CHAPTER II

RELIGIOUS WOMEN

The next most important class embraces the Ecclesiastics like Cecilia and the Prioress. Queen Zenobia of The Monk's Tale marries to ensure a progeny and exposes extreme resignation that causes her to tolerate her state with no choice. The other tales refer to the women as the cause of man's fall. The women of the religious order used to moral and religious discipline exhibit utmost restraint, piety and Christian tolerance in suffering. They do not curse the wrong doer but rather advise men towards attaining salvation of the soul. Cecilia expresses extreme courage in propagating the cause of the Lord and teaching men to be brave in the face of tribulations and undaunting in the face of suffering. With determination and courage men can conquer the fear of death, pain and enjoy eternal bliss in heaven. The Priorress is a medieval nun with a difference. In her eternal pursuit of the right appearance whereby she can observe religious dictates and yet look like a lady, she misses the right balance altogether. She behaves like a secular lady but her tale speaks of divine mercy and the power of God over evil. The widow suffers perpetually at the loss of her son. The oneness of God is the philosophy. Her only hope in life is the rearing of the son and her only support in life is the trust in God. The widow is poor but inner riches and moral enlightenment keep her and her son perpetually happy. Being all alone in this world, she has no choice in life but to learn to be happy and teach her son to be happy, causing her to lead the life that she leads.
Cecilia is the only character truly following a life of her order and dedicating it to the cause of God and giving it up without regret. She believes in heavenly redemption and persuades her husband and his brother to give up their lives for the cause of God. Her didactic mission cause her to do so. Faith, wisdom, mercy and perseverance are all that she illustrates. She dares like a true missionary to face the King and other heads as she is not afraid of the truth. She suffers as she can explain the truth of divine power and relevance of suffering for the atonement of mankind through a personal example. She fosters eternal faith in men and bequeaths everything to the church. As the Church continues to perpetuate her faith, she continues to live as a pure soul long after she has been killed.

This chapter deals with the women of the religious order only. But it is to be remembered that women like the Prioress or Cecilia are not born as 'religious' women but they have adopted a pious mission of their own Free Will. Cecilia exercises Free Will in determining her order as she has a mission in life and she is a chosen one. That is her Destiny. She is born in the order of the Nobility but chooses a religious and non-secular life dedicated to God and the cause of mankind. In the case of the Prioress, we do not know how or why she chooses to be a prioress or, if, she is compelled to be one or not. In the Medieval society women without a guardian were compelled to embrace a religious life, if, they intended to live with dignity. Again, the window in The Prioress's Tale is secular having a son, but leads a life of piety having full faith in God and her sufferings are an extension of the divine trial that women of the religious order have to face. Thus Chaucer on one hand selects women of the nobility and the housewives in the order
and they lead a religious life in spite of their secular origins. On the other hand he tries to focus on the motive for selecting a religious order, which is true missionary zeal in the case of Cecilia, faith in God in the case of the widow and most importantly, could be a compulsion in the case of the Prioress. The poet might have made a suggestion subtly, but the true cause for courting a religious life is not stated in the case of the Prioress who appears somewhat secular in her appearances and manners. Her tale perhaps brings out the fact that religious tales stated by habit cannot suppress the secular attitude in an individual. The order followed, if not pursued voluntarily, may prove to be an only alternative or a sort of punishment leading to a dignified livelihood as a consolation. Destiny hand in hand with Chance plays an undercurrent role in determining individual life. The widow has no choice but to lead that kind of a life as she has no husband, as chance would have it. Divine will has determined a religious life for Cecilia. Destiny tries to shape her life. Thus whatever they decide, that appears to be Free Will as dictated by Divine will and Destiny. How else can Cecilia have a guardian angel? Why else does she marry if she has a religious mission in life? These are questions answered by the will of God and Destiny as Cecilia is born with a mission, the widow is singled out to suffer. Her consolation is that her son is blessed by God. Religious faith helps her to suffer. Cecilia is successful in her mission. In spite of her secular ways, the Prioress narrates tales, true to her order, which express that Divine Justice comes to them in one way or other.

