

# The Church in Medieval England (597-1485)

Dr Matthew JJ Hoskin

Davenant Hall, Trinity Term 2022

## Description of the Course

The period known as the Middle Ages is often thought of as “dark”, particularly as far as Christianity is concerned. In this course, we will study the path of Christianity in England from the arrival of Italian missionaries in 597 to the accession of Henry Tudor (Henry VII) in 1485, a journey from small Anglo-Saxon kingdoms through the Norman world, up the cusp of the Reformation era. In the lectures, I will move generally chronologically, examining events and major figures as they arise. Particular attention will be given to the twelfth century because of the transformations of the wake of the Norman Conquest, the emergence of the Cistercians, and the rise of universities, as well as late medieval piety and calls for Reform.

What we shall see is a nuanced world of many layers, where the deep Augustinian theology of Thomas Bradwardine (Archbishop of Canterbury, d. 1349) co-exists with those he felt were Pelagian. Alongside the monasteries and universities, there is also the popular world of medieval religion, found in poems, plays, and pilgrimages, devoted to Christ’s passion, the saints, the Eucharist. In a sort of middle place, we will find time for the mystical writings of hermits, canons, and Carthusians, some, like the Abbey of the Holy Ghost, directed to the laity.

The readings outlined the table below will be devoted to primary sources; the lectures will provide the chronological and contextual apparatus for the readings. They include ecclesiastical and secular history, biography, saints’ lives, sermons, devotional poetry, theological treatises, scholastic theology, letters, plays, and the liturgy. Each week also includes a “bonus reading” for those with enough time to go further and deeper if they wish.

## Course Format

This course will meet once a week for two hours. The first hour will be a lecture, primarily about history and the background of a major source or author that week. The second hour will be a discussion about the lecture material and the assigned readings. **For-credit students are required to participate in discussion.** Weekly readings will normally add up to around 75-100 pages of text—many of these readings are born digital translations of sources, so their actual page-length is unknown.

## Course Outline

| Week beginning | Topic  | Required Readings (see below for more details)   |
|----------------|--|--|
| April 11       | Introduction; Pagans and Christians in the “Age of Arthur” | Gildas, <i>On the Ruin of Britain</i>  |
| April 18       | Missionaries and monks in Anglo-Saxon England, 597-800     | Bede, <i>Ecclesiastical History of the English People</i> Book 1<br>Bede, prose <i>Life of Cuthbert</i><br>Bede’s Death Song |

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|          |  | Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, 596-792   |
| April 25 | Anglo-Saxons and Vikings                                       | Asser, <i>Life of King Alfred</i><br><i>The Dream of the Rood</i><br>Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, 793-901  |
| May 2    | 1066 and All That  | Simeon of Durham, <i>History of the Kings</i> , 1066-end<br>Sermon of the Wolf<br>Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, 902-1070  |
| May 9    | Kings and Archbishops  | Eadmer, <i>Life of St Anselm</i> , Bk 2<br>Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, 1071-1154  |
| May 16   | Cistercians and Crusades<br>(Investiture, round 2) (1140-1216) | Aelred of Rievaulx, <i>Spiritual Friendship</i><br>Roger of Hoveden, passages related to St Thomas Becket  |
| May 23   | Universities and Scholastics (c. 1200-1300)                    | Alexander de Hales, commentary on Peter Lombard, <i>Sentences</i> , on Grace (to be distributed)<br>Robert Grosseteste, select letters (to be distributed) |
| May 30   | Popular Devotion in the Middle Ages                            | Selections from the Miracles of St Frideswide (to be distributed)<br><i>Everyman</i><br>Devotional poetry to be distributed                                |
| June 6   | Mysticism from Cuthbert to Richard Methley                     | Julian of Norwich, <i>Revelations of Divine Love</i> , chh. 1-40<br><i>Pearl</i>   |
| June 13  | Reform in the Late Middle Ages                                 | John Wycliffe, <i>Triologus</i> II.I-XVIII<br>Sarum Mass (liturgical text)   |

## Readings

There is no required textbook. Most of the readings for this course can be found online, so links are provided where available. Readings that cannot be found online will be distributed **except Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, and Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* which must be purchased unless you can read Latin for Aelred and Middle English for Julian.** For those readings where I will be using a print edition, I also give bibliographical data. If you have time and inclination, I also give a “bonus reading” each week.

Finally, I own a lot of older Penguin Classics volumes, as reflected in the bibliography. If you have a newer Penguin or a different translation, go ahead and use it. I have found my own copies to be generally reliable and readable, so I happily recommend them.

### Recommended medieval overviews

There is no general book on the church in medieval England. Therefore, I recommend the following two books, one on the church and one on England:

Saul, Nigel. *The Oxford Illustrated History of Medieval England*. Oxford, 1997.

Southern, R. W. *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*. Harmondsworth, 1970. Some have tried to take its place, but they fail.

**Anglo-Saxon Chronicle** – in Weeks 2-4, this is a source of readings. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is a complicated document, but a straightforward version in modern English is available here:

[https://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject\\_menus/angsax.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/angsax.asp)

## Weekly Readings

Week 1: Gildas, *On the Ruin of Britain*. Trans. J. A. Giles. <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1949>

- Bonus reading: *Y Gododin* by Aneirin. Trans. John Williams. <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/9842>

Week 2: Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Book 1. Dr H's trans.: Roger Collins and Judith McClure. Oxford, 1994. Online: <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/bede/history.html>

- Bede, prose *Life of Cuthbert*. Dr H's trans. in J. F. Webb, trans. *The Age of Bede* (previously released as *Lives of the Saints*). Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983. Online: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/bede-cuthbert.asp>
- Bede's Death Song: <http://www.thehypertexts.com/Bede's%20Death%20Song%20Modern%20English%20Translation.htm>
- Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: 596-792
- Bonus reading: Willibald, *The Life of St. Boniface*: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/willibald-boniface.asp>

Week 3: Asser, *Life of King Alfred*. Trans. Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, in *Alfred the Great*. Harmondsworth, 1983, pp. 67-110.

