period of the church fathers, with the age of the Son. But Joachim departed from accepted teachings in his notion of a third phase, the age of the Holy Spirit, in which the human duality of body and soul would be ultimately resolved in a transcendent and

totally spiritual entity. This age, warned Joachim with apocalyptic vision, was imminent, to begin in 1260 with the advent of Antichrist. Joachim exercised great interpretative license in claiming fantastically that "two new religious Orders living in apostolic poverty" would arise from the chaos and corruption of the Church "to inaugurate the new era in which there would be no need for authoritative institutions, since men would now live according to the Spirit of God."<sup>12</sup> The organized Church, then, would cease to function in this third age of the world.

To the Franciscan Spiritual Gerard, the Orders heralded by Joachim's apocalyptic work signified precisely the Franciscans and Dominicans. Consequently, the Spiritu-als were incited to regard their persecution by opposing members of the Franciscan Order as a testing ground for their glorious future mission, and as a tribulation divinely foreordained. Although Joachim's teachings had been severely distorted by the fanatical Gerard, such was the indignation of seculars and clerics (supposedly doomed to extinction) that all Joachist sympathizers became suspected of heresy. John of Parma's leadership as Minister General of his Order and his untimely espousal of Joachim's doctrines ensured that the Franciscans suffered the brunt of the attack.<sup>13</sup> Humble friars and fanatics alike were soon to be derided for their presumptuous claims to the position of greatest importance in the spiritual kingdom, and censured for the worthlessness of their existence as a religious

organization.

Hastening home from the papal curia in Rome to assume responsibility for spearheading the retaliatory movement of the seculars against the friars, William of St. Amour took advantage of the Joachist controversy to publish De Antichristo et eiusdem ministris and Tractatus brevis de periculis novissimorum temporum,<sup>14</sup> which depicted the friars not as the saving religious orders but as the precursors of Antichrist. William wisely used the friars' own weapons in waging his battle. As the friars pointed to Scripture to justify their mendicant life, so William replied with Scripture to refute their arguments. In a detailed explanation of William's method of "polemical exegesis" employed throughout the De periculis, Penn Rodion Szittyta warns that William misleadingly fuses Biblical with contemporary history:

The result is the crystallization of the image, and a tendency on William's part to foist upon the friars characteristics of the Biblical type rather than the other way around. To put it more meta-physically, what begins as a sign or a symbol comes to take on a reality of its own; for William the Biblical type comes to have a reality more pressing than that of his own flesh-and-blood enemies.<sup>15</sup>

William's elaborate scheme of imagery, although it may have strayed from the truth, supplied fuel for antimendicant fire throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

The central attack in William's De periculis and related works focuses upon an extended comparison of the friars to three sets of Scriptural figurae: the Pharisees,



the pseudo-apostles referred to by St. Paul, and the ministers of Antichrist foretold in Old and New Testament prophecies alike. Of primary concern to the secular movement was the endeavour to prove the hypocrisy of the friars' intentions in preaching and teaching, hence the particular utility of the twenty-third chapter of Matthew concerning the hypocritical Pharisees. "It is clearly to the controversy over the friars' magisterial chairs that William alludes in the De Pariseo, when he includes the desire to be called 'master' as one of the signs by which religious hypocrites like the Pharisees can be recognized,"<sup>16</sup> while the friars' designs on preaching from the pulpits evoke for him memories of the Pharisees' similar desires to secure for themselves the best seats during worship at the synagogue. William further compares the Pharisees' enjoyment of places of honour at feasts to the friars' hypocritical delight in fine foods, contravening vows of abstinence and fasting. While this detail about feasting is an amplification of the Scriptural text, William carries his antimendicant enthusiasm even further, for he asserts that the Pharisees, like their Franciscan posterity, walked barefoot.

More importantly, the friars were loudly denounced by William as false apostles for their fundamental claim to be imitators of Christ's poverty. Scripture, William argued, demonstrated beyond a doubt that Judas Iscariot had custody of the loculi, or purse, to provide for the common needs of Christ and His disciples. While William's

assertion sparked decades of theological disputation which prompted a flood of papal bulls each contradicting and invalidating the other,<sup>17</sup> the question of the friars' mendicancy was more tactfully handled. After declaring that civil law permitted only the aged and infirm to beg, and that both Christ and Paul had commissioned the apostles to earn their daily bread by ministering to the people, William accused the friars of preaching covetously for material gain, like the pseudo-apostles described in the Pauline letters,<sup>18</sup> a charge supported in full by the clergy. With reference to abuse of preaching privileges by the friars, William also relied on Paul's warnings against false teachers who attempted to lead the people astray and who prided themselves on their eloquent, but specious, language, an attribute associated with hypocrisy and the sin of avarice. Finally, the false apostles were depicted as "carnal men, attracted to this world, and sometimes given over to luxuria,"<sup>19</sup> or lechery, fond of lodging with the rich and feigning piety, all of which Szittyá advises may have been linked to the friars purely by imaginative extension of William's Scriptural images.