The Franklin’s Tale exposes the character of Dorigen who shines in her human virtues, but is always a character of flesh and blood and down to
the earth, a character that exists in real life. But Constance, in The Man of Law's Tale close to the tale of the second nun, exposes virtues that make her look imaginary, unreal, not cut out for this life. Griselda in The Clerk's Tale is a lifeless character who forsakes all her maternal values and duties for the master, her husband. In this big world, women have often forsaken husbands for the benefit of their children. But she acts like the most unnatural mother who allows her babies to be carried away even under the impression that they could be killed by her husband, Walter.

In The Second Nuns Tale, Cecilie, a true nun, sacrifices her life for the cause of the Great God. Hence the values that she shows do not look unexpected, though rarely shown by her order. As the second nun starts narrating her tale inspired by her preachings, she explains the meaning of the name "Cecilie", meaning "hevenes lilie" standing for "Chaste Virginity", "Whytnesse" for "Constancy", "grene" for "conscience" and "good fame" and her name bears the scent and sweetness. "Cecilia" may be taken as "the way to blinde" to spread holiness and heaven's glory and "lia" for ceaseless labour and address. Her life is dedicated to the cause of God and the means of preaching the masses. Faith, wisedom, mercy, perseverance are all that she spreads with "Charitee full bringte", and overcomes all difficulties in the path:

"This mayden bright Cecilie, as hir lyf seith,
Was comen of Romayns, and of noble kinde." (Il 120 – 121)
for we find that nobility usually comes from the good breeding. She prays all the time:

"Off Crist, and bar his gospel in hir minde,
She never cessed" (ll 123 – 124),

"Of hir preyere, and god to love and drede
"Biseking him to kepe: hir maydenhede" (ll 125 – 126)

But following the tradition she is married to Valerian but never leads a life of a wife. It is this marriage that helps her to become active in her preachings and her husband becomes her follower and is soon killed for the cause. She has "no bonds" left as most women of this order face in life.

"She ful devout and humble in hir corage.
Under his rope of gold, that sat ful fayre,
Had next hir flesh y-clad hir in an heyre". (ll 131 – 133)

She is being cautious making a calculated move to keep a double protective covering as a standby in case she is unable to preserve herself, at least, she will get some time for an alternative. But the whole thing depends on the man, where she is helpless. Hence she prays to the Almighty:

"O lord, my soule and eek may body gye
Unwemmed, lest that I confounded be? (ll 136 – 137)

Still she has to face what every women faces by the tradition:

"the night cam, and to bedde most she gon" (l 141)
Cecile has the heart to explain things to her husband. Not knowing how he will react, Cecilie makes him promise not to reveal “Ye swere ye shul me nat biwreye” (l 147) and explain to him how:

“I have an angle which that loveth me,
That with greet love, where-so I wake or slepe,
Is redy ay my body for to kepe” (l 152 – 154)

And if, Valerian touches her as a husband, he will face the angel

“That ye me touché or love in vileinye,
He right anon wol slee yow with the dede,
And in your youthe thus ye shulden dye;
And if that ye in clene love me gye,
He wol yow loven as me, for your clennesee,
And shewen you his joye and his brightnesse.” (ll 156 – 161)

The kind of pure and passionless love that the angel will allow is not granted by husband, as such wives “suffer” in silence. Why does she marry then? This is a question that can be answered later when her husband and his brother follow her path and they are destined by Divine Will to be united into a mission for the masses. Perhaps he intends to set an example that a true missionary zeal will not stop an individual from performing for the good of mankind. Family ties cannot hold him back if he is true to his cause, he can cater to the family duties as well as work for the common good of mankind. On further enquiry, Cecilie, directs her husband to seek Urban and
be baptized by him and then he can see the angel. Saint Urban baptizes him and Valerian finds,

