



Medieval Popular Religion: An Annotated Bibliography for Teachers

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Introduction

“Popular Religion” is not a perfect description for this bibliography, but no consistent term exists for the subcategory of medieval culture also called “lay piety” or “traditional religion.” This bibliography is intended to give the reader a general overview of how religion was used by ordinary people in England during the Middle Ages. It consequently ignores several related subjects such as the political history of the church, or the theological debates raging in the universities. I have also tried not to repeat some of the excellent work done in previous bibliographies for *Once and Future Classroom*, such as the “Crusades,” “Medieval Drama,” or the section on Mystics in “Women in the Middle Ages” (although all of these topics are related to popular religion). There are many aspects of medieval literature or medieval culture which are inextricable from religion in one way or another, and separating the strands is difficult. If the average man was called upon to go to Mass every morning, as he is in many texts from the medieval period, how can this activity be partitioned off from the rest of his daily life? And if the stories which he listens to as entertainment feature a monk and a friar, is this only incidentally religious? Is this somehow different from the belief in and practice of religion?

One of the problems with defining this field — as scholars from Norman Tanner to Diarmaid MacCulloch to Eamon Duffy have noted — is that this is a subject which is both understudied and extremely difficult to study. The lack of complete historical sources is possibly one factor in the tendency of historians to make generalizing statements, yet it is not clear what should replace them. Norman Tanner, in his *Ages of Faith: Popular Religion in Late Medieval England and Western Europe* comments that

“the quest for the religious outlook of the ‘average man (or woman) in the street’ of late medieval England may be faltering . . . [we are] wary, rightly I think, of trying to construct a common mentality for the period. General statements can surely still be made usefully, but complexity and diversity of outlooks is rightly seen as the major key in the symphony. Indeed, inhabitants of late medieval England are coming to be seen as increasingly modern in their outlook, with a pluralism and sophistication that surprises us.”¹

Therefore, attempting not to over-generalize, and realizing that it is impossible to divorce medieval religion from many other aspects of the Middle Ages." I have attempted to create a relatively wide-ranging bibliography. Medieval popular religion is characterized in many ways, by its fluidity; as Robert Scribner said, “because it is less structured and more fluid, popular devotion is a kind of liminal area where beliefs are volatile and susceptible to new suggestions and influences.”² This field is far too large to be encapsulated here, so it is divided into various sections, each of which contains a few representative examples of a subset of popular religion. These can be seen in many cases as stepping-stones to further research or more literature on the

subject, but not as comprehensive accounts. To make up for this lack, I hope to provide variety in the topics which this bibliography will cover.

Moreover, the confusion caused by the fact that the topic "medieval popular religion" is not well-defined as a research topic, there is a bewildering array of sources which can often be only partially relevant. In this field, I have tried where possible to give practical help to the reader, since teachers and students alike are going to have difficulty navigating all the many potential resources. One way I have done this is to stress the credibility and methodology of the writer in question, so as to give the reader some basis from which to evaluate the usefulness of the work. It is also one reason why I have subdivided this bibliography into relatively specific topics that I believe are more easily researched. Another reason is to point out the ways in which the material can be accessible to students. When I was teaching medieval religion to first-year undergraduates, I often had a difficult time finding appropriate material. Nothing kills interest in a topic like assigning too much reading, and yet, without that reading, how can anyone communicate the complex, theologically dense and often emotionally disturbing world of medieval religion? However, I did find that learning about and discussing how religion affected "ordinary people" was a much stronger means of understanding why it matters. The bibliography is consequently divided into six parts. The first part is a general resource section that provides an informative introduction, while the other five take on a particular relationship that medieval people had with other aspects of the period, such as their local communities, their books, the wider society, and the church:

One) General Resources for Medieval Popular Religion

Two) Religious Practice: Prayer, Ritual and Living in the Community

Three) Lay People and Religious Books

Four) Religion and Wider Medieval Society

Five) Religious Culture within the Church

Six) Societal Tensions with the Church

Lastly, unlike several *Once and Future Classroom Bibliographies* before me, I have elected to give the reader individual chapters and journal articles as well as entire books. I have done this partly because “Popular Religion” is frequently included as part of larger and more comprehensive histories, and I wanted to help the reader avoid unnecessary and irrelevant reading. Also, it is my hope that including shorter, bite-size bits will be more easily incorporated into lesson plans and will be more easily directly used as resources by students.

One) General Resources for Medieval Popular Religion

Primary sources:

John Shinnars, ed. *Medieval Popular Religion, 1000-1500: A Reader*. Ontario: Broadview Press, 2007.

As the name suggests, this is a resource compiling a variety of relevant primary sources regarding medieval popular religion. Because the editor was aiming at exploring diverse takes on “popular religion,” there are a few idiosyncratic readings such as “The faith of the Spanish peasant, Juan de Rabe” and “The sorcery trial of Lady Alice Kyteler” in amongst the more general sources outlining the cult of Virgin Mary, listing popular prayers and describing some of

the religion-inflected ghost stories. But I see this as a strength of the book, with respect to its usefulness as an inspirational text. By concentrating on the lives of individual people in many of its chapters, Shinnars brings out the living relevance of popular religion — students may find humor in the account of St Guinefort (a 13th -century greyhound revered for his martyrdom) but they may also find interesting parallels to modern objects of cult-worship. Moreover, by offering such a plethora of examples, and as such, different ideas of what constitutes “popular religion,” Shinnars gives the reader the power of interpretation in piecing it together.

Linne R. Mooney, Daniel W. Mosser, and Elizabeth Solopova, ed. *Digital Index of Middle English Verse*. <http://www.dimev.net/>

This genesis of this collection was compiled in 1943, and has been used in thousands of classrooms, for many different kinds of classes. Its new digital form is a nod to its continuing relevance and the absolute need of teachers to have an easily-searchable database of lyrics from which to select those most useful to them. It may be a slight flaw of the digital project that a user cannot blanketly search for “religious” or “devotional” lyrics but only from a long list of specific subtopics such as “Christ-The Harrowing of Hell.” These kinds of extremely targeted search options, however, may be exactly what a teacher needs in finding exactly the right resource for a class. The site gives a lot of information about each lyric, such as the number of manuscript witnesses (therefore giving a hint as to its popularity or usage), the language and versification style. Unfortunately, except with the very short lyrics, this collection only has the first and last lines. But it does provide the manuscript source of the lyric, which can generally then be found elsewhere.

Scholarly Sources:

P.J.P Goldberg. *Medieval England: A Social History 1250–1550*. London: Hodder Arnold, 2004.

This text covers much more than popular religion, and only a few chapters (4: “Church and Parish” and 16: “Devotion Before the Break with Rome”) are specifically relevant. However, while this social history is divided by chapters into social, economic, demographic and cultural forces, religion is mentioned frequently throughout as touching on each factor. For example, in a subchapter on “Guilds and Fraternities,” Goldberg gives specific information on devotional guilds, a subject he also treats in other parts of the text. Tackling the laboring and middle-class society of the English Middle Ages, he provides a great introduction to the period which virtually ignores monarchs and the greater political movements of the time in favor of dealing with the common man. He also discourses frequently and helpfully on the historian’s tools for analyzing historical evidence, stressing the “obscure” and uncertain nature of most historical “facts.” This kind of transparency might be more helpful as a model for students than the more bombastic historical texts that argue fiercely for one theory over another.

Norman Tanner. “Laity.” In *The Church in the Later Middle Ages*. I.B. Tauris, 2008.

In the introduction to this chapter, Tanner makes the dynamic statement that “the laity, both men and women, provided much of the energy and creativity as well as constituting the overwhelming majority of the Christian population . . . therefore this ambitious third chapter, which discusses the religion of the laity in the Western Church during the last two centuries of the Middle Ages, is central to the book.” (71) I find this curious since, unlike Goldberg’s history mentioned above, the laity are hardly mentioned in the other chapters, apart from a short discussion of their wills and bequests to the clergy in the preceding chapter and an even shorter

reference to their hymns and carols in the next chapter. Even here, Tanner employs a top-down means of discussing the religious practices of the laity, namely, by explaining their religious duties as mandated by the clergy, and the various means the clergy employed in order to teach them this duty. Consequently, you have to search to find details of popular religion. Within the tacit divisions of this chapter into such practices as Baptism, Confession, Marriage and Tithes, lay response is seen, for example, in Tanner's accounts of their complaints about their fellow parishioners' non-attendance, or the priest's complaints of their behavior. It is useful as a broad overview and as containing brief discussion on topics not otherwise covered by this bibliography, such as the European female mystics and the beguine movement.

R.N. Swanson. *Religion and Devotion in Europe c.1215-c.1515*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Similar to Tanner's book, *Religion and Devotion* covers the great institutions of the Church and the major ecclesiastical changes from the High Middle Ages onwards, with the additional responsibility of commenting on various European issues as well. It is suitable as a general resource for this bibliography, however, because of the way it is organized: although it is not an especially long book, it is subdivided into 97 separate chapters of about 3.5 pages each. These mini-chapters are concerned with relatively specific topics, many of which only touch on popular religion, such as "Living Faith," where Swanson discusses the historian's access to the individual spirituality of ordinary medieval people, and "The Laity in Control?" where he gives brief examples of late medieval lay communities exerting strong control over parish priests. These chapters can therefore be seen as a preliminary investigation into individual themes, and so ideal for planning classes. Although there is not an overwhelming amount on any one topic, and the

historical sources he pulls from seem to be inconsistent, it is an excellent starting point for research, especially given the wider European context.

Eamon Duffy. *The Stripping of the Altars: c.1400–c.1580*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.

In this book, Duffy largely discusses social and material aspects of popular late medieval religion. He constantly refers back to the visible and tangible — roodscreens, painted triptychs, misericords, those only known from written record and those still present today. The overall effect is of the accessibility of medieval religion as something the reader can not only understand, but touch and experience. Drawing from parish records, wills, and contemporary writings on religious culture, he demonstrates the regionality of religious practices, such as the specific blessings and curses used by inhabitants. He also comments on general trends in devotion that were shared by other countries, or which were markedly different from other countries. For example, in both France and England at this time saints were largely perceived by laypeople as friendly, neighborly or otherwise approachable, and as Duffy argues, easy to adopt without the aid of the clergy. Duffy's perspective is firmly on the laypeople, somewhat neglecting the clergy and the institutional church, charting popular religion as grassroots movements which easily and quickly spawned new kinds of devotions, spreading by word of mouth and relatively independent of top-down control. As well as noting affective responses, he also acknowledges the economic factors of a “corporate investment” in religion, such as the creation of guilds dedicated to maintain candles burning daily in front of the local altar. Ultimately, with his characteristic humor and wit, Duffy provides a balanced argument for both the richly symbolic importance of Christianity, and its practical usefulness to the average

layperson in helping to structure their society. I can't imagine students not responding to this book.

