

GOING TO CHURCH IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND by Nicholas Orme, *Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2021, pp. xi + 483, £20.00, hbk*

Acceptance of the ‘triumph’ of secularisation lulls into disregarding the anomalies and quandaries it generates. With over 25% self-defining as of ‘no religion’ in the 2011 Census of the United Kingdom, with the hegemony of de-Christianisation secure in the mass media, and with gloomy predictions of the virtual extinction of the Church of England in three decades to come, it is easy to ignore the price of this victory that leaves the land littered with traces of belief in the form of abandoned churches, ruined or left to decay. Taken as an aggregate, these have never evoked the massive scholarship dedicated to the cathedrals in England which concerns their governance, their stained glass, music and particular architectural styles, but set to service secular needs of aesthetics and scholarship. Archaeological investigations do dig up invaluable fragments, but like much study of the cathedrals, seldom extend concerns to the beliefs they serviced and embodied. Matters of ceremony, community and their social facets, let alone their mentalities, seem beyond scholarly scrutiny, hence their neglect.

Against this background, Orme’s handsome and highly readable study is both surprising and invaluable. He provides an exemplary account of the origins of the parish churches, their staff and buildings, and how they met the needs of faith in liturgical seasons and the life cycles of their congregations. A medieval scholar, with some 30 books behind him, including some excellent work on children and the cathedrals, this surely is his crowning work. Brilliantly, his reach is to the national and not purely the local so that the sweep of the work is wondrous.

When Ladurie’s *Montaillou*, on Cathars and Catholics in a French village 1294–1324, appeared in 1978, many were intrigued at the way the documents of an Inquisitorial investigation could yield extraordinary accounts of ‘normal’ peasant life. A peep-hole on it had been opened so revealing their mentalities in everyday life. One never conceived of medieval peasants sun bathing. Something similar, but also incredible, emerges in Orme’s work. No kings or battles are about in it, nor much on superstition. What emerges is a highly credible and systematic account of the practice and ordering of faith as routine, stable, and wholly identifiable to contemporary Catholics. The work reflects the standards of excellence to be associated with Yale University Press. Beautifully written, with colour illustrations, with a glossary of terms and an excellent index, the extensive end notes (pp. 414–461) reveal an effortless grasp of sources and a command of attention to the particular. The study is exceptionally well sub-sectioned and headed to address pertinent questions. The outcome is a detail that does not suffocate but intrigues, where no page in the study fails to fascinate. Time and again, Orme warns of the dangers of relying on liturgical texts rather than attending to their social and communal

milieu of use. It is this amplification of the social that renders the study absolutely indispensable.

Of late, some remarkable scholarship on the Sarum rite and of course Duffy's *The Stripping of the Altars* has emerged. As with others, Orme's work reveals a flourishing, coherent, and effective form of liturgical life embedded in the parish church which undermines the dismissive propaganda of the Reformation. Inevitably, much debate will follow on this work to be compared to Duffy's. Certainly, it is less rich in literary and artistic reference, yet it has its own unique values. The account is more grounded in exploring the organisation and reproduction of faith as made and enacted in ceremony and deployment of visual culture within the buildings. Unexpectedly, these generated a strong sense of commitment and affiliation combined with an active participation, properly understood, which gave to worshippers a sense of place in time and space. Even though services were often in Latin, they generated a sense of duty, of commitment at mass, and even in the Divine Office, often said assiduously. Especially convincing is the way he shows, that despite slender resources, the priest and parish clerk, along with serving boy(s), strove to fulfil their obligations. The outcomes were a strong sense of community, identity, and identification amongst the laity who emerge very much as stakeholders on their churches. Its plant is well described, for example in his treatment of bells, candles, and vestments. Spiritual capital was deployed to effect by the clergy to meet and exceed the expectations of their flocks.

With no particular thesis to affirm, Orme conveys well a sense of just following the evidence which renders the study all the more credible. He seems to have an almost omnivorous knowledge of his source material. Although ecclesiastical courts would provide material over complaints, striking is, Orme's use of church warden's accounts, wills, prayer books, letters and reflections which generate much on the 'normal' and the unexceptional. A good example relates to the discussions of the posture of the laity, their etiquette in church (pp. 172–180) where implications of kneeling and standing are creatively considered. Likewise, the use of asperges at the beginning of mass to draw in the laity and the holy (unconsecrated) bread given to the them at the end illustrate their recognition. Of especial interest are the treatments of confessions and attitudes to baptism, marriage, and death. Need was integrated with provision. A remarkable contrast emerges between the way the ideals of liturgical renewal in the twentieth century were actually realised in the supposedly discredited forms of rite of the late medieval world.

