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Geoffrey Chaucer's 'The Pardoner's Tale' and Democratic Dynamics in Nigeria

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Abstract

The theme of greed and corruption in Geoffrey Chaucer's 'The Pardoner's Tale,' as in the 14th-century when it was produced, has quickened deceptive simplicity and become more urgent in its appeal and suspicion within Nigeria's contemporary democratic transition. Scholars have linked the 14th-century European plague to the political, social, and religious narrative of Chaucer's work, but few have examined the transitional undercurrents among nations facing similar trials. Government and its structures—the stakeholders of Nigeria's democracy—are "fully dazed" by the spiritual effects of hypocritical love. This plays out in the contrast between active speech and passive action, and in the discouraged visions of those responsible for Nigeria's democratic heritage. These actors participate in a modern version of the pardoner's tale: a tale of one who himself needs pardon and one that mirrors Nigeria's current democracy, which appears to undermine democratic principles and hopes of democratic salvation. Using the New Historicism approach, this paper examines the historical ironies embedded in a democratic process where, as in The

Pardoner's Tale, those in office pledge to "live and die for one another," yet, like the pardoner denouncing avarice, may themselves become victims. The paper argues that medieval attitudes and actions are reflected in democratic governance and that, for peripheral countries facing change, all must be cleansed for society to reach its potential.

Keywords: *greed, corruption, The Pardoner's Tale, transitional dynamics, New Historicism.*

Introduction.

This paper examines the themes of corruption and greed in Geoffrey Chaucer's 'The Pardoner's Tale' as reflected in the democratic practices experienced in Nigeria's democratic dispensation from 1999 to date. The Pardoner's Tale by Chaucer is a mirror for institutional corruption. Its main goal is to alert citizens to the destructive nature of systemic greed and deceit, but in a hypocritical democracy like Nigeria, it also seeks to reveal how public leaders take advantage of weaknesses for their own personal gain. The story's thematic application directly relates to Nigeria's socio-political environment through certain goals and objectives, such as exposing the hypocrisy of institutions, criticizing the manipulation of emotions, and dismantling false power. The objectives include reorienting the public against greed, encouraging public vigilance, and encouraging ethical behavior.

In the 14th century, a pardoner's profession was a prestigious religious one. The pardoner would offer 'pardons' for all kinds of vices and guilt, both collective and individual, through the sacrament of penance for venial and mortal sins. To receive pardon, a person had to pay the pardoner, who had official credentials and used some Latin phrases and anecdotes. The pardoner also showed relics, believed to have miraculous powers, to attract attention.

The Pardoner of Geoffrey Chaucer's The Pardoner's Tale uses the exemplum text *Radix Malorum est Cupiditas*, meaning "Greed is the Root of all Evil." To gain miraculous cures and remission of sins, people go on a pilgrimage to Canterbury Cathedral, the shrine of St. Thomas à Becket, and it was on one of such pilgrimages that the narrative was performed in front of a yearning crowd. Sinners then had few rights or privileges of their own to encounter God personally, even as the Christian religion is a personal religion, and so had to seek an

intermediary in the highly positioned person of the pardoner, who, on payment of money, forgives or offers 'pardons.'

Chaucer's Pardoner, according to Mary Flowers Brasswell (1), is a "palimpsest" of Judas Iscariot, which leads to Christ's passion in the Pardoner's Tale. According to her, there is "bread and poisoned wine; oaths sworn by Christ's body and blood; a parodic Eucharist; and an enactment of the Mass"—yet the extent to which Judas's own disseminating repertoire imprints on Chaucer's storyline has been ignored. However, it was his betrayer who initiated the Passion, and the viewing of his story through that of the pardoner's corroborates Chaucer's work, suffusing the poet's own "last supper" with a layer of cosmic darkness." (1).

Mary Flowers Brasswell. Chaucer's Palimpsest: Judas Iscariot and the "Pardoner's Tale." P. 303 Chaucer's 'layer of cosmic darkness,' in my view, arises from the 'dark' experiences of the plague-ridden medieval society and the medieval narratives of a Judas within that caused the plague. Since this narrative is a pandemic-related text, even described by Lorenz A. Hindrichsen as a "postpandemic text," it draws on socioeconomic, historical, and biblical contexts and repercussions (2). Religious institutions always have a mediating power to teach, advise, and generally act in ways that will tame knotty situations. Beidler sees the Old Man as the Biblical Noah, thus rekindling the essence and impact of the plague on the narrative. (3). Noah proposed and acted on ways the flood would be humbled, just as the Old Man advised against harsh permutations.