Peter Dendle. "The Age of Faith': Everyone in the Middle Ages Believed in God." In *Misconceptions About the Middle Ages*. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Probably very familiar from other *Once and Future Classroom* bibliographies, this book is a great resource for starting class discussion in particular, as it briefly and simply lays out a certain number of beliefs people today have about the Middle Ages which are not true. Since religion is possibly one of the most misunderstood features of the Middle Ages (think of the widely held impression of the medieval church as "barbaric" and "tyrannical" or "with a tendency towards witch-burning," for example), some of these ideas need clearing up. Each belief is described and debunked in about 5 pages, so they are best used as a jumping-off point for further research. The first section, "Faith," touches on a lot of specific beliefs, such as the fact that there once was a female pope, but also more general and more prejudicial ideas about the corruption of the church. Dendle takes the idea that "everyone in the Middle Ages believed in God" as the over-generalization it obviously is, and breaks down some of the reasons why a) this was not the case and b) why people believe it now. In bringing up points such as the secular nature of many church functions, and the well-documented record of dissent against orthodox theology, he also compares the relationship between religion and popular opinion then to the same relationship today. I find this kind of move helpful, since it makes the material seem relevant to students' interests.

Christine Caldwell Ames. "Authentic, True and Right: Inquisition and the Study of Medieval Popular Religion." In *Christianity and Culture in the Middle Ages: Essays to*

***Honor John von Engen.* Ed. David C. Mengel and Lisa Wolverton. Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015.**

Somewhat differently from the other entries in this general reference section, this article does not give a basic rundown of the history of popular medieval religion; rather, it gives a good summary of the critical background to scholarship on the subject. Why do people study popular medieval religion? What are the main ways it has been conceptualized? How can modern historians correctly assess this historical culture? In answering these questions, Ames uses what may be considered as a surprising perspective: the Inquisition, and documents pertaining to their investigations. Through analyzing what was considered heretic or unorthodox religion, she presents, as in negative space, what was understood as popular religion. In a way, this approach is promoted in order to avoid modern prejudices about what religion should constitute. In the beginning of the article, Ames briefly discusses the tendency of earlier historians to make snap judgments about “authentic” or “real” religion based on, for example, how connected religious practices were to folkloric or pagan practices (to their detriment, as far as “authenticity” was concerned). Paying attention to Inquisitorial documents is to pay attention to what contemporary writers felt was important about popular belief, as it was felt to be of extreme importance to accurately describe — and consequently discipline — these beliefs and practices. This article may not be useful to most students, for those interested in either the history of the scholarship or the conceptualization of “popular religion,” it offers a great starting point.

Two) Religious Practice: Prayer, Ritual and Living in the Community

This section partly looks at individual religious behaviors, such as private prayer and domestic space as religious space, but also considers the ways these prayers and rituals were part of communal activity. Many of these rituals revolve around the devotion shown towards medieval saints, as this was both an extremely popular practice and a highly codified one, so that there are many historical records of saint-worship existing today.

Primary Sources

Anonymous. "A Prayer to Mary." In *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse*. Ed. George Shuffelton. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008.

This volume of late 15th-century religious and secular writings is a great resource for further study on the intersection between religion and society in the late Middle Ages, but this particular prayer is a good, easy source for understanding the importance of Marian culture to a medieval person in that culture. Although in medieval English, the text is short enough that it is not completely inaccessible, and for its brevity, provides a startlingly complex look at what Mary meant. Addressing her sequentially as a mother, a queen, an intercessor, a worker of miracles, the poem demonstrates her usefulness to varied facets of medieval readers, and the simple structure and rhyme scheme shows how easy it would be to memorize and use daily.

John the Blind Audelay. "Paternoster." In *Poems and Carols (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 302)*. Ed. Susanna Fein. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2009.

This medieval poem is something of a twofer: it gives the modern reader both the text of the Paternoster, one of the most frequently used prayers in the Middle Ages (and probably very familiar to most contemporary students) and a commentary on that prayer. The works of medieval poet John the Blind Audelay were likely not that well known in his time, and this

expanded version of the prayer does not necessarily reflect how people received the text, but it may very likely reflect the thoughts that they would have had about the familiar creed. This version of the Paternoster has a new stanza for each line, explaining the meaning and exhorting the reader to comply. Setting this primary source as a reading for students could help them understand the complex significance of the Paternoster for the medieval lay person, without needing to delve into scholarship on the theology.

Geoffrey Chaucer. “The Parson’s Tale.” In *The Canterbury Tales*.

For the students in the class who think they know Chaucer and *The Canterbury Tales*, the last tale should prove a surprising reading. But as a compilation of two well-known and well-used medieval documents (a penitential manual and a manual of Sins), it’s a fascinating resource which lays out both the actions and the necessary thoughts and feelings behind the rituals of penitence and confession. After 1215 yearly confession was mandatory for Christians, and local priests usually encouraged their parishioners to practice it more frequently. Exploring especially the penitential section, with its description of Hell and the sufferings of Christ, really helps the modern reader to understand the psychological pressures put on the confessional subject. Of course, there are many modern English translations of *The Canterbury Tales* but for some reason editors often choose to leave out this last, disturbing tale altogether, so you may prefer to use versions which can be found online.

<https://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/teachslf/parst-tran.htm>

Scholarly Sources

Robert L.A. Clark. "Constructing the Female Subject in Late Medieval Devotion." In *Medieval Conduct*. Ed. Kathleen Ashley and Robert L.A. Clark. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, 160–82.

While the majority of the essays in this book are concerned with the largely 15th-century phenomenon of "conduct books," and the social graces which they were supposed to instill in the rising upper middle-class, this article focuses on the particular precepts of daily mental and spatial conduct which applied to religious practice. As per usual, it is difficult to say how much of the "conduct lessons" were followed, but the texts Clark studies are so thoroughly prescriptive that they conjure up a powerful impression of the late medieval woman at prayer. He explains how these books differentiated between the statuses of women: unmarried, married or widowed women enjoyed varying degrees of freedom with respect to their devotions, particularly for how much they were allowed to participate in the contemplative life. He also gives examples of more general precepts, such as the times of day and places in a house where women were encouraged to pray, as well as the objects they were expected to have at hand. This article is more concerned with the physical act of devotion than the mental processes but could be valuable in its detail and strict focus.

Diana Webb. "Domestic Space and Devotion in the Middle Ages." *Defining the Holy: Sacred Space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*. Ed. Andrew Spicer and Sarah Hamilton. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005.

On a similar theme, this article seems to present itself as a response to certain misconceptions about the nature of domestic, rather than church-centric religious practice. Webb starts by briefly discussing the origins of Christian private worship as sanctioned by the early church, and then

how this activity was significantly influenced by the Fourth Lateran Council's famous mandates in 1215, of the necessity of confession, the receiving of communion and the performance of the eucharistic miracle by the clergy. Previous scholars and historians, we are led to understand, tended to believe that this strengthened the role of the church in Christian ritual. And Webb is not arguing against this idea, per se, but against the corollary idea that this strengthening of the church meant a weakening of religion as practiced in domestic spaces. In fact, as rituals were codified, they were also translated into non-church spaces like the private bedrooms of men and women, and into private chapels and rooms within the houses of the nobility. The noble layperson is but one focus of this article, though, and while Webb examines historical evidence from all over Europe, citing examples of palatial private chapels owned by men like Charlemagne, she also devotes attention to items like "portable altars" owned by the ill and infirm, who had difficulty making it into church. This is probably the only helpful chapter in the book — most of the others a) do not actually touch on the Middle Ages, and b) bear the telltale signs of myopic scholarship on singular subjects, (such as sacred spaces in Avignon on the eve of the French Revolution).

Robert Bartlett. *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013.

Bartlett's extensive study of saint-worship within Christianity begins in 100 AD and, despite the title, does not chronologically end with the Reformation but with a consideration of saint-worship today — region-specific cults, celebration of feast-days, etc. Moreover, the book is only partly arranged as a linear history; after the first five chapters, it engages in a much more topical study of various saint-specific tropes such as shrines, sceptics, and sermons, or pilgrimages, miracles, and relics. This presents something of a problem for the medieval scholar who is only

interested in a relatively small slice of the whole. The third chapter on “The High and Later Middle Ages” is somewhat oddly only concerned with the evolving practice of canonization and a few representative examples of such canonized saints. Unfortunately, it does not explain how the Middle Ages’ treatment of saints developed from the early church towards the modern period, despite claiming to do this in the introduction. To some extent, it works as a select summary of the history, but the more useful information on the Glorious Dead can be found in the succeeding chapters which are best read with frequent reference to the index. Many of these short chapters which look only at shrines, prayers, or candles, are ideal for finding information on medieval religious practice.

Christine Peters. *Patterns of Piety: Women, Gender and Religion in Late Medieval and Reformation England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

As the title suggests, this book is particularly focused on the question of gender and religion, and attempts both to distinguish between male and female religious practices, and to explain these differences within the context of the socio-political culture. On the whole, it is more successful at the first than the second. The author is a conscientious historian who constantly references specific historical records and supports them with corroborating independent evidence. As I mentioned in the introduction, the popular religious life of the laity is not a well-recorded subject in the Middle Ages and requires the historian to interpret trends and patterns from a variety of sources. As a result, it may be worth contrasting this book with Eamon Duffy’s *The Stripping of the Altars*, especially Peters’ chapter on the Saints in which she criticizes Duffy’s interpretation of the late medieval cult of saints. Like Duffy, Peters also deals with the religion of the early Reformation, but those looking purely for medieval material can read only the first 5 chapters, as the book switches periods at this point. *Patterns of Piety* is ideal for those searching for specific

information on religious practices — you can learn about Hockett, the ways to call upon St. Apollonia, how those lighting church tapers were segregated by gender and marital status, and many other details — although since the chapters can be misleadingly titled (“Religious Choices” or “Adam’s Fall” doesn’t really tell the reader what to expect), it rewards close reading more than browsing.

Catherine McKenna. “Gone to Ground: Relics and Holy Wells in Medieval and Early Modern Ireland.” In *Medieval and Early Modern Devotional Objects in Global Perspective: Translations of the Sacred*. Ed. Elizabeth Robertson and Jennifer Jahner. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

The religious practices of popular religion in Ireland are somewhat out of my remit, and deserve more consideration on their own merits, possibly as part of a future bibliography on medieval Ireland. However, some reference to them is not necessarily out of place, especially because McKenna in this article frequently discusses Irish devotions and behavior towards relics as different, even precisely contrary, to practices in England and elsewhere in Europe. The main argument is that “reverence for the sacred dead in Ireland in the Middle Ages was so profoundly implicated with memory, and memory of person and events so profoundly implicated with topography, that . . . Irish Christians came to value objects associated with their saints rather than disinterred and enshrined bodies.” She focuses on a few representative saints such as St. Patrick and charts the medieval fascination with the “books” of the saint, and relative unconcern with his bones. Some details of these cases are designed to prompt further investigation by interested students, such as the habits of some cultists to carry the relics of their saints into battle (and therefore causing the Psalter of St. Columba to become known as the “Cathach” or “Battler”). It

is a short piece, but could be useful as a counterpoint to some of the other entries in this bibliography.

Carole Hill. *Women and Religion in Late Medieval Norwich*. Woodbridge and Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2010.