The war waged by William on the third major battle front, however, over the apocalyptic warnings of temporal invasions by the servants of Antichrist, derived from no figment of William's imagination, but from the prominence of the Spirituals and their Joachist heresies. William considered any attempt to diminish the significance of the

Gospel of Christ as an act of blasphemy prompted by Antichrist, and the Eternal Evangel surely fell into this category. Since apocalyptic Scripture foretold the appearance of false prophets within the Church itself during the last days, William conveniently seized upon Gerard's work to identify the friars with these false prophets. Thus, he branded the friars as penetrantes domos, impostors who forced entry into men's houses, and, more horribly, into their souls "by hearing confession, becoming spiritual counselors to the weak, probing souls for secrets" and leading men "away from those having duly constituted spiritual authority over them, that is, the Bishops and the parish clergy."<sup>20</sup> The friars' defense of their worth as spiritual advisors, then, was forcefully denounced by William, who enjoyed the enviable advantage of resting his case upon the securest of authorities, Scripture itself.

William had censured the friars for their hypocrisy, questioned their right to exist and pronounced them minions of Antichrist, devastating assaults for which he was excommunicated in June, 1256 and exiled from France. His physical presence, however, was no longer vital to the continuance of strife between mendicants and seculars, for to his followers William bequeathed the vivid imagery which captivated the imaginations of medieval writers critical of all fraternal Orders, despite arguments in defense of their brothers by such brilliant scholars as the Franciscan St. Bonaventure and the Dominican Thomas Aquinas.<sup>21</sup> Disputes

between the friars and seculars surfaced periodically, in the flurry of tracts between 1269 and 1271 over Clement IV's bull of 1267 granting anew the friars' pastoral rights, the suspension of lectures by the university in 1271 and again in 1282, and the struggle between Boniface VIII and Philippe le Bel in the 1290's and early 1300's for control of the university.<sup>22</sup> Although none of these conflicts attained the proportions of the historic battle begun by William, each successive issue served to emphasize the fact that the friars would incessantly face the challenges of demonstrating and justifying their indispensability to medieval society.

Antifraternal hostility on the continent subsequently spread to England. Oxford entered the conflict in 1303 when "the friars were required to perform their examinatory sermons--decreed in 1253 as a condition of incepting in theology--in St. Mary's away from their own convents by the river" and subject to disrupting noises.<sup>23</sup> Strengthening their fledgling powers, the seculars next forbade the friars to preach directly to members of the theological faculty, then decreed that all bachelors lecturing on the Bible would first be compelled to lecture for a year on the Sentences of Peter Lombard, which were outlawed in the fraternal colleges. When Hugh of Sutton, a friar, was expelled for refusing to comply, the friars complained of ostracism and demanded review of the problem by a joint commission of two seculars and two friars. The statutes

were upheld by the commission's verdict in 1313, but altered by John XXII in 1317, provoking an alliance of the King and the Archbishop of Canterbury against the Pope. During William's time such an alliance would have been ineffective, but since then the English monarchy had gradually succeeded in undermining papal authority in England. Under such pressure from church and state, in 1320 the friars in England submitted to the demands of the university.

But these early troubles in Oxford probably contributed little to the major conflict which erupted during the 1350's. Richard FitzRalph, the instigator, largely ignored the question of the friars' inception and drew instead upon the historic arguments of William of St. Amour to abuse the friars through his controversial sermons. The motivation for FitzRalph's resumption of an old battle is explained perhaps by the knowledge that FitzRalph's influential friend, Bishop Grandisson of Exeter, had been a student at Paris during a dispute lasting from 1312 to 1317 and led by Jean de Pouilli, strong successor to William. Grandisson "was engaged in a long and bitter struggle with the Franciscan friars of Devonshire during the years 1354 and 1355" and, significantly, "FitzRalph's first quarrel with the mendicant friars occurs a year or two after his visit to Exeter."<sup>24</sup>

FitzRalph first preached against fraternal interference "with diocesan administration and discipline"<sup>25</sup> on July 5, 1350 in his sermon Unusquisque, but soon addressed the problem of the growing numbers of friars who were