Though not his concern, Orme's work affirms why Pugin and the Camden society reached back to the late medieval world to revive what modernity and the Reformation had lost. It would be too much to say that postmodernity and postsecularism suggest a second stage of re-appraisal of the lingering claims of these rites and times. Nevertheless, Orme presents a mirror of possibility for emulation. It deserves something more than recent scornful dismissals by the present papacy on the grounds

of succumbing to nostalgia. These late medieval rites evoke curiosity and mystery and form demands to make liturgy weird again, as recently expressed in *The New York Times*. The Vatican II documents on rite never did understand the perils of transparency.

It is a matter of regret that an offer made to the Ordinariate to nurture the Sarum rite was refused. The difficulty was that Anglican accretions were built into liturgical forms. The outcome was to accentuate a disconnection with the late medieval church whose traces are still so embedded in English identity. That rupture, which so left Catholicism as alienated from its own ecclesiastical cultural heritage, can be traced back to disagreements between Pugin and Newman, where the latter affirmed Ultramontanism to authenticate English Catholicism relations with Rome, whereas the former sought for a form that reconnected Catholicism to a pre-Reformation past which still enthrals. What emerges in Orme's study is a validation of the images in Pugin's *Contrasts*, where the warmth of pre-Reformation liturgical life is replaced by the cold duty of Reformation provisions. Orme illustrates a dilemma of liturgy, which the Reformation unfolded, as to how far the laity were to make their own way in rite, or had to be instructed and directed (p. 254). Unfortunately, as in the present, in seeking to put the laity in their place, they lost it. There was a further deleterious outcome that the dark Gothic secured a hegemony in culture denied to the light version of the cathedrals and churches. Catholicism was rendered foreign to its inheritance of cultural and spiritual capital and the Church of England was stuck with a legacy of reproach for its failure to gather fragments into some effective mosaic that would galvanise the nation into belief. Each seemed doomed to fail, as now belief ebbs away and as extinction, not renewal looms.

The image of completeness, of routine, expectation, and affiliation, the tenor of Orme's study so artfully reveals, is oddly ruptured in the chapter 8 on the Reformation. One wonders should it have appeared at all, for the disinterest that so renders the study credible is switched into a virtual justification of the Reformation which gets near implying that nothing changed. Whereas Duffy's study becomes more infused with regret for the Reformation and its unsuccessful attempts to snuff out Catholicism which lingered longer than desired, Orme's account seems to veer in an Anglican direction which sits oddly with what went before in the study. As images were removed, and a visual culture was eradicated, there is an irony in Orme's comment that imaging in churches was reduced to a solitary exception: the Royal coat of arms (p. 394).

Orme's work could be written off as an account of liturgical life in Merrie England, a sort of fantasy of completeness devoid of relevance to the present *Zeitgeist*. Yet, even though arising from incoherence, the rites 'worked', they gripped and elicited investment in their deployments of spiritual capital. Somehow, they realised properties which those seeking to modernise liturgies sought but never realised. In a sense, these late medieval rites operated with an innocence of knowing of the

complications of fracture and anomie so characteristic of present modernity. As the social now appears alien, archaic, and obscure and so easily by-passed by live on-line, enactments of liturgy form part of a wider problem of the disappearance of rituals. These suggest that Orme's account points to the dangers of rendering the social in rite as too explicit, too concerned with making things apparent and standardised as the Reformation sought to implement, so pointing to Weber's notion of disenchantment, when what is needed is enchantment realised by letting forms of liturgy speak for themselves, as in the churches of the late medieval England. In the argot of sociology, this is a paradigm-shifting work.

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COMMENTARY ON THOMAS AQUINAS'S *TREATISE ON DIVINE LAW* by J. Budziszewski, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2021, pp. xviii + 475, £75.00, hbk

The noted French Dominican, Marie-Dominique Chenu, once suggested that it should give us pause when we realize that most of the subjects in Thomas's *Summa* that we in the modern world consider essential, such as the proofs for the existence of God or the nature of the theological *scientia*, often occupy no more than one column in the Leonine edition and include generally no more than 3 or 4 objections and responses, whereas the Questions on the Old Law are by far the longest in the whole *Summa*, many extending to over 30 Leonine columns and employing 15 objections and 15 responses. Some historical context might help.

Nearly every major theologian in and around Paris in the thirteenth century wrote similarly long and detailed commentaries on the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament, most containing what we find in Thomas's *Summa*: a short introductory section laying out the definitions and distinctions among the different types of law, prefacing a much longer treatise on the Old Law. A broad study of these *summae* suggests, thus, that the burning question on the minds of Thomas and his contemporaries was the status of the literal meaning of the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament.

Why this renewed interest in the Old Testament Mosaic Law? In brief, let me suggest it was the result of a convergence of factors: renewed interest in the literal sense of the Old Testament, on the one hand, and the cultural challenges presented by the rediscovered and newly-translated Aristotelian corpus, on the other. With Aristotle's *Ethics*, scholars were