

practice' (p. 207). Following the work of Steiner, this discussion centres on the semiotic and etymological shift between versions B and C. Here, Thomas argues convincingly that as Christ's covenant changes from a 'patente' to a 'chartre' in Patience's speech, so too does Langland's approach to documentary sources of penance. Most notably, Thomas argues that poem pivots temporally, from a Christocentric focus on original sin (B) to a confessional process oriented towards Judgement Day (C). The retrospective of the outright rejection of canon law by Luther offered by the epilogue, represents the ending of the malleability of the canon law that Thomas strives to depict throughout the text.

Despite Thomas' clear, incisive writing, the penetrative depth of the discourse makes some of the more abstract ideas unruly. Therefore, this book would have been well served by a concluding chapter. The extent to which Thomas convinces the reader of a real, tangible *reinvention* of canon law varies between chapters and will remain dependent on the reader's interpretation of the term. Nonetheless, Arvind Thomas offers an engaging, interdisciplinary method of studying medieval penitential texts.

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Nicholas Orme, *Going to Church in Medieval England*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021, pp. vii + 483, £20.00, ISBN: 978-0300256505

Assuring the reader from the outset that his work 'does not attempt to argue a particular thesis about medieval parish churches' (p. 2), Nicholas Orme's latest book on the buildings, staffing, congregations, and uses of the medieval church offers instead a broad work that is rich in detail, as it draws together geographical, social and religious complexities into a comprehensive and engaging whole.

The chapters of this book can be divided into two thematic, complementary halves. The first addresses exactly what is meant by the medieval church, with Orme focusing on the development of the parish structure (Origins of the Parish, pp. 5-47), those employed by and within the church (The Staff of the Church, pp. 48-84), the physical spaces and buildings (The Church Building, pp. 85-139), and those to whom they administer (The Congregation, pp. 140-196). The second explores what happened to the church, and when — what happened at Mass, and how churches, both as buildings and spiritual centres, were understood and used everyday (The Day and the Week, pp. 197-254), through seasonal changes (The Seasons and the Year, pp. 255-301), throughout the individual lives of their parishioners (The Life Cycle, pp. 302-348), and through the changes (though not always

radical ones, as Orme suggests) of the Reformation (pp. 349-399). Each chapter offers a bird's-eye view of national trends, top-down imposed measures and religious generalities, alongside consideration of how different regions, parishes, and social, gendered and economic experiences influence the nature of being a member of the medieval English Christian community.

Drawing upon a wide range of textual evidence and engaging with some visual sources, Orme examines social norms, cultural stereotypes, regional specificities, and nation-wide generalities to capture the place that churches had, from a pious and practical perspective, in the lives of medieval English people. Mainly covering a period of around 1100 to the end of the sixteenth-century, Orme appears acutely aware of the limitations of his sources and their abilities to offer complete and accurate windows to all of medieval society in a single parish, never mind across a country; women and children, for example, are, by his own admission, underserved by the records available, yet attention is paid across this work to exploring, or at least asking questions about, those across all levels and ages.

The sections on late medieval piety and the chapter on the Reformation offer particular temptations, perhaps, in a work of such breadth and magnitude, to draw too great a set of conclusions or broad statements regarding the topics about which historians have debated for decades. Orme is alert to these challenges. He observes that 'the piety of parishioners, and the extent of their mental alienation from the Church, each forms a topic deserving a book to itself. There are dangers in trying to simplify the spirituality of millions.' (p. 189). A particular strength of this work is the ability to see long-term continuities as well as rapid and disruptive change. In doing so, it sits clearly in dialogue with the works of R. N. Swanson, Claire Cross, and Eamon Duffy, whilst adding to the impressive social and religious histories of scholars such as Katherine L. French. It is, by design, not a comprehensive study aimed at being fully conclusive. However, the skillful handling of a variety of complex evidence across historically periodised lines means that Orme's study enables the complexities present to form more of a complete historical picture, as opposed to being included as evidence that challenges, or sits outside of it.

Accessibility for students and a general readership, and a focus specifically on people in relation to the medieval church, are two of the central aims of the work, aided throughout by Orme's gift for weaving larger narratives with the colour and intricacies of smaller stories. The Lollard dissenters who burnt images of St Katherine in a Leicester chapel to cook their cabbage soup (pp. 38-39); the thwarted attempt of Bridget Stokes in the 1530s to privatise a chapel for her family's worship (pp. 103-104); the hermit preacher whose seemingly misogynistic sermons caused the female members of his congregations

to propose stoning him out of town (p. 252); such anecdotes provide individual insights into ordinary social lives that have the church at their centre. These stories thus go further than connecting readers to the human communities that existed around and within the medieval church; they often offer glimpses into lives that were connected to and recorded by medieval churches, evidencing the varieties of divergent, sometimes contradictory experiences of those within a parish across time, building to a similarly complex, country-wide picture.

When addressing the confessions of penitents during Lent, Nicholas Orme describes the questions that medieval clergy asked parishioners to discern the details of the individual cases: 'who, what, where, by whom, how often, in what way, and when' (p. 271). They are, indeed, questions that Orme himself raises and answers with thoughtfulness and curiosity – Who went to church, and what did they do when they were there? When and why did people go to church, and how does that answer change when we consider the poor, the young, or the socially-outcast? What did a church service entail, and how did those listening to, attending, or performing such services engage? In what ways did the medieval church change over time, as a result of discontent, passionate devotion, or apathy? In this book, Nicholas Orme asks, builds answers to, and seeks further nuances in all of these questions, and more, that a student of the English medieval church might ever think to ask.

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Jane Whitaker, *Raised from the Ruins: Monastic Houses after the Dissolution*, London: Unicorn, 2021, pp. 404, £35.00, ISBN: 9781913491918.

The dissolution of the monasteries (1536-40) dramatically altered the physical landscape of sixteenth-century England and Wales. The suppression of more than eight-hundred religious houses by Henry VIII's government was one of the greatest acts of iconoclasm of the Reformation. Structures that had stood at the heart of local communities were systematically dismantled in order to symbolise the triumph of the Henrician regime and to make it difficult for religious communities to return, as well as for the material gain of the crown, nobility, and laity. Put simply, for those who lived through it, the world looked different after the dissolution. On the one hand, processes of spoliation and demolition created an evocative landscape of monastic ruins. These damaged structures served as tangible reminders that the break with Rome represented a break with the medieval Catholic past. On the other hand, the dissolution also opened up new possibilities for converting and adapting monastic structures into buildings more