"An old man, clad in whyte clothes clere,
That hadde a book with lettre of Golde in honed,
"And gan biforn Valerian to stonde" (II 210 -213)

Valerian falls down in dread but is raised by Urban and he reads out

'Oo Lord, Oo feith, oo god with-outen mo,
Oo Cristendom, and fader of alle also,
Above alle and overal everywhere' --
This words al with gold y-writen were". (II 207 – 210)

Thus forsaking his passion and vulgar ideas of love, he goes home where he finds Cecilie with the angel who fetches two "corones" one made of "lily\(^3\) flower" which is given to her and the other of "rose"\(^3\) given to Valerian. They are advised,

"With body clene and with unwemmed thoght
Kepeth ay wel thise corones" (II 225 – 226)

Made out of heavenly flowers they will not perish but continue to give an ethereal essence and inspire them with aesthetic piety. Tiburce, Valerian's brother, on his brother's request finds the same grace of God after baptism\(^4\) and earlier, he has a vision of the truth when:

"And she gan kisssee his brest, that herde this
And was ful glad he coude trouthe espye." (II 290 – 291)
Cecilie thus kisses the pure heart of a fellow missionary and welcomes Tiburce into the world of eternal truth. A vision through the mental eye makes him seek the truth that he finds fully after the baptizing of his soul. He has no faith in "idols" but has unflinching trust in God. For God does not reside in an "idol". God does not remain in a temple but God is omnipresent and truly lives in the heart of the pure souls. Cecilie preaches them and guides them to the rightful path that they should not be afraid of the truth but spread truth fearlessly for there is a life after death and a better place where God will grant them everything and they should act in a truthful way.

Again a clean mind alone can see the truth and hence Cecilie advises him:

"And make thee clene; so that thou mowe biholde
The angels face of which thy brother tolde" (II 300 – 301)

It is the purity of soul that matters and men should not be afraid of the truth and they should speak the truth at any cost:

"But there is better lyf in other place,
That never shall be lost, ne drede thee noght", (II 323 – 324)

and hence it is true that:

"That fadres sone hath alle things wroght;
And al that wroght is with a skilful thoght
The goost, that fro the fader gan procede,
Hath sowled hem, withouten any drede" (II 326 – 329)
And "That ther was other lyf ther men may wone" (I 332)

Life earth is an illusion that occurs again and again but the real life in heaven is the reward for a blessed soul. Cecilie thus preaches them:

"Right as a man hath sapiences three.
Memorie, engyn, and intellect also,
So, in o being of divinitee;
"Three persones may ther right wel be?
Tho gan she him ful bisily to preche
of Cristes come and of his peynes teche" (II 338 – 348)

Thereby Cecilia preaches the true tenets of the religion and also prepares the heart for any outcome of pain for the true cause. If God has suffered for mankind then men can do it for themselves. Soon it reaches the ears of the Roman Officers named Almachius who sends for Valerian and Tiburce and questions them. Maximus takes them for execution but their composure and dignity makes him weep in pity. He is converted at the end. Cecilie calls them "Cristes owene knightes" (I 383) and prays to them:

"Caste all" werkes of derknesse",
And armeth yow in armure of brightnesse" (II 384 – 385)
They have righteousness and faith that will help them.

She emphasizes on the night of ignorance that will be pierced with the light of true faith in God which will restore souls in His faith. They are sacrificed as Valerian and Tiburce. Cecilie is also executed but not before
she leaves behind an indelible mark on the minds of men. Maximus is killed and Valerian and Tiburce are received by God. Men who come to Cecilie from Almachius are all converted by her holy lore and express confidence in what she says and weeps from devotion to God. Cecilie proves her conscience, pure heart and faith unfeigned and when threatened by Almachius declares that:

"Your might; quod she ful litel is to drede?
For every mortal mannes power nis
But lyk a bladdre, ful of wind, y-wis,
For with a nedles poiht whan it is blow,
May al the boost of it be leyd full owe" (ll 437 – 441)

The truth cannot be denied and Cecilie continues:

"For ye, that known wel our innocence,
For as muche as we doon a reverence
To Crist, and for we bere a Cristen name⁶,
Ye puttee on us a cryme, and eek a blame". (ll 452 – 455)

Almachius stands no match to her faith, reason, courage and offers her one alternative

"Do sacrifice, or Cristendom reneye".