The people themselves develop this self-indulgence in sin because their twin guilt, the pardoner's (although this knowledge of the pardoner's guilt may be unknown to them), was handy for giving pardons. This proves the saying that followers get the leaders they deserve, a saying rejected by some Nigerians in conversational circles. Since medieval society was emerging from an oral and pagan Anglo-Saxon period, elements of paganism could still find a space in the people's hearts, and superstitious beliefs such as the pardoner's parade of symbolic bones still hold strong. Developing nations have situational dynamics to cross before the realization of their vision, and this was a hurdle to cross for the people of England in the 14th century. The pardoner preached constantly against greed and corruption, but ended up being the hypocrite and the guiltiest by extorting money from gullible people of all walks of life. The people, in their quest for material desires and gains, hasten in their naivety to be deceived by the pardoner, thereby

instituting a cooperative and all-involving guilt, one that seems to bedevil Nigeria at the moment. The three roisterers, in their gullibility, led themselves to their death in the heroism of a hypocritical religious leader.

1. Mary Flowers Brasswell. Chaucer's Palimpsest: Judas Iscariot and the "Pardoner's Tale." P. 303
2. Hindrichsen, Lorenz A. Chaucer's pilgrims as Black Death survivor kids... P. 144
3. Beidler, G. Peter. Noah and the Old Man in 'The Pardoner's Tale.' *The Chaucer Review* Vol. 15, No. 3. Pennsylvania State University Press, 1981. Pp. 250-254.

... The Plague and Chaucer's Pardoner. *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 16, no. 3, 1982. Pp. 257-269.

Hypocrisy has existed as a human weakness over a long stretch of historical time, even to this moment of overwhelming Western democratic dispensation. Vicious and cyclic examples of hypocritical tales are immersed, not to their death but into individual and institutional extended interests in government establishment offices, religious institutions, and the private sector establishments. There are similar patterns, layers, and hybridism of the pardoner's poetic tales in Nigeria's march to democratic governance in this re-emergent fourth republic democratic dispensation, starting from May 29, 1999.

The poetic tales are the poetry of the Nigerian situational facts, facts which seem to be drawing the country into tales of instability, uncertainty, and deferred futures. Examples of such tales in Nigeria are capped with ironic expressions such as "Avarice is the root of all evil" and "We will tackle corruption headlong." "We are doing everything possible to address the situation," "We will lead by example," "We are committed to serving you," and, even greater irony, exceptionally and truly Nigerian, text of "We are on top of the situation." These catchy statements, like lines in the Prologue to *Canterbury Tales*, are deemed to be "of sovereign value in all (weak) eyes... so much distinguished... (as) wise/bearing modest as a maid/... never yet a boorish thing had said." (4) (L63-66).

Three intoxicated, gluttonous men in Chaucer's *The Pardoner's Tale* swear to murder. Death after a crony dies from the plague, but instead discover a stash of gold coins beneath an oak tree. Their greed drives them to arrange the murder of one another in order to obtain the

treasure. Two men kill the third when he returns with wine, only to perish from the poison in the wine they consume in celebration. Using this narrative, who can be said to be truly on top of the situation? All are complicit and heading to abutting futures. Ironically, the Pardoner, a hypocritical preacher who preaches against crimes he commits, makes use of the story's moral lesson against greed to highlight the negative effects of corrupt money, which he earns for a living, at the expense of others.

1. Chaucer, Geoffrey. The Canterbury Tales. Lines 63-6
2. Chaucer, Geoffrey. The Pardoner's Tale. 15-24.

In The Pardoner's Tale, such an ironic twist of articulator incarnates as Death, who is "personified as a privy thief" who has "slain" its "dead drunk" ones "in the present plague" (5).