As a common problem with this topic is the difficulty of generalizing across England's different geographies, one solution may be to use studies of specific places. Norwich has frequently been acclaimed by historians as having a deeply rich and interesting religious culture in the medieval period; Shannon McSheffrey's *Gender and Heresy* devotes much attention to the heretical movement in this town. Hill's book ignores this history, but concentrates attention on a particular subset of religious practice: that used by women, and focused on the cult of saints. Each chapter in this book is devoted to a different female saint in Norwich religious culture who was particularly influential for women, except for the last chapter on "Norwich women and the seven corporal works of mercy," which takes the broad medieval interest in "works of mercy" as filtered through particular focus on those saints. The effect is a little uneven, as it is not clear what differentiates the last chapter from similar discussions within the others. The chapters on the saints provide a good balance between explanation of their theological and political significance, and their emotional significance for women particularly, and how these elements are both expressed in the architecture, church artwork, and bequeathed personal artifacts recovered as evidence of the cults. This book may also be useful for its information on prominent medieval mystics Margery of Kempe and Julian of Norwich, who are frequently mentioned. While this bibliography generally omits any discussion of mystical literature as only tangentially relevant to popular religion, this book places such writing in the context of ordinary women's daily religious practice, and as such offers a relatively unusual perspective.

Ralph Houlbroke. *Death, Religion and the Family in England, 1480–1750*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.

The scope of this book is far greater than the scope of this bibliography, and it only captures the very end of the Middle Ages in its discussion of the religious rites surrounding death, burial and the hereafter. It may therefore not be of much value to the reader, but for those willing to make frequent use of the Index to find the relevant material, it does contain a wealth of information on late medieval religious practice. The general tenor of the argument is the importance of the Reformation in altering attitudes and behavior towards death, and consequently, pre-Reformation ideas are widely discussed. This is clearly evident in places like chapter two, “The Hereafter,” in which Houlbroke begins by giving a linear history of the concepts of heaven, hell and purgatory, moving rapidly from the early church to the medieval church to 16th, 17th, and 18th century beliefs, but then keeps returning to medieval ideas and practices as a point of comparison with the later periods. A similar formula is found in chapter five, “Last Wills and Testaments: Forms and Contents,” which charts in particular the decline in bequests to the church, and frequently discusses the changing beliefs from the Middle Ages which turned from “an investment in the dead” to “an investment in the living.” Some chapters, however, such as 11, “Burial and Commemoration,” don’t touch on the Middle Ages at all, and can be passed over. On the whole, this book is more concerned with charting large-scale changes in religious ritual throughout England, and has less emphasis on detailing the historical sources which support this historical interpretation, so it might be more helpful as a preliminary read.

Three) Lay People and Religious Books

This section is focused on the books which medieval readers would have primarily used for religious purposes, such as saints' lives that were read for the moral examples they supplied, as well as for knowledge of the lives of the holy men and women. The choice of primary sources might seem arbitrary, since all the primary sources in this bibliography would have been read by medieval people. This section merely focuses on those books which made up an important part of the literary culture, since this is the aspect which I feel needs to be emphasized most to students. Too many of them seem to be under the impression that everyone who wasn't part of the gentry was illiterate, or uninterested in books, or discouraged from owning them. Too often, "literary culture" does not come to mind when speaking of popular medieval religion, and this needs to be rectified.

Primary Sources

Deirdre Jackson. *Marvellous to Behold: Miracles in Medieval Manuscripts*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Engaging students with images is a time-honored means of getting their attention, and luckily the medieval period in general is more than generous in obliging us with examples. This book is a sheer delight not just for those students but for anyone interested in comparing different (or similar, as the case may be) beliefs and practices between Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.

There is a relatively small amount of text explaining the significance of certain global tropes like the Great Flood, or more regional ones like the bones of the saint which sticks to a thief's hands. More of the author's time is given over to detailing the miracle stories themselves, and while these are filtered through a modern perspective, they are not subject to much interpretation on Jackson's part. Moreover, it is the images which take up most of the over-size book, and they can

be considered as the real primary sources. In a large layout which easily shows every detail of the (for the most part) highly elaborate and decorative illustrations, and in vivid color, they should prove a captivating study.

Jacobus de Voragine. *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*. Ed. William Granger Ryan. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.

This collection of saint's lives originally compiled in 1260 is the most useful primary source for lessons on medieval saints, as it was widely used and promoted by the church, and was probably the book most frequently read by medieval laypeople after the Bible and the Books of Hours.

While not comprehensive in terms of all the medieval saints' lives produced and read in this period (this is an abridgment of the exceedingly long original, but probably more suited for the classroom), this 182-story collection gives modern readers a sense of both the variety and generic similarities of the saints' lives. While it includes male and female, lay and ecclesiastical, martyrs and confessors, and representatives from over 9 countries in Europe and the Holy Land, reading even only a small selection of these lives shows the formulaic qualities present in their construction: e.g. torture, withstanding temptation, frustration of pagan judges/soldiers/kings, several attempts at execution, miracles surrounding the dead body. In this edition, the stories have been rearranged so that they fall in the order of the medieval calendar (from the beginning of Advent), with the feast-day of each saint marked out in succession. This simple layout therefore has the effect of impressing the modern reader with how much knowledge of the saints impacted upon daily life, how they structured the year in tandem with the major religious holidays. Reading Duffy's chapter on "Seasons and Signs: The Liturgical Year" from *Stripping the Altars* alongside this text will show this even more clearly. Abridged, organized and translated into modern English, this resource is a fun, easy read for anyone.

Mary-Ann Stouck. *A Short Reader of Medieval Saints*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009.

This is actually a shorter, much condensed version of a much longer reader by Stouck which catalogues a much greater variety of saints' lives. However, for the purposes of this bibliography, *The Golden Legend* has breadth covered. The main attraction of this brief reader is its usefulness for a limited set of classes, or even a single class, on medieval saints. In the Preface, Stouck says as much, and lays out instead a selection of different kinds of saints' lives, only a few of which come from the Golden Legend and therefore have their characteristics. Other kinds of readings included here are excerpts from the Life of Catherine of Siena, a popular medieval mystic whose life was both an example to others and a glimpse into the private devotional life of a medieval women; also different versions of some of the Golden Legend saints. For example, the Saint Marcellinus story in the *Golden Legend* is fairly short, and mostly concerned with his role as Pope. In this reader, Stouck uses an excerpt from his Life which focuses a lot more on the role on the writer, and his duties in recording the details of the miracles surrounding Marcellinus, explicitly in order to prove the sanctity of his relics, and so support the pilgrim trade. By reading chapters such as this one, students today can appreciate not just the stories qua stories, but the way in which they were deliberately constructed and framed for medieval readers

Charity Scott-Stokes. *Women's Books of Hours in Medieval England*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2012.

There are a variety of books on the market right now which offer the reader a view into the Books of Hours; unfortunately, most of these are almost or entirely focused on the illustrations,

or the decorative aspects of the Books (a couple of examples include *Illuminations from Books of Hours* or *Painted Prayers: Books of Hours in Medieval and Renaissance Art*). Possibly these might be useful for a class, if the editors also gave a good indication of how the average medieval reader used these books. But the only books which accomplish this are full-length editions of highly elaborate Books of Hours that were owned by nobility or royalty, like *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves* and therefore are not that representative of the books which were well-known or popular. The great majority of medieval Books of Hours were relatively plain and unadorned. Images and illustrations can be great resources for getting the attention of students, but in order to understand the usefulness of the medium, they need the text. Strangely, Scott-Stokes' is one of the few books to give selected texts from the Books, alongside a discussion of their manuscript context and an interpretative essay. Depending on the class, a teacher could pick and choose, but the book offers a great variety in the texts: not only prayers, psalms and offices but lists of family records (who married whom), and other personal details which were inscribed into the privately owned and privately made books. Although Scott-Stokes' perspective is on female ownership and readership, this book is also one of the best primary sources for the genre in general.

Anonymous. *Gesta Romanorum: A new translation*. Ed. Christopher Stace. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016.

For what is probably one of the most popular story-collections of the Middle Ages, it is shocking that it has taken so long for a new edition to come out — before this year, the most recent edition was published in 1903, and it was an abridgment at that. There is scholarly debate about the original *Gesta*, but the first version was probably created in Germany and thence spread to other European countries, and was first translated into English in the 14th century. Many of the stories

may be familiar to students from other places, since the *Gesta* makes use of folktale, history and myth in its vast repertoire; the salient feature of the collection is how each story is given a Christian allegory (a popular motif in the Middle Ages). For a tale of an unhappy wife who hanged herself on a tree because of her husband's cruelty, the text provides a moral that compares the tree to the Cross, the wife to Jesus Christ, and the husband to man, who torments and 're-crucifies' Christ through his sin. The *Gesta* was well-used not only as a household book, but through being excerpted for other purposes, such as sermons or religious education manuals. For students today, it can demonstrate clearly the ways in which literally any kind of story can be viewed through a Christian framework; guessing at what the moral of a given tale would be may provide an interesting lesson.

Scholarly Sources

Elizabeth Salter. *Popular Reading in English c. 1400-1600*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012.

Salter is one of the foremost literary critics working in this field, and this book conscientiously explores reading habits in the late Middle Ages and early modern period, analyzing the most popular texts produced at that time for their likely reception. Her theory of reading is drawn largely from Wolfgang Iser, and calls upon the modern critic to imaginatively reconstruct the conditions of reading, necessitating a strong awareness of the cultural framework of that society. While not all the chapters in this book are relevant for classes on popular religion, her focus on cultural cues for readers may be usefully paired with Eamon Duffy's history of traditional religion, and provides an accessible approach for non-medievalists. This book also unusually devotes an entire chapter to the popular *Gesta Romanorum* 'moral' tales and the slippage these

stories experiences between their use by the clergy and by the lay reader. Browsing through this chapter, or the “Religious Reading” chapter which discusses the different values of Latin and English prayers, and how they would have been used by non-Latinate readers, will give students a clear impression of what medieval people read, and some expert interpretation of *how* they could have read.

Sabrina Corbellini. *Cultures of Religious Reading in the Late Middle Ages: Instructing the Soul, Feeding the Spirit and Awakening the Passion*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2013.

This book explores textual communities operating within lay religious culture in the Middle Ages, with a varied selection of essays focusing on specific case studies in both England and the wider Continent, including Germany, Italy, and Holland. In the introduction, Corbellini describes how the late Middle Ages saw the rise of a new non-Latinate and mostly urban lay reading community; however, the book does not chart this phenomenon in any kind of comprehensive way or draw links between different kinds of communal reading activities. As a result, this book is less useful as an overview of religious reading. Instead, it is valuable for its broad range, both in terms of content and methodology. Some essays demonstrate a thorough analysis of manuscript evidence, such as Eyal Poleg’s discussion of how the Wycliffite Bible was adapted to make it more accessible to lay readers, or Corbellini’s analysis of marginalia in Tuscan books, from which she evinces a community actively sharing books between lay and religious circles. Other essays, like John Thompson’s essay on *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, use more traditional literary criticism to suggest ideal or imagined lay readers from popular religious works, and others like Kristian Jensen’s essay, use digital data-mining tools to analyze book-buying patterns across Europe. The scope of this book would make it useful for advanced students exploring purely textual aspects of popular religion.

Laurel Amtower. “The Reading Public” and “The Images of the Book.” In *Engaging Words: The Culture of Reading in the Later Middle Ages*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000.

