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## SECTION 5 (DISCRETION, STRENGTH, BEAUTY, AND FIVE-WITS)

While Strength, Beauty, and Discretion explain themselves to a modern audience by their names, Five-Wits may require some clarification. This character represents Everyman's ability to perceive and understand. The five wits are traditionally defined as common sense (or "wit"), imagination, fantasy, estimation, and memory. The term is related to the phrase "to have one's wits about them." In later works the term five wits was also used to refer to the five senses. While Everyman is receiving Communion, Five-Wits and Knowledge talk very generally about the role of the clergy. Their conversation is an interesting digression in the play. While this is important to Everyman's salvation, they are not instructing Everyman but engaging in a debate. Five-Wits asserts that priests, in their unique and God-given capacity to perform the rituals that will allow human salvation, are greater than angels. This is countered by Knowledge's point that priests as humans are sometimes as wicked and sinful as their parishioners, if not more so. She lists a series of their offenses, including selling offices and indulgences, using their position to extract personal wealth, and breaking their vows of celibacy. Criticism of clergy on such charges was frequent, and such offenses were contributing factors to what would be the Protestant Reformation. However, it is worth noting that Knowledge claims never to have met any such wicked priests, only heard of them. Thus, the text seems to side with FiveWits's position that the clergy ought to be respected unless definitively proven unworthy of that respect. That this argument about the clergy exists within the play implies that if Knowledge did not raise the criticism, the audience might have. No medieval audience would have been unaware of the ways in which some church officials placed worldly goods above heavenly rewards. After all, it was not a new complaint. The companions recommended to Everyman by Good-Deeds and Knowledge stand in contrast to his friends in the first half of the play. They promise him their loyalty, but only as long as they are genuinely capable. They do not mislead him. They represent the virtues of a good life and powers within him rather than any dependent on the world outside. However, they also have their limitations. None of them can follow him into death, and their departures mirror the decline of aging and sickness. One by one, Beauty, Strength, Discretion, and FiveWits leave a dying Everyman to infirmity, incapacity, and dementia. This reinforces the transitory nature of all earthly things, and Everyman remarks on it specifically. However, Knowledge stays with him to the end and Good-Deeds accompanies him into the afterlife.