(The Pardoner's Tale L15) The "little tavern knave" warns those daring in their hypocritical and gullible 'drunken rage' of statements against old age, death, that:

If you should meet him, you had best be wary.
Be on your guard with such an adversary.
Be primed to meet him everywhere you go.
That's what my mother said. It's all I know.
(The Pardoner's Tale Ls14-24)

In historical relevance, a 'plague,' a bubonic plague pandemic called the Black Death, killed almost half the population of England and Europe in 1348 and 1349. It may yet be quantified how many of the contemporary plagues of hypocrisy, greed, corruption, and gullibility in Nigeria perform a filmic dance of death on the 'pilgrims' of Nigeria.

1. Chaucer, Geoffrey. The Pardoner's Tale. L 14-24.

To the few groups of Nigerian pardoners in the democratic process and the larger gullible roisterers who do not challenge facts but death, Niyi Osundare (6) in his poem 'Advice' advises:

To yourself
Friend, be true.
You farm a hundred yams.
And tell us it is two hundred.
Alright,

After eating a hundred yams
You will eat a hundred lies.

In Osundare's view, the hypocrisy of the friend, such as found in the three roisterers, amounts to eclipsing the future, what he calls, in another neighbor poem of the same collection, "Eating Tomorrow's Yam," in which, after a heated argument and polemics, they agreed to "cut the yam into seedlings/and plant tomorrow's harvest" (6). This thinking set a country in check of its excesses for unity, peace, and development to thrive. In order not to eclipse the future, a theoretical framework, New Historicism, emerges as the next area of discourse, which aims to interpret cultural precepts in context and historical relationships, such that it unravels hypocritical, selfish, and non-committal deeds of humanity.

1. Osundare, Niyi. *Village Voices*. Pp. 19.
Theoretical Framework: New Historicism Theory

The researcher's interest in a topic and theory here is not only connected to the teaching of the topic and theory to undergraduate and postgraduate students but also to the interest in projecting the topic within the theory to situate cultural, historical, and democratic co-existence and time-bound dynamics of emerging democratic nations like Nigeria. The New Historicism theory is appropriate here because it demonstrates how literature and history actively influence one another; New Historicism is essential. It helps us comprehend how a work reflects the power structures of its day and gives voice to marginalized viewpoints that are frequently omitted from official historical records, preventing us from reading works in an artificial vacuum.

The literary theory known as "New Historicism," which was mainly established by Stephen Greenblatt in the 1980s, examines how a text interacts with its historical, cultural, and social context. It sees literary works as "cultural artifacts" (or "co-texts") that are part of the same material practices, ideologies, and power structures as non-literary records from the same age. Other proponents include Louis A. Montrose, Walter Benn Michaels, and Catherine Gallagher. Concepts and ideas surrounding New Historicism bear influence from Louis Althusser's Marxist ideology, the deconstructive criticism of Clifford Geertz's anthropology, and Michel Foucault's discourse and power.

1. Abrams, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 45

M.H. Abram believes the new historicists conceptualize that “the literary text is situated within the institutions, social practices, and discourses that constitute the overall culture of a particular time and space, and that the literary text interacts as both a product and a producer of cultural energies and codes” (7).

The New Historicists, according to McGann, are of the accord that “the core of New Historicism centrally concerns the relationship between history and text, the commonality between historical and literary texts.” The main concerns of New Historicists are that literary works are integrated in their historical environment and influenced by social, economic, and political factors; that analysts need to compare and interpret the texts historically and contemporarily within a contextual interpretation; that literature emerges from a history and thus texts must constantly be in a dialogue with the past; New Historicism investigates the cultural narratives, power mechanics, and ideologies in the creation of the text and the historical narratives of the time; and that historicism is beyond biography.

New Historicism is the co-textuality of text (Stephen Greenblatt), historicity of text and the textuality of history (Louis Montrose), the influence of power (Michel Foucault), and the cultural poetics (Stephen Greenblatt) for negotiating meanings.

1. Abrams, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*.
2. McGann, J. *Historical Studies and Literary Criticism*. The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.