It is stupid as Cecilie has faith in an afterlife and boldly adds:

"O juge, confus in thy nycetee,
Woltow that I reneye innocence,
To make me a wikked wight?" (II 463 – 465)

On one hand Cecilie should have faith in God and then she is also asked to sacrifice her faith, which is absurd. Afterall:

"Power and auctoritee

To maken folk to dyen or to liven" (II 471 – 472). This is what a mortal man has in his power for he can abuse his power and kill or allow someone to live. Then Cecilia answers him:

"Thou, that ne mayst but only lyf bireve,
Thou hast non other power
thy ne no leve" (II 482 – 483)

Hence "thy" is "full naked" and he is accused of being irrational and indifferent to "things that we seen alle

That it is stoon, that men may wel espyen,

That like stoon a god thou wolt it calle" (II 499 – 501)

It is beyond him to bear the situation, having no reply to what Cecilie addresses him. He orders "Brenne hir right in a bath of flambes" (I 515) But Cecilie sits there "cold" and "felede no wo" for mortal pain is beyond her. A man is sent to kill her in the bath. He tries thrice but cannot cut her throat as truth cannot be cut by anything. We find a logical argument and a divine Free Will of Cecilia. He could not try again as per an ordinance and leaves her bleecing but Cecilia continues to teach in spite of the pain, and the faith that is fostered in the people, is fostered fully well. All her goods, movables,
her rights are bequeathed to Saint Urban. Cicilie has desired “three days” of “respyst” in her order as before her lay the mission of commending souls to God, such that God may guide them in their search till the end and her house is to be made “perpetually a cherche”. Thus stands the “chirche” of “seint Cecilie highte” showing her remarkable dedication, faith and truthfulness, following a mission from which no suffering could deviate her, no fear could acquire her and thus she continues to live years after and the church does help perpetuate her faith in men. Divine Justice ensures this.

Thereby the character of Cecilia shines in her strength, divine virtues and she is a true missionary. Unlike other women characters, she is endowed with exemplary qualities by God and she is one such character that defies Chance and Fate to a great extent. She remains chaste after marriage, converts every heart to God and dies only after her mission is completed. Free Will is exercised and established fully and Chance and Destiny are defeated by a truly noble and pure soul and her missionary zeal.

The prologue deals with the Prioress and describes her physically before her tale is narrated. Her secular means act a contrast to the men of her order who behave unnaturally against their order. Divine Will, Destiny and Chance shape the lives of women of the religious order. The prologue to The Canterbury Tales describes each of the pilgrims individually. The prioress follows the most pious line of thoughts and speaks of the glory of the Lord as her order should do. But against this religious background, she exhibits a set of secular habits and ways unlike her order. She is known as “Madame Eglentyne” and “hir smyling was full simple and coy” (I 119).
She sang a service "Entuned in hir nose", (I 123). And Fresh she speak faire" (I 124) though she is taught in France. Her eating habits are exquisite for she will allow no "morsel" from "hir lippes falle" down. However, the emphasis on her secular ways does raise a doubt as she does not let a morsel fall from her lips. It could be height of her manners or the extreme addiction to the food that she will allow not even "a morsel" to fall down. Hence it can be the extreme of any of the two opposite ways:

"In curteisye was set full muche hir lest.
Hir over lippe wyped she so clene" (ll 132 – 133) and
"Ful semly after hir mete she raughte" (l 136).

It is to be thought carefully whether she is secular but acts pious or the other way round. In any case there is nothing to ascertain why she chooses the profession.