- *The Dream of the Rood*, trans. Kevin Crossley-Holland in *The Anglo-Saxon World: An Anthology*. Oxford, 1984, pp. 200-204. Online: <https://oldenglishpoetry.camden.rutgers.edu/dream-of-the-rood/>
- Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: 793-901
- Bonus reading: Alefric of Eynsham, A Sermon on the Sacrifice of Easter-Day, in *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, vol. 2. Trans. Benjamin Thorpe. London, 1844-46. pp. 263-283: <https://archive.org/details/homiliesofanglos02aelfuoft/page/262/mode/2up>

Week 4: Simeon of Durham, *History of the Kings*, 1066-end. J. Stevenson, trans., *The Church Historians of England*, pp. 511-617:

<https://archive.org/details/historicalworks00simegoog/page/n104/mode/2up>

- Sermon of the Wolf to the English. In *The Anglo-Saxon World: An Anthology*, 294-300.
- Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, 902-1070
- Bonus reading: *On the Unjust Persecution of the First Bishop William Inflicted by King William*, by Simeon of Durham. J. Stevenson, trans., *The Church Historians of England*, pp. 731-749. <https://archive.org/details/historicalworks00simegoog/page/n324/mode/2up>

Week 5: Eadmer, *Life of St Anselm*, Bk 2, pp. 63-151. Ed. and trans. R. W. Southern. London, 1962: [strobertbellarmine.net/books/Eadmer--Life\\_of\\_St\\_Anselm.pdf](http://strobertbellarmine.net/books/Eadmer--Life_of_St_Anselm.pdf)

- Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, 1071-1154
- Bonus reading: Anselm of Canterbury, *On the Procession of the Holy Spirit*, in Brian Davies and Gillian Evans, edd., *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, pp. 391-434. Oxford, 1998.

Week 6: Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, trans. Lawrence C. Braceland. Collegeville, Minn., 2010.

- Roger of Hoveden, material related to Thomas Becket: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/hoveden-becket.asp>
- *Bonus reading*: Jocelin of Brakelond, *Chronicle of the Abbey of St. Edmund's (1173-1202)*: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/jocelin.asp>

Week 7: Alexander de Hales, *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* on grace (to be distributed)

- Robert Grosseteste, select letters (to be distributed)
- *Bonus reading*: William of Ockham, *Dialogus*, Part 1, Books 1-2: <http://publications.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/pubs/dialogus/1Dial1to5.html>

Week 8: Selections from the Miracles of St Frideswide (to be distributed)

- *Everyman*, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/everyman.asp> Dr H's trans.: A. C. Cawley, *Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays*. Trans. A. C. Cawley. London, 1956, pp. 205-234.
- Devotional poems (to be distributed)
- *Bonus reading*: Any cycle of mystery plays, as in *Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays* (cited above) or in John Gassner, *Medieval and Tudor Drama*. New York, London, 1963.

Week 9: Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, chh. 1-40. Dr H's trans.: Clifton Wolters. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966, pp. 61-122). There is a newer Penguin, I happen not to have it. Online in Middle English: <https://gutenberg.org/ebooks/52958>

- *Pearl*. Dr H's trans.: J. R. R. Tolkien, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, and Sir Orfeo*.
- *Bonus reading*: *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Trans. Clifton Wolters. Harmondsworth, 1961.

Week 10: John Wycliffe, *Triologus* IV.I-XVIII (pp. 131-183):

<https://archive.org/details/tractstreatiseso00wycl/page/130/mode/2up>

- The Roman Mass according to the Use of Sarum: <http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/Sarum/English.htm>
- *Bonus Reading*: Pope Gregory XI, The Condemnation of Wycliffe 1382 and Wycliffe's Reply, 1384: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/1382wycliffe.asp>

## Assessment

**Attendance and participation:** 10%

For-credit students are required to attend the course live and to participate in discussion. Non-participation in discussion will result in a lower grade. Come each session with the following:

- A question about a reading.
- Something surprising from a reading.

I will ask you point-blank if you do not offer them up yourselves.

**Mystical Book Study: 40% (2000 words) - Due Friday, May 27**

Fourteenth-century England saw a flowering of literature we would consider “mystical.” Choose one of the following books and write a review and analysis. Focus on the author, his or her intention, the main thrust of the work, and how it interacts with its own immediate context.

- *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Trans. Clifton Wolters. Harmondsworth, 1961. Online: <https://www.catholicspiritualdirection.org/cloudunknowing.pdf>
- Walter Hilton. *The Scale of Perfection*. Trans. John P. H. Clark and Rosemary Dorward. There is also a Penguin, *The Ladder of Perfection*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price, and a public domain version at CCEL: <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/h/hilton/ladder/cache/ladder.pdf>
- Richard Rolle. *The Fire of Love*. Trans. Clifton Wolters. Harmondsworth, 1972. Online: <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/r/rolle/fire/cache/fire.pdf>
- Margery Kempe. *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Trans. and ed. Lynn Staley, New York & London, 2001. Middle English online: <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/staley-book-of-margery-kempe-book-i-part-i>

**Final Essay: 50% (4000 words)**

Pick one of the texts assigned, including bonus texts, or one weekly topic and formulate a research question. The thrust of the question should be to better understand a figure, theological idea, or text within its own context rather than to thrust upon it concerns that arise after 1517.