This book mostly discusses canonical medieval authors and their response to popular reading, but the first chapter, “The Reading Public” gives a great rundown of the book production context of medieval England and the huge, growing market for religious books in the 14th–15th century. Students can find concrete information here regarding the likely number of books that existed, through physical witnesses and mention in wills. In conjunction with this, a basic introduction to the literacy rate in England over the Middle Ages, which may help to debunk contemporary thinking about the “dark” Middle Ages, and some limited ideas concerning how people were taught to read, which can inform upon the Slater reading. The second chapter, “The Image of the Book” devotes itself to a consideration of the “medieval bestseller” Books of Hours. While there are more in-depth studies, this chapter gives a quick introduction to the genre, arguing specifically for the strong relationship between the use of these texts and the rising Marian culture during the late Middle Ages. As I mentioned in the entry to the Scott-Stokes book *Women’s Books of Hours*, the illustrations of such books are not necessarily the most helpful access point for understanding their usefulness to people. But Amtower considers not only the more high-market illustrated versions, but also the layout and organization of texts into the down-market Books, which is a valuable approach. She particularly emphasizes the personal nature of these books, and the way in which they could be arranged so as to suit the tastes and needs of the individual devotional subject. This cannot fail to be of interest to students who want to learn about the private religious practices of medieval laypeople.

Eamon Duffy. *Marking the Hours: English People and their Prayers 1240-1570*. Yale: Yale University Press, 2006.

More focused than Duffy's wide-ranging *Stripping the Altars* listed above, this book claims to discover intimate and private details of the medieval religious life, through study of the Books of Hours. In this way, it can be seen as a longer and detailed supplement to Amtower's chapter, possibly for students who want to explore the ideas expressed there with more rigorous scholarship. He begins first of all with the 12th-14th century chronological history of the books which is lacking in Amtower's much shorter account. When describing the 'customization' that characterizes the books, he not only notes the insights this gives into the person who commissioned the book, but also the tenor of the relationship which must have existed between that reader and the person who was gifted such a book in a will (as most books of this kind were bequeathed). Although a little speculative, it provides a detailed picture of medieval people. Inevitably, as with most criticism on the Books of Hours, there is a great deal of explanation and argument concerning the illustration; in fact the very layout of the book is constructed so as to accommodate the images as equal in importance to the text. As part of this discussion, Duffy places a great deal more stress on the concept of the Books as precious objects, a strand of critical thinking which is gaining more and more importance in scholarship today. A specialist, subject, it does veer off into reformation territory and the political consequences of printing the Books, but this occurs in the later chapters, and can easily be avoided.

John Arnott McCulloch. *Medieval Faith and Fable*. Edinburgh: Riverside Press, 1932.

This entry is probably the oldest reference book in the bibliography and normally would be excised on an assumption of its being far too dated to be of use to a 21st century student or

scholar. Most histories written during this period are prey to several noticeable prejudices and lacking in some of the rigorous standards for evidence which are much more common in recent historical scholarship. However, *Medieval Faith and Fable* is not strictly a history. In the Preface, McCulloch acknowledges to the reader that this “is not a history of the Middle Ages” but rather an attempt to “show what men thought or believed or said or did regarding many things which . . . are characteristic of the period.” (xxv) This may be confusing, and what McCulloch fails to adequately communicate here is how exactly “what men thought or believed or said” really differs from a historical account. My impression from reading this book is that the difference exists in how the book is largely made up of stories that popularly circulated in the Middle Ages. Miracles worked by dead saints, appearances of devils, strange plants and animals which show the hand of God, and every other kind of popular religious story that can be imagined: nowhere in the Preface does McCulloch characterize his book in this way, but it effectively works as a wide-ranging collection of stories, folklore, myths and other cultural ephemera related to religion which were ‘read’ either verbally or aurally, in the Middle Ages. It may be dated, but it’s a fun and fascinating read, and rewards dipping in and out for research and for pleasure.

Miri Rubin. *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999.

For this bibliography, I am not including much discussion of non-Christian faiths in the medieval period, largely because I could not do them justice. But some inclusion seems necessary, and I believe this book to be, in particular, a highly useful exploration of what the Jewish people and the Jewish faith actively meant for the average Christian layperson in the Middle Ages. As much of their impressions of Jewish beliefs and practices was vastly incorrect, I find Rubin’s take on

the subject unusually perspicacious; Christian understanding of Judaism at this time can very helpfully be seen in terms of stories or tales, prejudicial narratives which highly influenced their response to Jews, and which marks a certain unfortunate part of the medieval religious culture. For those reader only interested in English responses to Judaism, the first chapter “From Jewish Boy to Bleeding Host” will be the most helpful. This chapter discusses the main subject of the book, the “host desecration” story, examples of which appear throughout Europe, and which she explains initially, are part and parcel with standard religious reading in England, to be found for example in many Marian tale collections, exempla, and miracle-books. The rest of the book is concerned more or less with a different question: how much did common prejudicial stories about Jews affect their treatment? Since the expulsion of the Jews from England in 1290, this was more of a European issue, and Rubin takes the reader from Paris to Castille, charting the different responses towards Jews as a result of various misunderstandings. Her style of writing history works here as a kind of detective investigation, where she considers all available facts and posits questions of interpretation, such as “Were the Jews of Korneuberg framed?” This approach to the history is slightly unusual but highly engaging for students. Even though her focus is always on the aspects of the narratives — she tracks the common tropes, the common caricatures, the links between anti-Semitic stories and anti-clerical satires — she never gives the reader the impression that she is engaging in ‘mere’ literary criticism, but in a wholesale investigation of the ways stories affect people’s beliefs and actions.

Kirsty Campbell. “Reginald Peacock and the Religious Education of the Laity in Fifteenth-Century England.” *Studies in Philology* 107 (2010); 48–73.

For anyone even casually studying popular religious reading in late medieval England, the name Reginald Peacock is sure to come up frequently. This is definitely a special study for students

interested in books sanctioned by the church, for the purposes of learning and understanding more about orthodox religion, since as Campbell argues, this was Peacock's main goal. The title may be misleadingly dull, but her article is an engaging, even thrilling story of a man who tried to make his sermons and books speak to the popular imagination in order to instruct the laypeople, and eventually ended up branded as a heretic for his attempts. Writings of Reginald Peacock may be most usefully read in conjunction with books on Lollardy (which can be found in a later section in this bibliography) as Lollards practiced similar moves against popular religion, only from very different standpoints. In the beginning of the article, Campbell also gives a good precis of the typical religious instructional manuals which medieval people were encouraged to use, before arguing for Peacock's superior (as in, ambitious) educational program, which was designed to lift readers out of their simple understanding of religion into a 'higher sense' of its theological complexity.

Four) Religion and Wider Medieval Society

In previous sections of this bibliography I have been discussing specifically religious acts such as prayer and confession, or explicitly religious materials. This section grows out of both topics, but constitutes a separate idea by itself, if a somewhat amorphous one. Here I will look at ways in which religion touched on and influenced other aspects of medieval society, or where religious ideas and tropes were melded with secular interests and concerns. It is difficult to say what exactly belongs in this section — as I mentioned in the introduction, it is the labor of many lifetimes to disentangle “religion” from everything else in the medieval world, and this is not a very rigorous attempt.

Primary Sources:

John Mandeville. *The Book of John Mandeville: with Related Texts*. Ed. Iain Higgins.

Indianapolis: Hackett, 2011.

The 250 manuscript witnesses of this travelogue that we have from the Middle Ages testify to its popularity. It's a challenge to generically categorize this work, but any description would have to include references to medieval religion, and how this book is largely structured around a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, a review of global religions, and reflections on the current state of Christianity which were, I believe, shared by many of his contemporaries. A long, and not entirely interesting text, I suggest that teachers excerpt selections from this resource, for example Mandeville's description of other cultures' religions — as when he explains the burial rites of one sect who burn widows alive on their husbands' funeral biers, or others who wear no clothing of any kind in observance of Adam and Eve, pre-Fall — or when he warns his readers about the coming apocalypse, and the need for a popular renewal of faith, or when he more prosaically charts the pilgrimage trail through Jerusalem and Rome. This edition is not perhaps the most authentic one for a primary source of medieval religion in England, but while many of those exist in perfectly accessible forms, they are generally in Middle English. Here, Higgins has translated a 15th-century Middle-French version of the text into modern English, and this might be a better choice for a high school classroom. Higgins is also a reputable Mandeville scholar, and his introduction is more detailed and reliable than the slightly dated introduction in the 2005 Penguin modern English edition.

Anonymous. *Les pelrinages communes que crestiens fount en la Seinte Terre, Les pardouns de Acres, and Scriptum quod peregrini deferunt.* In *The Complete Harley 2253 Manuscript, Volumes 2 and 3.* Ed. Susanna Fein. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2014-16.

As offering an insight into the expectations and experiences of the medieval pilgrim, these three sources offer a reasonably well-balanced selection. The first two (of these very short texts) are in volume 2, and the third is in volume 3 of the Harley 2253 manuscript, a famous 14th century miscellany that is considered to be a great source of popular vernacular material. This edition gives a complete modern English translation of the Anglo-Norman texts on the pilgrimage culture, as well as commentary by the editor and acknowledged expert on the manuscript. These three texts collectively embody three different, but interrelated concepts about the Holy Land, which in tandem with each other could be very useful for students. The first text speaks generally of common pilgrimage routes and the geography of the area, the second is focused on the spiritual benefits from walking similar routes (and how much more you are pardoned if you walk them several times over), and the third is given over to fantastic luxurious (and extremely fanciful) descriptions of the relics in one such spot, available for the pilgrim to view and reflect on the sacred history from which they derive. As a collection, they supplement each other in a more or less practical way, and may intrigue students with the concrete vision of pilgrimage travel they offer, while at the same time reinforcing the religious context of such a trip.

Anonymous. *Sir Owain.*

<http://www.eleusinianm.co.uk/middle-english-literature-retold-in-modern-english/visits-to-purgatory/sir-owain>

This text demonstrates to the reader one of those intriguing medieval mixing of genres, and it is difficult to say whether it is more of a romance, or a travel narrative, or a religious sermon on sin. Mostly, it has been categorized as a “purgatory poem,” which does not give you much information. The plot is straightforward: a knight decides to visit a place known as St Patrick’s Purgatory in Ireland, and takes upon himself the quest of descending into what is presented as a literal mouth of Purgatory (a much more popular destination for English medieval protagonists than Hell). During his journey he sees many specific torments visited on the sinful and briefly experiences some himself before protecting himself with prayer and calling upon God. After his traumatic pilgrimage, he is rewarded with a vision of the Earthly Paradise and returns home determined to be a more virtuous person. As a resource for students, it is particularly valuable for the vivid descriptions of purgatorial suffering, and the insights it can give into the mindset of the medieval reader about their religious obligations. There is an edition of this text in Middle English, available both online and in print, from the METS series. However, the modern English translation available online at *Eleusiniannm* is probably more appropriate for the high school classroom.