Methodology

A qualitative, text-driven approach is necessary to examine Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Pardoner's Tale" in light of Nigerian democratic dynamics. Chaucer's text and Nigerian political experiences and discourse are the main data sources. The writer adapts a close reading of 'The Pardoner's Tale' for the thematic extraction of themes such as *Radix malorum est cupiditas* (greed as the root of evil), the manipulation of faith, and systemic hypocrisy. The writer also employs archival and document analysis methods to gather Nigerian political history and academic analyses of electoral fraud and political corruption. In order to find peer-reviewed journals on medieval literature and Nigerian political

history, the work makes use of academic databases and platforms such as Google Scholar. The author groups findings into comparative categories using a thematic coding system, such as "The rioters' greed versus embezzlement of national resources" and "The Pardoner's false relics versus political campaign promises." The writer also connects particular tale sections to actual Nigerian case studies or more general socio-political issues (e.g., vote-buying, institutionalizing religion in politics, and betrayal of public trust). The author finishes by analyzing how Chaucerian allegories offer enduring paradigms for identifying and resolving Nigeria's democratic issues.

The Traditional Phases of England and its Literature of Democratic Struggles.

It is imperative to briefly delve into the history of England and into reflections of its literature of democratic struggles to show the link between history, literature, and politics and their spiritual connectivity in terms of cultural conditions.

This is because a series of conquests, national upheavals, and rebellions constituted the situational dynamics of England, a sort of transitional phase, and became 'subjects' of discourse.

These transitional dynamics and the concomitant commitment to tame the tide of misfortune, misrule, and corrupt practices result in efforts toward a better society, graduating England to its present stages of democratic development. The many of England's unresolved issues of power, class, social groups, religion, and gender sum up the tensions that 'underlie the surface meanings' of The Pardoner's Tale. Geoffrey Chaucer was intentionally bringing the three roisterers, and perhaps, the three classes in society together to tell tales relating to their obnoxious actions, their class snobbery, and general insensitivity to their country. The pilgrimage was one to obtain forgiveness and gain better futures for the individual and country, and so it was wise to truthfully tell your history in a new historical way.

The Pardoner's Tale is 'embedded' in contexts as 'an interactive component within the network of institutions, beliefs, and cultural power relations, practices, and products that, in their ensemble, constitute what we call history,' an interpretation that may help generate lessons for contemporary existence. (David Lodge (ed.) 1976)

It began with the Roman conquest. The Roman Emperor, Claudius, in 43 AD, overpowered the Celtic Britons and established Roman rule in the first century, in a period that lasted for four hundred years, a similar period to the conquest of Africa. In the fifth century, however, the

mighty Roman Empire itself came under severe attacks by barbarians, after which Rome withdrew its valiant soldiers and administrators. England did not have any better feeling of reprieve as the 'Romanized Britons' came in constant conflict with other Celtic tribes like the Irish from the west and the Scots and Picts from the north.

1. David, Lodge. 20th Century Literary Criticism: A Reader. London: Routledge, 1972.
2. Woolf, Daniel. Historical Writings in Britain from the late Middle Ages
3. Kohlmann, Benjamin, and Frontmatter, Mathew Taunton. Eds. A History of 1930s British Literature. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978
4. Haverfield, Francis. The Romanization of Roman Britain. London: Clarendon Press, 1912.
5. Jovanovich, Brace Harcourt. Adventures in English Literature. Heritage Edition, 1980.
6. Campbell, J. Ed. The Anglo-Saxons. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982.
7. Cooper, H. The Canterbury Tales. 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

These internal crises were soon consumed by the invading forces across the North Sea, from the Germanic forces. These Germanic invaders were of three tribes called the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes. Their homelands were along the northwest coast of Germany and the Danish Peninsula. The trio established the Anglo-Saxon fiefdom of England between c. 450 and 1066. (Woolf 2012; Kohlmann 1980; Haverfield 1912; Jovanovich 1980; Campbell ed. 1982; Cooper 1996).

Within a century and a half, all of England paid its pardons to the conquerors. The Anglo-Saxons had surrounded themselves with bigger and lesser gods and deities—forces that personified supernatural strength in human or animal agency or those in nature brought to the fore of living experience, but Christianity also came right during the Roman conquest, and Christian missionaries had established Christian religious centers in the northern part of Ireland.

The first force of Christianity into England, however, came straight from Rome when, in 597, Pope Gregory the Great sent his emissary Augustine to convert King Ethelbert of Kent. The new religion had promised much more than the traditional deities could offer the Anglo-

Saxon people, and within 'a generation or two' Christianity had spread everywhere in England.