“And sikerly she was of greet disport,
And ful plesaunt, and amiable of port,
And peyned hir to countrefete chere
Of court, and been estatlich of manere" (ll 137 – 140)

As such it clearly exhibits the attempts of the Prioress to make herself look like a lady full of courtly graces and stately bearing, though in reality she should be far from being courtly for she belongs to an order that should care for discipline and kindness more than bearing. The image of the self thus focuses at a serious ambiguity, a Prioress who does not look and feel like one but has to act as a Prioress. There is nothing wrong with the secular
urgés in a lady but in this case the lady lives under the religious cover. In the absence of facts, we have to look at the circumstances prevailing in the middle ages, that might have led to the choice of a profession.

In the middle ages, women are often placed under the guardianship of a male guardian, in his absence, even the landlord acts as a guardian to the women and he is the final selector of her husband. If she dares to refuse his choice, then she is deprived of her assets and has no future before her, the only decent way leads to embracing nunhood. A social compulsion and unfairness lead to nunhood but is the lady mentally prepared to accept her obligations and suppress her secular desires beneath her social helplessness? The Prioress, can possibly be an instance of the cited kind. But nevertheless, she seems dignified in all her dealings. As for her sympathies and tender feelings:

"She was so charitable and so pitous,
She wolde wepe, if that she sawe a mous
Caught in a trappe, if it were deed or bledde." (l 143 – 145)

It is quite natural for her to behave like that in keeping with the trends set by the male members of her order. Hence,

"Of smale houndes had she, that she fedde
With rosted flesh, or milk and wastelbreed."

But sore week she if oon of hem were deed,
Or if men smoot it with a yerde smerte
And al was conscience and tender herte." (ll 146 – 150)
She takes utmost care of her pets but feeds them with meat though she weeps at the sight of a dead mouse. The friar of *The Summoner's Tale* does the same, requests the hostess not to kill any animal but the dishes that he orders for can be prepared through wholesale killings only. Therefore, she simply acts in keeping with the practices of some of the men of the religious order. Repeatedly hits are made at her ways, dresses, her veil was gathered in a seemly way and –

"Hir mouth ful smal, and ther-to soft and reed;  
But sikerly she hadde a fair forheed". (I 153 – 154).

With a set of beads of green she wear a golden brooch with the words "*Amor vincit omina*" (I 162) graved on it. This handling of the Prioress is done discreetly bringing to the forefront her secular looks, and drawing a comparison with the fat Mon, a wanton friar, and the labor stealing Sergeant-at-law and the pleasure loving Franklin. The Prioress is attacked repeatedly for her sensuous looks for which she is not really culpable. Her secular behavior follows the tradition of the male members and she looks the way she is created by God. The hit at her feeding her pets is paralleled in the monk who –

"He yaf nat of that text a pulled hen" (I 177) and states that "hunters been nat holy men" can kill. He has greyhounds and spares no expenses. And the friar gives young women what he can afford while fixing a marriage and absolves sin for a gift which brings out his double standards and "He was the beste beggere in his hous" (I 252), having "wantownesse" in him. We need to sympathise with the Prioress for adopting a profession by
Divine Will for which she has no aptitude and she is not cut out for, rather than criticize her for acting by her real will in an acceptable way. The motive in the lives of the religious women comes out clearly and Divine Justice is granted to them. The Prioress having followed the order theoretically has Divine Justice in a way.

In The Prioress Tale\textsuperscript{12}, the Prioress appears true to her mission, and narrates a tale in praise of the holy Lord:

"O Lord our lord, thy name how merveillous
Is in this large worlde y-sprad-quod she :
For noght only thy laude precious
Parffourned is by men of dignitee,
But by the mouth of children thy bountee
Parfourned is, for on the brest soutinge
Som tyme shewen they thyn heryinge" (ll 1643 – 1648)