Thomas Malory. “The Quest of the Holy Grail.” In *Malory: Complete Works*. Ed. Eugene Vinaver. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Along similar lines, this section of the famous history of King Arthur also shows how powerfully religion can influence otherwise mostly-secular stories. The Grail Quest interrupts the regular battles and tournaments of the knights, replacing chivalric with religious values, and (mostly) exchanging scenes of violence, destruction and courtly love for holy miracles, tests of faith, and devotional prayer. Reading the adventures of the knights on this particular quest may give students a different impression of the Arthurian stories than they might have had before, and it

certainly evinces the power of popular religion. Reading this chapter in conjunction with texts like *Sir Owain* above could be useful for students exploring religious-adventure writing in the Middle Ages.

Anonymous. 'Robin Hood and the Monk.' In *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*. Ed. Stephen Thomas Knight and Thomas H. Ohlgren. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000.

This may seem like a strange choice of text to teach medieval popular religion, but it has three arguments in its favor: 1) it is a Robin Hood story, and so might be more agreeable to students (many of whom, it seems, largely conceptualize the medieval period through the lens of Robin Hood and the Knights of the Round Table), 2) it is one of the very few Robin Hood sources to actually date from the medieval period and so has a stronger claim to medieval 'authenticity' and 3) through a fictional example, it shows the power and importance of religious ritual to daily lives. Robin is comfortably living in his greenwood stronghold until he feels the craving to participate in a Mass, which he obviously can't do in the forest. This is narratively important, since "going out of the forest and getting caught by the sheriff" is one of the most common plots to the Robin Hood stories, and "Robin Hood and the Monk," among others, emphasizes the disconnection from (and therefore need for) a communal religious ritual like the Mass. In other early Robin Hood stories, Robin is similarly shown to be highly religious; he frequently prays to the Virgin Mary as his particular object of devotion. This story, unlike *Sir Owain* or "The Grail Quest," takes a much more everyday religious ritual and folds it into an adventure story, conveying how central these structural aspects of religion were to medieval society.

Anonymous. *York Mystery Plays: A Selection in Modern Spelling*. Ed. Richard Beadle and Pamela M. King. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

The medieval mystery plays were a strong feature of popular religion and popular culture, and at least a passing familiarity with them is key for an understanding of popular religion — a previous *Once and Future Classroom* bibliography has this topic covered, so I'll just include this primary source, as an ideal choice if you are only using one text for a class. The York plays are not necessarily more interesting than the Wakefield or Chester plays, but there is much more information available on their historical and modern performances. Students may find it intriguing to picture the performance of these relatively staid biblical dramas about Noah's Flood or the Slaughter of the Innocents when imagining them acted out on rickety carts in the middle of the streets of York. Beadle and King cut down the cycle to a manageable amount, focusing on the more exciting action-filled plays and creating a better climax by having the Last Judgment directly follow on the Crucifixion sequence (and consequently losing the theologically-important but dull plays about the Descent of the Holy Spirit and Appearance of Mary to Thomas). The blend of religion and wider society is, however, somewhat at the forefront of their edition, in that each play is explicitly introduced as connected to the guild members who performed them, delightfully making "The Butchers" inseparable from the "Death of Christ."

Scholarly Sources:

Diane Watt. "Mary the Physician: Women, Religion and Medicine in the Middle Ages." In *Medicine, Gender and Religion in Medieval Culture*. Ed. Naoe Kukita Yoshikawa. Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 2015.

As medieval medicine has become more and more of a popular scholarly interest, women's involvement in medicine has similarly claimed attention from scholars constantly finding new avenues of discussion and different perspectives on women's role. One relatively recent tack is to consider female medicine —unlike male medicine —as particularly influenced by religious culture, and the model of healing female saints and martyrs. The focus of this essay is nominally on this topic but quickly shifts from considering the Virgin Mary as the prime exemplar of a female healer in the late Middle Ages, to considering how her model was followed, not by average English women, but by the famous mystics of the period. The brevity of the article limits its usefulness; however, it does offer an in-depth analysis of the mystics' healing activities within their own communities and their relationship to a variety of religious ideas also affecting other women, such as *caritas*, penance, and the longstanding medieval belief in a strong connection between the health of the body and the health of the soul. Late in the article she also references the well-known epistolary collection of the 15th century Paston family, and examines features such as Margaret Paston's distrust of doctors and faith in the intercessory healing of the Virgin Mary — accompanied by Margaret's own individually developed cures, plasters and ointments, laboriously described in some of her letters. While most of the essays in this volume are too idiosyncratic to be broadly useful, it might be a valuable resource for exploring some of the newest research along these lines.

William C. Jordan. "Charms to Ward off Sheep and Pig Murrain." In *Medieval Christianity in Practice*. Ed. Miri Rubin. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009. Pp. 67-74.

One of the entertaining aspects of medieval religion is its relationship to medicine, and the fact that this medicinal power was not just applied to people. Rubin's book contains a wonderfully

diverse selection of articles detailing some of the more extraordinary or unexpected aspects of medieval Christianity, and is well worth reading in its entirety, but mostly overlaps with other entries in this bibliography. Jordan's article is fresh and fun reading, and enjoyably begins with a lengthy transcript of two such charms or blessings to prevent or get rid of sheep and pig disease. For a relatively short article, it gives the reader a detailed history of the specific context in which these pigs and sheep might live, according to the time and place from which these blessings derived. While most historians of medieval religion do not ignore the rustic community, they also do not tend to place much stress on rural lives and concerns, but Jordan admirably paints a scene of rural life in which religion was often very much a tool for practical living, and where the blessing of sheep was a large, ceremonial event. Students cannot help but be charmed by the image of sheep-specific Masses and rung bells, with the priest and congregation then trooping out into the sheepcote and reading to the animals selections from the Gospel.

V.A. Kolve. "The Corpus Christi Drama as Play and Game." In *The Play Called Corpus Christi*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966.

Although this book does not explicitly market itself as a social history of the play, it performs this function through constantly referencing the religious rituals from which the play is derived, the relationship between the audience and the actors, and contemporary medieval opinions on play-acting as a religious activity. While some chapters (mostly, those later in the volume) are given over to the play's literary qualities and the role of the dramatist, early chapters consider the play in the context of the more popular religious cultures, and demonstrate the strong relationship between them. The chapter on 'Play and Game' explains the movement of the drama from monastic houses 'into the streets' as the complete transformation of the liturgical performance into a game organized and performed by secular members of the community who,

as Kolve says, would have said “We will play a game of the Passion.” (14) Yet while the format of the play became largely non-serious, Kolve does not let the reader lose sight of the essential necessity of the play for giving the layperson a way to imagine the most important events of biblical history. Kolve discusses the extent to which the medieval layperson would have felt that doing God’s will and play-acting are reconcilable activities. As an introduction to medieval drama, it seems helpfully focused on the thoughts and feelings behind the experience, and as such, more engaging for students.

Jill Stevenson. “Embodied Enchantments: Cognitive Theory and the York Mystery Plays.”
In *The York Mystery Plays: Performance in the City*. Ed. Margaret Rogerson. Woodbridge and Rochester: Boydell & Brewer, 2011.

This book could be extremely valuable for students interested especially in medieval mentalities. There are a variety of articles in this book which discuss performances of the mystery plays today, but Stevenson offers some insights into the medieval audience’s understanding of the plays —and the religious stories behind them — through applying cognitive theory to 2006 audience members. One of the things I find most useful about her argument is the unusual emphasis on scientific terms and methodology. While she calls herself a theatre scholar, students who think of themselves primarily as interested in science would be comfortable reading her theories. Certainly several biology and chemistry majors I taught were able to find this article more accessible than other reference works within the humanities. Reading about mirror neurons may be an unusual route to learning about sacred history, but it can also yield great dividends.

Jonathan Sumption. *Pilgrimage: An Image of Medieval Religion*. London: Faber & Faber, 1975.

Like many medieval historians, Sumption begins this book by bemoaning the length and complexity of the medieval period that prevents a comprehensive account of its religion; while cautioning the reader to mentally insert a “probably” before all generalizations, he presents this study as “an attempt to draw a thin line through a very long period of history.” (xiii) As this “thin line” is focused on the history of medieval pilgrimages, his studies naturally touch on a variety of related issues such as the efforts of pilgrims to get their miraculous stories officially recorded by monastic writers, or the romantic fascination held by the city of Rome as a symbol of a lost classical past. His book, while a little dated now, is useful for this bibliography for three reasons. One: while concentrating on England, it naturally is also concerned with the wider geographical bounds influenced by the pilgrimage trade, and takes the reader not only to the Holy Land and back, but through much of medieval Europe on the way. Two: unlike many of the books here, which center on the increasingly-secular Christianity of the late Middle Ages, Sumption begins his account of pilgrimage history in 1050, and in fact often references relevant aspects of earlier church history, such as the ninth-century drive for relics in northern France and the exemplary life of the tenth-century pilgrim-knight Gerald of Aurillac. Three: while his attention and discourse is firmly set on the material objects and practices of the medieval pilgrim, he colors his account with a strong sense of the psychological influences at work supporting medieval religion, such as the constant, tangible, and sometimes-paralyzing sense of evil operating in the world. However, as is in keeping with histories of medieval religion produced before 1990, Sumption keeps turning back to the institutional structures of the church and ecclesiastical squabbles over, for instance, the doctrine of indulgences. At times this focus overwhelms the discussion of how such doctrines affected the average pilgrims, but he always returns to them and their interests.

Susan Hopper. *To Be a Pilgrim: The Medieval Pilgrimage Experience*. Stroud: Sutton Press, 2002.

As an alternative, or possibly as a supplementary work, Hopper's account of medieval pilgrimage is of an entirely different style to that of Sumption. He tries to be comprehensive, wide-ranging, and authoritative, while Hopper's main interest, it appears, is to be accessible. Unlike many of the volumes in this bibliography, Hopper frequently uses large, color images of stained-glass windows, manuscript illustrations, and sacred reliquaries in order to present to the reader as vivid a picture as possible of the medieval pilgrim. While the preponderance of these images and the over-large format of the book may give *To Be A Pilgrim* the appearance of a children's book, it is yet surprisingly useful for a scholar. While they are eye-catching, Hopper also makes sure to contextualize the images she uses. For example, she explains how the 15th-century manuscript image of pilgrims crawling on their knees around a tomb provides evidence for the design of Edward the Confessor's tomb, which allowed individual pilgrims to crawl inside and touch the body of the saint. Similar to Norman Tanner's approach, she also contextualizes her discussion of medieval pilgrimage as an antecedent of modern pilgrimage activities; an image of a 21st-century pilgrim touching the foot of a statue of St Peter is framed alongside a note of 13th-century pilgrims doing likewise. Her methodology in writing this history may be less comprehensive than Sumption's, but she excels in the particular; instead of attempting to take on the whole of Europe and the Holy Land, she concentrates chapters on a few distinct case studies, such as Our Lady of Norfolk and Santiago de Compostela. Each of these chapters demonstrates the vivacity of the pilgrimage experience, and gives a brief sense of the local history. The whole does not give the reader much in the way of concrete data, but it may

work better as a means of inspiring students to study an example or two more widely through other volumes.