The widespread Christianity notwithstanding, surviving folklore, in such relics as The Yule Log and Feasts (the tradition involves burning a specially selected log during the winter solstice or Christmas season to bring good fortune, protection, and the promise of returning light and warmth). It started from a Norse festival called "Jól," the mistletoe (the mistletoe plant) during winter festivities, and kissing beneath it, a custom in Celtic and Norse tradition.

In a Norse myth, the god Balder was killed by a mistletoe projectile, only to be resurrected. His mother, Frigg, declared mistletoe a symbol of love and peace, promising a kiss to all who passed beneath it, and the names of the days of the week. Monday from Moon's Day, a celestial body dedication, Tuesday from Tiw, the Norse god of war, Tyr, Wednesday from Woden's Day, the Chief Teutonic Norse god, Odin, Thursday from Thor's Day, the Norse god of thunder, and Friday from Frigg's Day the Norse goddess of home, love, and beauty, who was the wife of Odin, Saturday, named after Saturn, the Roman god of agriculture, and Sunday named after the celestial Sun as Sun-Day (Zerubavel 16, David M. Henkin's 17. FitzGerald's 18)

1. Eviatar, Zerubavel. *The Seven Day Cycle: The History and Meaning of the Week*.
2. Henkin, David, M. *The Week: A History of the Unnatural Rhythms that Made Us Who We Are*.
3. Fitzgerald, Tucker, L. *Days of the Week: Babylonians, Planets, Romans, the Sun, the Moon, and a Few Gods*. Independently published, 2018

All these Anglo-Saxon adaptations of Roman planetary week-naming conventions and folklore traditions show paganism's enduring resistance effect, even penetrating significantly into Christendom. This demonstrates that in highly entrenched democracies and so-called civilizations, there are widespread effects of a historical and cultural continuum of their character and worldview. From the Anglo-Saxon era to the tenth century, England began to be thought of as a 'unified' nation until, in 1066, the Norman Conquest ended the Anglo-Saxon narrative of England. This started yet another epoch, or 'period,' in the experience of England called the Medieval Period.

The Medieval ‘age’ of England (1066-1485), which spanned more than four centuries, saw the lords, mostly knights, against the slavish serfs in a feudal system who connived with the church, in what was called, in medieval terms, the “two swords of God” to administer lands and lives. War was begun in 1337 with France and lasted for a hundred years, in what was dubbed the Hundred Years’ War. What England gained in the war was that the Normans and the Anglo-Saxons no longer thought of themselves as separate groups but as all English, the same way Geoffrey Chaucer made England become, in *The Pardoner’s Tale*, a literary creation. Another war situation, the War of the Roses, was fought between the descendants of the Duke of York and the Duke of Lancaster, who were both sons of Edward III. The thorny issue was resolved in a marriage situation between the Earl of Richmond of the house of Lancaster and Elizabeth, heiress of the house of York, thus addressing lineage-held conceptions. The Earl ascended the throne in 1485 as Henry VII, the first of the Tudors to be England’s top leader. (Jovanovich 13, Campbell 15, Cooper 16).

1. Jovanovich, Brace Harcourt. *Adventures in English Literature*.
2. Campbell, J. Ed. *The Anglo-Saxons*.
3. Cooper, H. *The Canterbury Tales*. 2nd edition.

The democratic dividends were that the serfs, who were a little less than slaves, were left in freedom without masters to a freer life in towns. In a helpless freedom without homes and work, some became vagabonds and robbers, leading to the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381, which, though savagery was crushed by the nobles, created a middle class of merchants and craftsmen who prospered and created levels of personal and national stability to pave the way for yet another transitional phase in England’s history and democracy. Much improved in mental attitude, the country members began to create the much-needed sense of nationalism; improvement in commerce and the economy; a legitimate quest for a rise in class status instead of ‘a fixing thing’ it earlier was; and a challenging attitude that questions the powers of the church and the secular leadership to unpopular beliefs and ideas. Then, democratic principles and values began to whisper and permeate England’s geographic air and human consciousness to usher in a new dawn and democratic direction. The transitional practice here is that as human experience increases in line with spiritual strength and socioeconomic spectrum, the people’s mental attitude and preparedness broaden and deepen. In a transitional

time, civilization widens its horizon and gaily takes great strides towards all forms of development.