She does follow her mission well and her story sings the praise of Lord Jesus Christ and the goodness\textsuperscript{12} He blesses men and children with. The story preaches virtue to men but the genuineness of the tale has no historical record to support it. Of course, it has both moral and religious sanctions. The noticeable factor about the Prioress is the selection of a story of a widow, her affections, sufferings and undying devotion to God\textsuperscript{12} beyond the limitations of caste and creed. Though the small boy of seven years is the central character, the means of propagation of the Christian belief, the sufferings, helpless state and misery of the widowed mother, both social and
emotional, is highlighted in a way. Notwithstanding the social miseries, financial problems and lack of adequate education, the helpless, widowed mother does not lack in the knowledge of truth and the all pervading wisdom that God is to be worshipped everywhere in any name. She believes, like a truly religious scholar that God is the same everywhere. The widow, thus, a teacher to her only son, who is the only support and light of her life, teaches him to respect Mother Mary:\[1\]  

"And eek also, wher – as he sought th’ image Of Cristes moder, hadde he in usage, As him was taught" (II 52 – 54)  

Having spend her life in utter insecurity without a husband to support her, she manages to maintain her family somehow and her devotion finds a suitable dwelling in the heart of the boy. His devotion to Mother May and purity of heart drags him to learn "O Alma Redemptoris\[1\] from a friend. The widow though not permitted much affluence keeps the child happy, a most divine blessing, that many rich families are deprived of. As all happinesses are short-lived, her son is killed by the inhuman Jews for singing in praise of the Lord :  

"This cursed Jew him hente and heeld him faste, And kitte his throte, and in a kit him caste" (II 1760 – 1761)  

But Lord Christ has mercy upon the boy and the boy retains his power of speech through a divine miracle he is killed by the Jews :
The "povre widwe awaiteth al that night\textsuperscript{14}

After hir litel child". (ll 1776 – 1777)

but her son does not turn up. "With face pale of drede and bisy thoght" (ll 1779) she goes on to search for her son in the school, in the streets. Her physical and mental agony feeds upon her soul but gives her inner strength "modres pitee" to search for her son. She weeps for her son and approaches the killer unknowingly who pretends ignorance. She finally gets the news that he may be found in the streets of the Jews, as he is last seen there, sets her there. But in her breast "With modres pitee in hir brest enclosed" (l 141).

"She gooth, as she were half out of hir minde" (l 142) to every place where she can find her son. The worries and her inner sense make her more desperate than ever. Perhaps she is prepared for everything and finally nears the alley where the son is killed and hidden and the boy starts singing the holy song "\textit{Alma redemptoris}". People gather there and the Provost comes to make an enquiry and the boy is dug out. The widow having lost all she has, even the meaning of her life, swoons and there is no comfort for her there.

"This newe Rachel bringe fro his bere" (l 175). The men are punished, the boy is redeemed of his bodily confinement\textsuperscript{15} but the widow suffers eternally. The widow of the "\textit{The Prioress's Tale}" is not a great missionary chosen by God like Cecilia. Hence she suffers like any man of flesh and blood. She performs her duty well by teaching her son the right things to be taught but Fate plays foul with her. Chances do not favour her good efforts and she drifts in the river of life. She has shown little Free Will except to train
her son as she does and suffers till the end, may be to be blessed by God at the end. The fact is that the trials that she faces are not compatible with her good deeds. Perhaps God tries her soul to purify it like gold, may be to grant her Divine Justice in an eternal blessing in Heaven afterwards.