Jean Sorabella. *Pilgrimage in Medieval Europe*. Online Exhibition. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/pilg/hd_pilg.htm

For the last secondary resource on pilgrimage, I present an extremely brief, and in comparison to the other two, very limited essay on medieval pilgrimage. The main reason why I am including it here is for its place within the website for the Metropolitan Museum of Art and its collection of medieval religious objects. In this essay, Sorabella draws connections between a great variety of items in the collection, ranging from an ivory plaque of women mourning at Christ's tomb, to a 5th-century glass-blown Jewish pilgrim jar, to a gold pendant blessed by Bishop Reginald of Bath. Each item is attended by a considerable array of information, like the exact dimensions, dating, and every reference work in which the item is mentioned. The essay also provides many links to other essays on similar topics based around other items in the museum's collection, and thus is essentially a way to intelligently navigate all the medieval holdings. This resource is great for students mainly interested in artifacts, or art history.

Five) Religious Culture within the Church

It would be a mistake to imagine that popular religion was necessarily separate from the institutional structure of the church. Popular religious culture spread out into the community, into the private home, and into secular spaces, but the church was also the heart of most parishes, especially in rural areas, and many daily or weekly religious practices took place there.

Primary Sources

Anonymous. *A Medieval Carol Book*. Ed. Sir Richard Runciman Terry.

http://www.hymnsandcarolsofchristmas.com/Hymns_and_Carols/Images/_Terry-A%20Medieval%20Carol%20Book/a_medieval_carol_book.htm

Carols were a significant part of popular religion, especially for the non-literate for whom the literary religious culture was largely accessible via oral performance. Most popular carols would have been memorized and sung both in church and without, in yuletide festivals. A digital resource, this website lists all the carols found in the Selden manuscript, a 16th-century collection of mostly religious material from the Middle Ages (as well as a few more from a 15th-century manuscripts and a miscellaneous collection). Oxford University, via *Early Manuscripts at Oxford University*, has digitized the entire manuscript and put the facsimile online for anyone to view; however, it is notoriously hard for modern readers to read medieval music. Terry has, in editing the collection, created modern staves with the notation of the carols in a modern, readable form, so that they can be played or sung. This could allow for a fairly dynamic class, if students learn how to reproduce the music of the Middle Ages themselves.

Lumina Vocal Ensemble. *Medieval English Carols*.

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLsCQ5hYBQ6MNkkxOE8l82nwHIIGNY_JSC

This Youtube playlist is created by the Lumina Vocal Ensemble group, whose aim is to “share rare and wonderful music with the world.” As well as medieval music, they also sing carols from the Renaissance, but a user can easily search for medieval-specific playlists like this one. It includes very popular carols like “Alleluia — now make we all mirthes” which also appears in

the digital *Medieval Carol Book*. They don't have the same level of detail about the carols as the above digital resource, and the site suffers somewhat from lacking a clear transcription of each carol. However, the mixed acapella choir has a professional sound and gives a good impression of how these carols might have been sung by the lay community.

Anonymous. *The Lay Folks' Mass Book*. Ed. Thomas Frederick Simmons. London: N. Trubner & Co, 1879.

<https://archive.org/details/layfolksmassbo00jere>

It's a source of perpetual and increasing annoyance to me personally that there is no modern edition of this terribly important resource. *The Lay Folks' Mass Book* is a manual for attending the Office of the Mass, in verse, which includes both the role of the priest and the necessary responses on the part of the laity. It was actively used by many medieval laypeople and provides some very strong evidence for how the average medieval churchgoer acted within the church, for two reasons. First, the book acts much like a script, detailing not only the various prayers and creeds which the member of the congregation was to hear or repeat, but also the actions required of them: when to kneel, when to be silent, when to look at the priest. When reading, it is possible to imagine the layman as an active participant in the church, teaching himself how to act, and not simply relying on cues from the clergy. Second, the version that this EETS edition gives is actually four separate versions: the editor has chosen those manuscript variations because they demonstrate different usages of the text. For example, it is intriguing that later versions of the text tend to cut out the lengthier of the priest's prayers, concentrating more on the part of the layman. Other versions also give more autonomy to the reader, asking him to choose whichever prayers he likes best. It is a fascinating first-hand view into his (or her) mentality. However,

there are some problems with this edition that I wish would be rectified with a newer version. The lengthy introduction is somewhat biased in its approach, less concerned with the history or the period and more with disparaging the Catholicism of the Mass and comparing it unfavorably to Christianity in England in the late Victorian period. The print book is also large, and unwieldy, being somewhat weighted down with appendixes. Even so, the slight advantage of the ancient quality of this edition being its easy availability through the Internet Archive, I strongly suggest that teachers and students alike make the effort to get past the difficulties of its format; the text well rewards reading.

Anonymous. "Homily 16, Quinquagesima Sunday." In *The Northern Homily Cycle*. Ed. Anne B. Thompson. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008.

While it is my intention to strongly limit the number of medieval-language resources in this bibliography, unfortunately sometimes it is inevitable. There are many fantastic and unique medieval texts which would be of immense value to the student of medieval religion that have not yet (possibly owing to the somewhat limited popular interest in this subject) been translated into modern English. This sermon from the Northern Homily Cycle is one such resource. The collection is an abridgement of a sermon cycle (i.e. a sermon written for every Sunday of the year, and fixed to a particular calendar date). These were often disseminated among priests and used as models for their own sermons. Although there was some adaptation, these texts would have been repeated and heard in many parishes, on a regular basis. Considering the fact that only half the population was literate, sermons like this would have constituted a significant part of their verbal religious experience, and so such sermons are a necessary resource for teaching popular religion in the church. This particular sermon, "Homily 16, Quinquagesima Sunday," is a good, brief and easily explicable example of the form. In this collection the format is: an

excerpt from a Gospel in Latin, a Middle English translation, a commentary on its deeper meaning, and an exemplum, usually featuring a saint. Quinquagesima is the Sunday before Ash Wednesday and so features a story of Christ entering Jericho and giving a blind man his sight when he calls for Jesus. The commentary concerns the nature of Christ's showing his disciples the truth of the Passion before it occurred, and so the importance of spiritual sight; the exemplum changes tack and focuses on the blind man's prayer to Jesus, telling a story about a man who tried to pray the Paternoster without ever letting his mind stray from the prayer. This sermon shows both the complexity of the message that audiences were meant to grasp, the element of popular stories, and the repeated stress on basic ritual (like saying the Paternoster) which was such a large part of popular religion.

Scholarly Sources

Miri Rubin. *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Inevitably, this section of the bibliography is going to include more reference to the work of the clergy and sacramental aspects of the church than might be desirable, but Rubin's extensive study of this highly important medieval religious ritual frequently touches on the role of the layperson, especially in the chapter "Elevation and Participation." In the introduction, she describes the role of the Eucharist as making God "domesticated" (14), and reinterpreting the immense power of the supernatural as part of daily routine. Her perspective, subsequently, is on the experience of the Eucharist for a member of the congregation, and the experience comes alive under her thorough description and dynamic prose, from the emphatic gesturing of the priest's hands to the lighting of the incense and the pealing of the bells. While Rubin does not

avoid some commentary on the mindset of the average spectator during this ritual, arguably more weight is given to the material aspect, such as the difficulties attendant upon imbuing physical objects with divinity; for example, she cites the creation of practices intended to avoid crumbs of the Eucharist from falling on the floor, and comments on the limited elevation of the chalice, to prevent spills. Use of the index is recommended with this book, as several chapters are almost completely concerned with ecclesiastical decrees, the ritual within monastic communities, and other non-secular topics.

Norman Tanner. "Sin in the Middle Ages." In *Ages of Faith: Popular Religion in Later Medieval England and Western Europe*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2009.

Of a more recent date than Tanner's book cited in the general bibliographical list above, *Ages of Faith* is frequently found on reading lists for students studying religion in the Middle Ages. I am only, though, selecting one essay from this collection because it is the only one which is absolutely relevant and which does not repeat information contained elsewhere. The collection is also a little disjointed: as Tanner explains in the introduction, it is not a coherent work centered around one dominant, or even several dominant ideas, but rather a gathering-up of the last two decades of writings on semi-related topics, such as "Making Merry in the Middle Ages" and "Do North Americans Understand the Middle Ages Better Than Europeans?" I can easily recommend each chapter as a pleasure to read, since Tanner's humor and easy manner of address is much more evident here than in his earlier history *The Church in the Later Middle Ages*. But most of the chapters are only tangentially relevant to the subject at hand. Chapter 17, "Sin in the Middle Ages," does not immediately give the reader a list of religious beliefs and practices related to medieval concepts of sin, and is the better for it. Instead, Tanner begins by discussing the concept of sin as it appears in our society, and how we have lost a sense of certainty about its

definition and subsequently, he suggests, a clear way of dealing with it. An interesting opportunity for class discussion, possibly. In explaining this point, he lays out for the reader a few basic ideas of what constituted the medieval mindset towards sin — it was rooted in the original sin of Adam and Eve, it was concentrated on the individual rather than his position, it was seen as forging common bonds with the rest of humanity, it was easily forgivable. Although none of his claims here are very historically rigorous, or backed up with a mountain of evidence, it is a piece of rhetoric all the more powerful for how it consistently refers back to the present day and our often contrary attitudes, thereby providing a deeply compelling picture of the Middle Ages.

Arnold Angenendt. “Fear, Hope, Death and Salvation.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Christianity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

While the handbook is an incredibly wide-ranging resource, many of its topics are not relevant to this bibliography or have already been represented elsewhere. Angenendt’s chapter, which in many ways is on the medieval psyche, lays out a lot of the theological basis behind the ‘fear and hope’ which he sees as largely characterising the popular medieval response to Christianity. He actually refers fairly regularly back to the early church and the origins of saintly martyrdom in the 1st century after Christ and the wide-held belief in the coming apocalypse. Gradually, the church began to focus less on the “good” deaths and the Christians who went to Heaven, and more on the souls of those who lived badly, and went to Hell. This was an important change, Angenendt argues, as it sets the scene for the Middle Ages when subjective Christianity became dominant, i.e. how a person felt and thought, the consciousness of virtue and sin. Heaven and Hell were well established but needed the creation of Purgatory in order to account for this less black-and-white understanding of goodness, as a way to alleviate fear; similarly, the increasing

concern for 'pastoral care' attempted to balance the uncertainty about the afterlife. This chapter's summary of the ecclesiastical history and its psychological effect on people is a little top-down, but could be useful if paired with primary sources on sin and punishment.

Derek A. Rivard. "Sacred Persons: Blessing the Laity." In *Blessing the World: Ritual and Lay Piety in Medieval Religion*. Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009.

Although "lay piety" is part of this book's title, Rivard is generally more concerned with the clergy's role in mediating between the layperson and the institutional framework of the church. In this chapter, however, he looks at the great variety of blessings which were a significant part of the everyday ritual that people experienced, dividing them into various groups who had particular sacred needs. Pilgrims and other travelers, for example, were given special items (the staff and the scrip) that were blessed to be holy in themselves, and consequently were seen as protecting their bearers (in this way, this practice has a clear relationship with the medieval understanding of magic as commonly being embodied in objects). Other resources in this bibliography, such as Jonathan Sumption's and Susan Hopper's books on pilgrimage, have discussed at length the specific pilgrim dress and accoutrements that constituted an important part of their social identity; Rivard's chapter is a useful addition to these texts in emphasizing the role of the clergy in creating the significance of these items. He gives information on how these rituals evolved throughout the Middle Ages and changed across Europe, based on different interpretations of scripture.