Chaucer's 'The Pardoner's Tale' and Its Contextual Relationship to Nigeria.

Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Pardoner's Tale* is a work in the Middle English period that serves as an important model for contemporary lessons of barrier-breaking situational dynamics in Nigeria's democracy. *The Pardoner's Tale* is a poetic narrative about a religious leader, the pardoner, who pardons sinners who part with their money and dumps them with their sins. The pardoner parades false relics and credentials from high-ranking church officials. To arrest the people's sensibilities and gain financial favor in their gullibility, the pardoner is armed with catchy phrases of an ironic and hypocritical nature, and his sermons are full of illustrative anecdotes. Chaucer's Pardoner, on the way to Canterbury Cathedral on a pilgrimage, uses, as he claims, the same text, a text in ironic twist of his actions: Avarice is the root of all evil. It is obvious to every listener at the pilgrims' gathering and to the readers of the literary text that the pardoner, as he admits about himself, is an extreme referent of avarice. He reveals his tricks to other pilgrims and yet offers to sell them the same pardon he admitted was worthless. The fact remains that the pardoner has as his profession the selling of pardons, and so whether the tricks are known or not, he still has to trade his products; otherwise, he will run out of political business of extorting money by selling pardons, which people need desperately, even as show-offs. It is instinctive to the pardoner to carry out his democratic business of selling pardons, being 'routine by rote' to him. Checking Chaucer's lines closely, one could arrive at the opinion that the poet detests the pardoner and sees him as an arch-hypocrite who could not feel any sense of remorse in his professional misconduct. Chaucer's repulsive lines liken the pardoner symbolically and compare him to animals with an incapacitated human sense of conscience:

Just back from visiting the court in Rome.
He loudly sang, "Come hither, love; come home!"

.....

This pardoner had hair as yellow as wax.
Hanging down smoothly like a hank of flax.
Dribbles fell from his locks behind his head.
Down to his shoulders, which they overspread;
Thinly they fell, like rat tails, one by one.
He wore no hood upon his head for fun.

The hood inside his wallet had been stowed.
He aimed at riding in the latest mode.
But for a little while, his head was bare.
And he had bulging eyeballs, like a hare.
He'd shown a holy relic on his cap.
His wallet lay before him on his lap.
Brimful of pardons come from Rome, all hot.
(Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, L 658-674)

The pardoner entertains the company of pilgrims with a tale about three roisterers whose portrait is representative of the ficelle class, the downtrodden in society, as they engage in unusual and unacceptable and unproductive habits of drinking and vowing to "kill this traitor death." They end up, in an ironic turn of an earlier vow to "each defend the other" and to "live and die for one another," by planning each other's death, but rather dying against their schemes. This suggests that by mouth, they, typically Nigerian, be-charmed with those "I love my country" and "We love ourselves" statements, but not carrying it to conscience ends up being the very vows that stand to destroy a nation. The people, therefore, need to be steadfast in their vows and commitments to themselves and their country in order not to fall foul of their hypocritical vows.

Contemporary Parallels of the Pardoner in Nigeria's Democracy.

Beguiling gurus of contemporary parallels of the pardoner in Nigeria's democracy, with a free breeze, are, like the 14th-century pardoner, "riding in the latest mode" of material possessions, displaying their "holy relic" to convince the unsuspecting, even as their "bulging eyeballs, like a hare," are hypocritical and their "small voice a goat has got" reverberates in tremolo to deceive others and enrich their "wallet." The living spiritual legends are ludicrous in speech and action but show off a logjam that needs to be overcome, as did England, which emerged at the end of the tunnel in unfaltering fashion. Certainly, the pardoner's boom of doom will be overcome in Nigeria's democracy in its transitional and historical dynamics, given that lessons are connected to commitments.

The religious groups in Nigeria, the African traditional religion, Christianity, and Islam, and their priests, clergy, and imams have played the pardoner in their economic loadstar for achieving not spiritual salvation for their sins but a hypocritical means of attaining personal and

institutional wealth. Certainly, there is light and shade in this film of Nigeria's democratic life. A lacuna of democratic and spiritual salvation is created in this wake because, as Kukah (1994:445) states, "the pestilential greed of a corrupt, profligate, and thieving elite" has ravaged the morsels of morality that could have sustained us... (and) consumed by the termite of selfishness." Kukah (19) further laments these sad transitional moments in Nigeria's history, worthy of being quoted.