Hence if we look at both the tales of the two religious women like that of Cecilie and the widow in The Prioress Tale, we find that Divine Justice prevails at the end directly or indirectly and Destiny or Divine Will works at the onset of it all, deciding fates, happiness and sorrow of an individual. Free Will is not given a chance for the common excepting the freedom to pray to God or have faith in God. Chances do not look like mere and sudden happenings but they look like acts guided and directed by forces beyond human control. Hence Chaucer's religious women are ruled by Divine Will and mercy and Destiny more than anything else. Individuals are mere instruments in the hands of God and divinity guides Destiny in the way it happens. Exceptions like Cecilia does not prove the rule as they are saints and not bound by the ordinary limitations of a common women like the simple widow. She exercises Free Will by Divine blessings as she is chosen by God. Otherwise, the widow and other common women cannot exercise Free Will and perhaps God grants them peace at the end with Divine Justice ensuring it. The soul that unites with God is purified and is devoid of carnal desires, as their desires are burnt in the fire of their sufferings on the earth. According to the Bible, enlightened days follow their souls in heaven. As a human being they will have to suffer and preach and guide men to the path of god. The motive is to live a life chosen by God and face the circumstances
without complain. This is what the order demands of them. Free Will is used to propagate religion and not for a personal benefit. Their silent acceptance of the Divine will becomes the strongest expression of their characters.
1. The source of The Second Nun’s Tale is taken from the Saint’s life which is a popular genre of the Medieval Devotional Literature and “Collections of the Lives of Saints” that were common in the later Middle Ages. The most commonly known is the golden Legends of Jacob of Genoa whose interpretation of the name of Cecilia Chaucer adopted.

cf.2. “He who performs his duty without depending on the fruits of his actions – he is a sanyasi and a yogi, not he who is without fire and without activity. No one becomes a yogi who has not renounced scheming or planning. “Bhagavad Gita” 6.1-2 expresses the true attitude of a yogi or a hermit. Chaucer’s Saint Cecilia similarly acts to set an example for men without any planning or scheming like a true yogi.

3. White lily and rose are symbolic. White lily stands for chastity as rose for passion and beauty.

4. Baptism prepares the body and the mind for the true knowledge that leads to God. A guru or a teacher cleanses the mind of the disciple for the desired path of attaining God with true devotion. Hence Valerian surrenders to Cecilia and gets baptized by Saint Urban to be enlightened by the light of truth.
5. Rabindranath Tagore expresses even better in “Rathayatra” where all the devotees bow down to pray. The path considers itself God Himself, the chariot follows suit and so the idols, while, the omnipotent and the omniscient smiles deep down in man’s heart.

The Biblical line “ye are the temple of God” comes alive.

6. “Whatever takes form is false. Only the formless endures. For God in infinite, within the body and without ........ so God is everywhere, Filling all things. And flowing through them forever.” (Ashtavakra Gita 1 : 18 – 20). Hence Cecilia objects to the traditional form of worship.

7. The leaders of the Bhakti Movement in Bengal resorted to performing duties notwithstanding the consequences. Mahaprabhu Sri Chaitanyadev has always confirmed that the name of God takes away all evil, sufferings and fear from the heart of a man. A man may suffer but he will not feel pain if he takes the name of God. Chaucer’s Cecilia expresses a similar idea to suffering.

8. The height reached by Saint Cecilia can be explained by another saint, Mother Teresa who says “This is the secret we discover in the lives of some saints : the ability to go beyond what is merely natural.” (chapter – Prayer & Holiness in Thoughts of Blessed Mother Teresa, pg. 23).

9. Madame Eglantyne typifies a medieval nun in many ways. [“The Prioress’s Prologue and Tale” by James Winny (II 139 – 141)]. Eileen Power in “Medieval people” states that the nuns had to follow a very strict discipline. They were expected to devote themselves to
prayers and service and follow a simple life. But some are influenced by the Worldly habits of secular women and often imitate them as Madame Eglantyne who swears by St. Loy, speaks French, has dainty table manners, befitting a lady. She has pets, wears a brooch of gold – all practices forbidden in a Convent, but in reality taken little notice of [A History of English sexual Morals" by Ivan Block].

10. Images of the self, act as a motivator and motivation owing to the self acceptance that lead an individual to act in a particular way. The prioress is similarly motivated. The effects of self image is explained in Robert Fulmer’s “New Management”, pg 221.

11. The helpless state of a woman under the guardianship of a man is stated in The Encyclopaedia of the World Woman, by Dr. Shashi where every key issues about a woman is decided by a male member.