Bernard Hamilton. "The Practice of Christian Life." In *Religion in the Medieval West*. Second Edition. London: Hodder, 2003.

A general textbook approach to medieval religion, the only relevant part of this book is the second of three chapters, since the last chapter takes on diverse topics like the West's relationship with the Eastern churches, and how the church dealt with paganism and witchcraft, and the first chapter lays out the ecclesiastical structures and the theology behind them (as per usual in histories of religion in the Middle Ages). But the "Practice of Christian Life" is interesting, and valuable here, for its focus on the rituals and practices of the faithful within the church. The bibliographical section earlier on prayer, ritual and the community deals with the rituals that spilled out of the church. Hamilton discusses their orthodox position as constructed and maintained by the church, and correspondingly fills in a lot of the information left out by other histories. It is in this book that the reader can find precise information on, for example, the types of holy oil used in baptism, how often they were blessed, and according to what calendar. However, while the church's role is the dominant perspective of the text, Hamilton constantly references the thoughts and actions of the laypeople involved, noting the tendencies of people to put off sending for a priest to administer the last rites, and arguing that this could be attributed to many factors, including fear of death, preference for folkloric magics, or simply inability to pay the priest's fees. The medieval church, in his account, does not come off as especially strict or uncaring, but willing to work with the lay community and the difficulties of their lives. Hamilton also gives a certain degree of importance to partitioning out the medieval lay population, and explaining the different relationships of the church to the nobility and to the peasants, to university students and to merchants. It may be considered a sparse history, as it does not give much evidence or dwell on any particular case studies, but it should be an excellent resource for beginning research.

Rosaline and Christopher Brooke. *Popular Religion in the Middle Ages: Western Europe 1000-1300*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1984.

Similar to the above entry, this general-purpose textbook also approaches the topic of medieval religion predominantly from the standpoint of the church and institutional means of channeling popular belief. More than the Hamilton book, however, the Brookes' text has a particular, if largely unspoken fascination with the literal structure and architecture of the physical church buildings, and many of the otherwise-general comments about religious rites refer back to their memorialization in the architecture or the physical places which — and this may be of particular interest to students studying in the UK — are still visible today. While it includes chapters on “The Saints” and “The Laity and the Church,” discussion on these topics is firmly concentrated upon the main towns and churches which housed various cults of saints, or the specific physical details: when beginning a section on the eucharist, the first point of reference for the authors is the stone fonts carved with the seven sacraments. Such is the predominant theme of space and place — including a broad selection of contemporary photographs of existing churches — the history may be almost mistaken for a travel guide.

Paul Binski. *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996.

Some of the histories hitherto cited in this bibliography are full of easy-to-use textual apparatuses, such as detailed tables of contents, multi-chaptered sections and complete indexes. Binski's text is unfortunately not one of them. It is not the easiest book to navigate, but anyone searching for precise information on local, regional and national medieval rituals about death can find something useful. Avoid the table of contents, which unhelpfully points to you “Death and

the Afterlife” and browse; the writer has a funny, engaging style as when explaining that for someone in the Middle Ages, “Hell is other people,” in that they were consistently asked to conceptualize their family, their friends, and other people they knew as suffering there. It is something of a meandering text, and I cannot point to a single chapter which has a good summary of the important points. Discussion of the “inversion trope” in images of Hell (for example, with evil bishops being baptized in fire) leads him back to a reinforcement of an earlier point, of the importance of correctly performing the standard rituals. Binski is fond of the more darkly humorous medieval stories, like the one about the midwife who incorrectly baptized a baby and condemned it to Hell accidentally. These are some of the reasons why it’s an interesting read, if perhaps not the best research tool.

Larry Scanlon. “The Sermon Exemplum.” In *Narrative, Authority and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

While the title of this book might suggest that it falls within the genre of literary criticism, and while several chapters are devoted to this subject in general and Chaucerian scholarship in particular, the fourth chapter is given over to a broader discussion of the sermon exemplum as a broadly cultural item found within and outside medieval sermons. Scanlon explains how the exemplum tradition was geared towards the lay audiences in order to help them appreciate the moral weight of sin and the necessity to abide by the rules of the church by using the rhetorical power of the stories to produce emotional reactions in the congregation. This chapter is useful insofar as it gives many examples of a typical sermon exemplum, and demonstrates the logic behind increasingly using these for their persuasive powers where complex theological doctrine would have failed. It is also valuable as a model for understanding the contemporary concerns of the laity who were addressed: Scanlon argues that the simple exemplum form did not introduce

new ideas as much as reconfirm the importance of known moral precepts by using topical issues, drawing from elements of folklore and helping the audience engage with the protagonists.

Students may find this text especially helpful when read alongside a medieval sermon, e.g. from the *Northern Homily Cycle*.

Six) Societal Tensions with the Church

Strictly speaking, the sources which focus on tension or dissent with the medieval church are not as connected with ‘popular’ medieval religion as the other entries in this bibliography. Although there was assuredly a great deal of anti-clerical feeling in the Middle Ages, and a history of religion is incomplete without a consideration of its challenges, neither of these aspects can really be termed ‘popular’. This section, therefore, only includes texts which also, I believe, speak to popular religion in some way — while their focus may be on the church, and pockets of heresy, or unorthodox religion, they provide valuable windows into the mainstream culture as well.

Primary Sources:

Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger. *Malleus Maleficarum*. Ed. P.G. Maxwell-Stuart. Manchester: University of Manchester, 2007.

There are a number of editions of this famous treatise “The Hammer of Witches,” but I recommend Maxwell-Stuart’s because it is presented in a clear, modern format (some of the others are updated versions of 1920’s editions and retain the original typeface) and because it abridges the material. This seems important because of the awareness contemporary students

often have of this text and the misconceptions they harbor about it. The actual *Malleus* is largely a dense, ecclesiastically-focused tome which is far more concerned with heresy than witchcraft activities. Clearing this up for students is necessary, but in order to engage their interest, a shorter version like Maxwell-Stuart's has an easier basis for understanding. A brief example: the first question in the uncut version (the text is organized around questions, as if from a teacher to a student) is "Whether the belief that there are such beings as witches is so essential a part of the Catholic faith that obstinacy to maintain the opposite manifestly savors of heresy." Clearly an important theological and practical question back in the 1400's but a little convoluted to understand now. In comparison, Maxwell-Stuart's first question is "Is there such a thing as an act of harmful magic?"; he not only clarifies the text but re-orders it so that the first questions are built around basic points of heresy and attack on Christianity that develop into more complex questions. His introduction is speculative and gossipy at times, but again, geared towards the average student rather than the scholar. I particularly recommend the sections which touch on traditional folk magic that was a part of village popular culture and the insights it gives into communal behavior towards the church.

Anonymous. *Medieval Comic Tales*. Ed. Derek Brewer. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1973.

Not all these tales are relevant, but they are more or less good fun and definitely comprise aspects of popular culture in the Middle Ages. The stories here are divided by country, and can be useful for a side comparison of the (usually similar) comic tropes, including anti-clerical satire. As for a source on popular religion, several of them represents the vast swell of discontent against the church in the late medieval period. English examples are "The Lady Prioress" and "The Tale of the Pot," which critique the sexual misbehavior of parsons by tricking or cursing them into public exposure, or "Dom Hugh of Leicester," which pokes fun at a lecherous monk

through a comic series of events in which his corpse is ‘killed’ four separate times and eventually staked as a demon. These stories are not long or complex but they provide a good window into popular animosity against the church, and are closely translated into modern English so that students can get a sense of medieval puns and turns of phrase.

Geoffrey Chaucer. “The Pardoner’s Tale.” In *The Canterbury Tales*. Trans. David Wright. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

While I don’t want to cite too many Chaucer works for this bibliography, considering that it is not meant only for literature classes, two of the most useful sources for communicating popular religion in medieval England are “The Parson’s Tale” and “The Pardoner’s Tale.” While the former is a straightforward, clear-cut summary of what every Christian needs to know, the latter wraps an essentially good Christian message in a complicated anti-clerical satire which inevitably taints the entire work. The story of the three young men who kill each other for gold, and the moral of their greed leading to their deaths, is simple enough. However, the broader context of the story gives a far older moral more rooted in folklore, that those striving against death, as the young men attempt to do, will succumb all the quicker. In the context of the bubonic plague, this is a particularly chilling message, and seems not to leave the reader with much hope. Moreover, the context beyond this is the pilgrim-narrator himself, who is self-professedly a liar and cheater and is utterly insincere about what he is saying, so that the effect is ultimately a distrust of clergy and church. With these complex layers, this source is a great favorite with students, especially if you allow discussion of the final Harry Potter book *The Deathly Hallows*, which as J.K. Rowling admitted, was partly inspired by this Chaucerian tale.

Scholarly Sources:

Shannon McSheffrey, *Gender and Heresy: Women and Men in Lollard Communities 1420-1530*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985.

McSheffrey takes as her main argument that women have hitherto been inaccurately represented by medieval historians as disproportionately inclined to heresy, in comparison to men, and against a social background in which men are overrepresented as guardians of orthodox religion. Lacking a strong awareness of this academic context (and McSheffrey doesn't explain this very thoroughly), the reader may be confused about her choice of studying Lollard communities, since these are quickly apparent as predominantly male. Consequently, this is not a useful book for studying feminist history, and it gives less of a clear impression about women's roles in medieval religion than, for example, Christine Peters' *Patterns of Piety*. However, it is useful as a history of Lollardy that constantly points out the relative absence of women, gives explanations for this lack, and suggests cogent reasons as to why this misconception exists. Moreover, with this perspective on women, the book avoids discussion of the theology behind the movement, or the ecclesiastical response. Instead, there is a persistent focus on the social, familial, and cultural background to Lollard members which exposes many useful trends, such as the high involvement of artisanal men in Lollardy (and the low involvement of artisanal women, because Lollardy could not give them any similar social advancement). Although the book is divided into chapters on Lollard "Communities," "Family", and "Social Status," these subjects are clearly interrelated, and discussed in every chapter of this book. Frequent use of the Index, rather than the Table of Contents, is recommended here.

Alexander Murray. *Suicide in the Middle Ages: The Violent Against Themselves*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

As a mortal sin, suicide was a divisive issue between the church and the people in the Middle Ages, and Murray spends much of this book exploring that tension. Part of his perspective is on the paradoxical fascination that people seemed to have with suicide, listing the number of popular stories in which a family member commits suicide (and usually other sins as well) but after being redeemed by the actions of the protagonist, or the intercession of a saint, is able to go to Heaven/come back to life. He organizes this material by relationship, number of victims, and other literary tropes which allows the reader to cross-reference stories of suicide throughout history. This is a potentially interesting area of discussion for students, since it can be usefully paired with stories from the *Gesta Romanorum* which feature suicide, or sermons on the subject. Partly, Murray also attempts to track the historicity of suicide, and how statistically common it was in any given medieval era. The methodology he displays here is a good model to follow, as he is very careful not to trust any record without corroborating sources, but he reveals much about the nature of those records in his research.