These are very difficult times indeed. Everywhere there is so much angst, anger, frustration, cynicism, despair, and despondency. We are presently being enveloped by a dark cloud of such magnitude that the prophets of doom have had a blossoming time reminding us with self-righteous indignation that they told us so. Many of our self-acclaimed prophets who feed on our misfortunes, anxiety, and fear have taken time to remind us that unless we mend our ways, even God's patience may just be wearing thin. ... The gory details of our misdeeds over the past few years stare us in the face.

1. Kukah, M. H. Religion, Politics, and Power in Northern Nigeria. 445.

... "The Minority Question in Northern Nigeria," *The National Question in Nigeria*. 1st edition. London: Routledge, 2002

Politicians, government officials, and Nigerians of all walks of life pay their 'philanthropic' monies to the churches and mosques as penance for sins.

On such glorious occasions, the pardoner priests and imams offer an unreserved 'pardon' even as such monies may have created the 'angst, anger, frustration, cynicism, despair, and despondency' that Kukah talked about. In the shrines of African traditional religion, the pardoner priest offers unreserved 'pardons' even as such monies may have created the 'angst, anger, frustration, cynicism, despair, and despondency' that Kukah talked about. In the shrines of African traditional religion, the pardoner-priest offers worldly salvation in political, economic, religious, social, and security spheres to the politician, seasoned administrator, government official, and others in need of 'miraculous relics.'

There are other 'pardoners' in Nigeria's government system, such as the judiciary, which sets 'pardon' precedence that has negative long-lasting effects on the country; the police, in their subversion of justice in exchange for remittance for pardons; the economists of Nigeria, who take pardons from government coffers and network the country's

financial system in ways that defraud the nation; the politician pardoners, who sell and receive 'pardons' from the highly placed and the 'roisterers' of Nigeria for political and greed gains; the ethnic-conscious pardoners, who deploy ethnicity to generate gains; and the religious pardoners, who sell religion as a pardon to exhort concessions and get gains against the country. Politicians, popularly called moneybags in Nigeria, engage in the patron-client phenomenon called in local parlance "godfatherism."

The Nigerian nation-state has a wide range of raconteur pardoners who sell pardons that lead Nigeria to a low-income country. The leadership is held as being responsible for the messy hypocrisy that exists from the unsuspecting followers. The country carries a model of a pardoner's state, which manifests a dualism of self-imposed and externally imposed dishonest practices, greed, corruption, and hypocrisy. Development literature has a scant pardoner of hypocrisy, and therefore it will be in Nigeria's interest to combat the pardoner practices and their counterproductive effects on the socioeconomic, ethnic, religious, and political development of the country. Deviancy should not become normal to avoid prevalence and repercussions inimical to national growth, peace, and productivity.

Conclusion

The Pardoner's Tale by Geoffrey Chaucer provides a potent allegorical framework for comprehending the moral perils present in Nigeria's democratic environment. The story reflects the political corruption and institutional issues that frequently jeopardize the integrity of Nigeria's democratic process by showing how greed, hypocrisy, and exploitation erode social trust.

Nigeria's democracy is constantly threatened by the "gold" of political corruption, embezzlement, and the looting of public resources, just as the "three rioters" in Chaucer's story were destroyed by their ravenous desire for gold.

The Pardoner preaches against the exact vices he commits. This is similar to circumstances in which political leaders openly participate in electoral malpractice, voter suppression, and nepotism while promoting democratic values (such as equity and the rule of law).

The Pardoner takes advantage of his flock's credulity and desperation for his own benefit. Similar to this, dishonest politicians in Nigeria often use vote-buying and ethnic or religious manipulation to gain and hold

onto power by taking advantage of the general populace's poverty and lack of civic education.

The Pardoner's Tale serves as a warning that emphasizes Nigeria's urgent need for ethical reorientation. Strengthening the nation's democratic dynamics requires not only strong institutional frameworks but also a culturally and civically aware electorate that can identify and reject exploitative leadership. The timeless message cautions that a society that is driven by unbridled greed and institutional deceit is doomed to systemic collapse, whereas a thriving democracy depends on accountability, transparency, and the active moral agency of its citizens.

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