12. The source of The Prioress’s Tale appears to be the Miracle of Virgin. It is a very popular genre of devotional literature and the story was widespread in the Medieval Europe. Chaucer reproduces the outlines of the tale with a few changes to bring out passively suffering womanhood.

cf.12. Prioress connects her tales to goodness and the love of God. In a similar fashion Mther Teresa said, "If what we do is not connected to love, however, our work is useless in God's eyes." (Thoughts of Blessed Mother Teresa, pg 11). The small boy and the widow of the tale work with genuine love and they are blessed by God at the end.
cf.12. The tale of the prioress deal with the passively suffering womanhood and the undying devotion to God. Mother Teresa similarly states that "when facing God, results are not important. Faithfulness is what is important". (Thoughts of Blessed Mother, pg 11).

13. James Winny in “The Prioress’s Prologue and Tale” states that Madame Eglentyne typifies a medieval nun in many ways and Chaucer adds to the human side of the Prioress. She is in a moral dilemma to observe religious restrictions and duties and pass off as a lady.

Similarly Eileen Power in “Medieval People” states that the nuns would have been less human if they did not grow weary of that life.

cf.14. The boy of the tale is taught to sing in praise of God always. Similarly Schelling said “the religious instinct should be honoured even in the dark and confused mysteries." (The Teaching of the Vedas,” by Maurice Phillips).

cf.14. The devotion of the boy to Mother Mary is meditation that draws him closer to God. Even the Upanishads, religious text of the Hindus, lay stress on the penance and meditation as the most excellent way of attaining heavenly bliss. (The Soteriology of the Vedas, page 227).

15. "As water does not cling to a lotus leaf, so no evil clings to one who knows the self.” (The Teaching of the Vedas, pg 228). Similarly the soul of the boy in the tale, knows no evil as he has known the truth to be God and is redeemed by the grace of God.
16. The boy and the widow are purified by God as they have got to know the truth to be God and goes beyond corporal death, that is meaningless to them. "He who perceived that which is without sound, without touch, without form, without decay, without taste, eternal, without smell, without beginning, without end, beyond the great and unchangeable, is freed from the jaws of death." (Katha Upanishad, 1, 3; Valli.15) brings out the same.

17. Chaucer did not believe in the Jewish ritual murder but he welcomed the story in a way. The merchants and scholars of Italy were notorious for their free thinking — "Chaucer and his England" by G. G. Coulton.

18. Froissart of the 18th C shows the unpriestly priest. Chaucer criticized the Philosopher's stone, fairies, magic, Virgilian miracle, Pagan oracles, Gods, alchemy and judicial astrology. Hence the story of the boy in the Prioress tale followed an oracle.

19. Chaucer's expression on the religion comes out in the prologue to the Legend of Good Women —

"A thousand times have I heard men tell
That there is joy in heaven and pain in hell,
And I accorde well that it is so.
But natheless yet wct I well also
That there is none dwelling in this countree
That either hath in heaven or hell y – be,
He may of it none other ways witen
But as he hath heard said or found it written,
For by assay there may no man it prove."
Again Arcite's spirit leaves its home at the end of the Knight's Tale, which brings out Chaucer's sense of religion without referring to Boccaccio.

20. The notoriety of the priests and the undue growth of wealth in the Church is also aimed at by Chaucer. In “Chaucer and his England” by G. G. Coulton, it is said in the conclusion that the Churches grew in furnitures and lords built oratories to hear a Mass without getting out of the bed. The "new theology" grew up that minimized sin and denied eternal punishments. The 13th C friars raised a similar question. Chaucer believed in the church and philosophy and thus presented the eternal dispute between Free Will and Predestination. As he grew of age, in experience and intellect he did not try to hide the scandalized men who cheat in the name of God.

Thus the false friars, monks, priests stand exposed in his stories. He condemns the killing of the boy in the Prioress's Tale because he follows Christ and some men did not like it, killed him in the name of God. Their wrongful means were punished at the end.