Michael Bailey. “From Sorcery to Witchcraft: Clerical Conceptions of Magic in the Later Middle Ages.” *Speculum* 76:4 (2001); 960–90.

While there are a lot of resources on sorcery, witchcraft and magic in the Middle Ages, this one has the advantage of clarity and near-comprehensiveness — on a small but important subject. A little tangential to the subject of popular religion, it clarifies the time when, and the reasons why, the medieval clergy turned against medieval magic as a natural expression of popular wisdom and started to see it as danger. For students who know the stereotype that “the church was constantly burning witches in the Middle Ages,” this reading would pair well with extracts from the *Malleus Maleficarum*. He clarifies that a great number of Christians used magic in western Europe — both the clergy and the laity used such devices as magical amulets, dusts, liquids,

prayers, and incantations without necessarily attributing the power behind it to any evil force such as the devil, until the late Middle Ages. Bailey's chronological history, in the first part of the article, is probably more helpful than his focus on influential clergy in the second part, but the whole is a useful resource on helping students to learn more about this highly misunderstood issue.

Jennifer Kolpacoff Deane. "Medieval Magic, Demonology and Witchcraft." In *A History of Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*. Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011.

Possibly a little more accessible than the Bailey article, this resource isn't as rigorous in its clarification between demonology and witchcraft, but has more engaging examples of the "cunning" folk-wisdom magic that was for much of rural English life in the medieval period, inextricable from popular religion. This reading can be understood as approaching a similar topic to the Jordan and Rivard chapters on clergy blessing sheep and pilgrims to ward off disease and danger, but from the perspective of this being in some contexts considered as an unorthodox practice. It is a strange but interesting feature of medieval religion that an action which in some places was perfectly holy was in others a sin, and that the difference mainly lay, as Deane explains, in the eye of the beholder: what was a religious ritual and what was a heresy? It depended on whether the action was unknown to the viewer, or a natural, established part of the community tradition. For the most part, this chapter looks at 'popular' magic as opposed to the 'elite' magic practiced in universities and has been touched on several times already in this bibliography.

Dyan Elliott. "Between Two Deaths: The Living Mystic." In *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitorial Culture in the Later Middle Ages*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.

While the two above entries touch on the subject of women as particular sufferers of inquisitorial practices, this book puts them at the forefront. This chapter, however, is as much interested in the activities surrounding female spirituality as it is interested in their deaths, and through this, the more common medieval interest in accessing the divine. In particular, it uses the concept of female torture to explore some of the physical aspects of religious devotion, such as weeping, being tormented by devils, and fasting, and that these were in some cases deliberate practices designed to gain a popular following. Using inquisitorial documents from several high-profile European cases, Elliott examines the women's fraught relationship with the church partly as a battle over who was more influential in the community. The usefulness of this resource is a little in question — the author is not obviously concerned with mainstream religion, and the reader is required to extrapolate somewhat in order to understand the relevance. But the descriptions of all of the intriguing manipulation and deception perpetrated by these women, and the details that emerge about their dupes, and how they were caught, adds a great deal of spice to a lesson on church history.

Modern Sources

While this was not the focus of the bibliography, I have tried where possible to show where certain historical texts or scholarly resources attempted to draw a parallel between the medieval and modern periods and engage readers on contemporary questions of religion. Since I feel this

is an important aspect of engaging students about the Middle Ages, I would be remiss if I didn't include at least some modern primary sources which do the same. These sources, from books to film to TV, are representative of certain genres of popular medievalism which should be explored more thoroughly by students.

Karen Cushman. *Matilda Bone*. New York: Yearling, 2000.

Although categorized as a young adult novel, this text is suitable for anyone studying medieval religion. Like the similarly popular *Catherine Called Birdy*, *The Midwife's Apprentice* (both also by Cushman) and *The Book of the Maidens* by Rebecca Barnhouse, this novel has been praised for its balanced handling of historical details gleaned from extensive research and entertaining, speculative fiction. The medieval world Cushman creates here is full of life and color, with its market scenes and continual sound of church bells, and in many ways feel like watching one of those medieval-esque episodes of *Doctor Who* with manure and straw spread all over the floor of the set. But Cushman's choice to set this story in a bonesetter's cottage provokes some interesting questions about the battle between faith and practice. The protagonist, Matilda, was brought up in a monastery, and her faith rather charmingly consists of treating saints like her personal helpline whenever she's in distress. Meanwhile, her mistress the bonesetter, practices Christian charity as a healer. The dichotomy this sets up is a little simplistic, but it makes the reader feel like she is viewing medieval private devotion, in a variety of forms, something which is difficult for modern students to conceptualize.

Karen Maitland. *A Company of Liars*. New York: Delacorte Press, 2009.

Representative of a much darker, and possibly more realistic Middle Ages, this counter-Canterbury Tales narrative is set in northern England in the middle of the Black Death, and

features a mixed set of pilgrims trying to find a village untouched by the disease. I do not recommend this book only for (often grotesque) aspects of rural religious life which it displays — for example, a quasi-mystical forced marriage between two crippled beggars, blessed by local priests in order to ensure a good harvest — but for the way it explores the problem of faith. Unlike *Matilda Bone*, which largely sets two different but worthy Christian practices against one another, *A Company of Liars* uses the frightening spectre of imminent death promised by the plague, as well as the threat of thieves and murderers on the road, to push their protagonists to spiritual nadirs. To tell too much of the story would be to give the game away, but the action centers around a strange child that some people believe to be possessed by a devil, and the uncertainty which the reader faces about whether to have faith or commit terrible acts in the name of God and self-protection. It's an interesting resource for a class on medieval popular religion because much of it feels like an elaborate exemplum, stripped of a comforting moral framework and left up to the readers to make their own interpretations.

William George Storey. *An Everyday Book of Hours*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2001.

This is a fascinating genre, and ought to be explored by more students and scholars. Inspired by the medieval Book of Hours genre in particular, these kinds of self-help manuals are consciously aiming to bring to modern readers the certainties and structure of medieval faith, as grounded in daily prayer. Similar kinds of books which are based on mystical medieval writers include *Praying with Julian of Norwich* and *Praying with Hildegard of Bingen*. Storey's *An Everyday Book of Hours* has a little more of the Middle Ages in it; unlike *Praying with Hildegard* it does not just ask the modern reader to reflect on the mystic's life as a source for their own self-reflection, but actually includes selections of the Liturgy of Hours. Modernized, it uses

contemporary ethical problems to make newly relevant a structured reading schedule focused around psalms, canticles and excerpts from the Bible, much like its medieval counterparts. As a type of book which may be less well known to students otherwise well versed in popular medievalism, this could be a great resource for reading alongside a medieval Book of Hours, to analyze the differences which the modern version provides.

‘The Archbishop’. *Blackadder*. Produced by John Lloyd. BBC1, 1983. TV Series.

For a comic TV series starring an actor best known for his Mr. Bean persona, this is actually a surprisingly good resource on religion in the Middle Ages. The focus is more or less entirely on the church, and the rampant corruption apparent in their structural authority and relationship with the crown. But this is exactly the kind of cultural artifact which supports the general prejudice of “the corrupt medieval church” that can spark interesting class discussion, possibly alongside some of the scholarship written on the *Blackadder* take-off of History. Moreover, the lengthy scenes involving the fake relics, in which the church is accused of selling boxes of Christ’s fingers, the nose of St Peter, or the breasts of Mary Magdalene, to credulous pilgrims, is both extremely funny and touches on a few historical realities.

***Jesus of Montreal*. Dir. Denys Arcand. Monique Letourneau, 1989. Film.**

Specifically, for those studying medieval drama, this film is probably the best cinematic representation not just of the Passion play but of the context of performing such plays today. It’s not a good resource for learning about medieval drama qua medieval drama, but for understanding some of the timeless sources of argument between religious institutions and their relationship with society and culture. The actors are all hired by the Catholic church to restage the Passion, but overstep their brief in updating the drama, making it more relevant to

contemporary social concerns — as mystery plays did in the 15th century. In reaching the community, they threaten the power structure of the church, but when the focus of the film moves beyond the play to the pressures placed on the actors, you can see the fractured ways in which religion fails to connect with modern life. This versatile film can be used in a number of ways, from simply showing students a modern example of medieval drama, to a subtle test of their knowledge of the Passion (as the film itself becomes a Passion play, dropping continual hints which the viewer can pick up on), to a venue for discussion of the relationship between religion and society.

***Season of the Witch.* Dir. Dominic Sena and Brett Ratner. Relativity Media, 2011. Film.**

This is an entirely ridiculous film about Teutonic knights escorting a suspected witch to a monastery in the 13th century. The silly premise and horror-movie-like tonality pretty well strips it of all credibility as a useful resource on the Middle Ages, much less popular religion.

However, it could be helpful to watch this film in conjunction with actual historical sources such as the *Malleus Maleficarum*, and the scholarly sources on witchcraft and demonology, as the film features both aspects of medieval magic.

***Black Death.* Dir Christopher Smith. Egoli Tossell Films, Hanway Films, Zephyr Films, 2010. Film.**

The above terrible *Season of the Witch* could also be usefully compared to *Black Death* for a class on modern interpretations of medieval Christianity vs. witchcraft. While *Season of the Witch* is a simple action-horror that happens to have been set in the Middle Ages and takes the reductive viewpoint that “Fighting for Christianity is Fighting Demons,” *Black Death* explores the nature of belief in the Middle Ages, whether in Christianity or in witchcraft. Both films

involve a group of soldiers/clerics targeting female witches, in the context of a land ridden with the Black Death. But while this setting in *Season of the Witch* seems almost incidental, in *Black Death* it is (as the name suggests), a powerful motivation for faith. The viewer is caught guessing as to which system of faith is right, or for the best, and can see how the medieval peasants need to believe in supernatural powers as their only hope against the terrible cruelty of the disease. This film would be also be well paired with *A Company of Liars*, and Arnold Angenendt's chapter on "Fear, Death, Hope and Salvation" for their similar treatment of 'faith and fear' in one of the darker parts of the Middle Ages.

***Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. Dir. Terry Gilliam and Terry Jones. Michael White Production, Monty Python Pictures, 1975. Film.**

Not that this film is unknown to anybody remotely interested in the Middle Ages, but it's always worth recommending. For this bibliography, the surreal humorous take on Arthur and his knights flailing around a not-really-medieval-England is valuable on two counts. It can be usefully watched in context with Malory's Grail Quest, in order to show up the kind of changes that are imposed on the religion of the original book (for example reversing the chastity of Sir Galahad), and it includes some funny scenes spoofing modern stereotypes about medieval religion. Very little about the scene with the witch-judging, or the Holy Hand Grenade, is in any sense based in historical fact, but the scenes do represent longstanding beliefs about the tyranny or violence (or pedantry) of the medieval church, that despite the dated quality of the film, are still present in people's minds today.

¹ Norman Tanner, *Ages of Faith: Popular Religion in Late Medieval England and Western Europe* (I.B.Tauris: London: 2008), 82.

² R. W. Scribner *For the Sake of the Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation* (Clarendon Paperbacks: Oxford University Press: Oxford, U.K.:1994), 95.

The Once and Future Classroom. XII.2 (Spring 2016)

<http://once-and-future-classroom.org/XII/2/12-2harper.pdf>

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