A Monk there was, one of the finest sort
Who rode the country hunting was his sport.
A manly man, to be an Abbot able;
Many a dainty horse he had in stable.
His bridle, when he rode, a man might hear
Jingling in a whistling wind as clear,
Aye, and as loud as does the chapel bell
Where my lord Monk was the head of his cell. [Although he has
taken a vow of poverty, the Monk is a hunter with a stable of
horses with expensive bridles.]
The Rule of good St. Benet or St. Maur
As old and strict he tended to ignore;
He let go by the things of yesterday
And took the modern world's more spacious way.
He did not rate that text at a plucked hen
Which says that hunters are not holy men. [He is complaining
about all the rules that he is supposed to live by.]
This Monk was therefore a good man to horse;
Greyhounds he had, as swift as birds, to course,
Hunting a hare or riding at a fence
Was all his fun, he spared for no expense. [He doesn’t worry
about the money he spends on hunting. He even owns expensive
hunting dogs.]
I saw his sleeves were garnished at the hand
With fine gray fur, the finest in the land,
And on his hood, to fasten it at his chin
He had a wrought-gold artfully fashioned pin; [He wears
expensive clothes and has a gold pin. No poverty here.]
Into a lover's knot it seemed to pass.
His head was bald and shone like a look-glass;
So did his face, as if it had been greased,
He was a fat and personable priest;
His prominent eyeballs never seemed to settle.
They glittered like the flames beneath a kettle;
Supple his boots, his horse in fine condition.
He was a prelate fit for exhibition,
He was not pale like a tormented soul.
He liked fat swan best, and roasted whole. [It’s ironic that the Monk eats roasted swan, a dish fit for a king. Chaucer is pointing out that the church was no longer what it was supposed to be.]