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The Christian Middle Ages as an Historiographical Problem

JOHN VAN ENGEN

THE MIDDLE AGES, THE SO-CALLED MIDDLE TIME between antiquity and the era of the early modern reformers, a full one thousand years of European history, has been subject to wild swings in interpretive emphasis, ranging from the “dark ages” described by Renaissance humanists, Protestant reformers, and enlightened philosophes to the “golden age” depicted by Restoration Romantics and neo-Scholastic Catholics.¹ But each of those outlooks still shared the common presupposition that medieval culture was essentially “Christian” or “Catholic,” whether it was vilified as so much superstition or revered as so much authoritative tradition. Precisely that common assumption has come under scrutiny in the last twenty years. All the texts pored over by generations of medievalists, some historians now claim, have disclosed the views only of a minuscule clerical elite; the great mass of medieval folk lived in a “folklore” culture best likened to that observed by anthropologists in Third World countries.² Forms of primitive magic and not faith largely governed religious-cultural attitudes and practices.³ This

A first draft of this essay was read at the Ninety-Ninth Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, held in Chicago, December 27–30, 1984, at a session jointly sponsored by the Catholic Historical Association and the American Society of Church History. My thanks to Bernard McGinn of the University of Chicago for the invitation, Karl Morrison of the University of Kansas for his thoughtful commentary, and William Courtenay of the University of Wisconsin for encouragement.

¹ For a general orientation and bibliographies, see Giorgio Falco, *La polemica sul medioevo* (Turin, 1933); Wallace K. Ferguson, *The Renaissance in Historical Thought* (Boston, 1948), 113–32, 290–385; Hans R. Guggisberg, *Das europäische Mittelalter im amerikanischen Geschichtsdenken des 19. und des frühen 20. Jahrhunderts* (Basel, 1964); Jürgen Voss, *Das Mittelalter im historischen Denken Frankreichs* (Munich, 1972); and Ludovico Gatto, *Viaggi intorno al concetto di medioevo* (Rome, 1977). For newer work, see Norman Cantor, “What Has Happened in Medieval Studies?” *Humanities*, 5.5 (1984): 16–19; Karl Morrison, “Fragmentation and Unity in ‘American Medievalism,’” in M. Kammen, ed., *The Past before Us* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1980), 49–77; Ovidio Capitani, *Medioevo passato prossimo: Appunti storiografici tra due guerre e molte crisi* (Bologna, 1979); and Piero Zerbi, *Il medioevo nella storiografia degli ultimi vent’anni* (Milan, 1976).

² Jacques Le Goff first promulgated widely this folkloric view of medieval culture. See Le Goff, *La civilisation de l’occident médiéval* (Paris, 1964), 18–19. But the notion was not entirely new. See C. S. Lewis, “Imagination and Thought in the Middle Ages,” *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge, 1966), 41. Also see the still-earlier works mentioned in note 39, below.

³ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York, 1971): “The medieval church thus appeared as a vast reservoir of magical power” (p. 45). “The line between magic and religion is one which it is impossible to draw in many primitive societies; it is equally difficult to recognize in medieval England” (p. 50). Many other historians have pointed up widespread “magical” conceptions of religious life, but in ways that qualify Thomas’s sweeping description. See, for instance, Aaron J. Gurjewitsch, *Das Weltbild des mittelalterlichen Menschen* (Munich, 1978), 352–400; Joseph-Claude Poulin, “Entre magie

newest historiographical shift has proved so powerful that even authors kindly disposed to Catholic Christianity have summarized the state of late medieval religious life as “in broad stretches a religious consciousness that can hardly be called Christian.”⁴ A little background will indicate the extent of this shift.

In 1799, as the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation verged on collapse, a petty nobleman known as Novalis drafted an influential essay, “Christendom or Europe,” recalling “that beautiful and brilliant time when Europe was a single Christian land.” Just three years later, from exile in London, Chateaubriand vigorously defended the medieval *Genius of Christianity*. And over the next generation or two, in the aftermath of enlightenment, revolution, and industrialization, European intellectuals everywhere rediscovered the spirit and beauty of an ancient order animated in the main, as they saw it, by Catholic Christianity.⁵ Toward the end of the century, in 1879, Pope Leo XIII challenged his Catholic flock to recover their medieval philosophical heritage and to refute modern heresy. *Aeterni patris* laid the foundations for a remarkable neo-Thomist revival that has shaped Catholic thought into the present day.⁶ At the turn of the century, the pope’s more specifically apologetic purposes combined with a general European flowering of historical and philosophical learning to produce a brilliant revival of medieval scholarship, with Christian philosophy very much at its center. Best known among the institutes that encouraged the new scholarship are those associated with Maurice DeWulf and Fernand van Steenberghen in Louvain, Fernand Grabmann in Munich, Martin Mandonnet in Fribourg, and Etienne Gilson in Toronto. The first volume of *Mediaeval Studies*, official organ of the Pontifical Institute in Toronto, carried a letter from the archbishop of Toronto, its titular head, blessing this enterprise for “applying the best methods of scientific scholarship to the study and interpretation of the thought of those Ages of Faith.” A paperback series on philosophy published in the 1950s included a volume on the medieval period called *The Age of Belief*. The editor of that book noted that, “as we become increasingly aware of our own spiritual bankruptcy, we may look

et religion: Recherches sur les utilisations marginales de l’écrit dans la culture populaire du haut moyen âge,” in Pierre Boglioni, ed., *La culture populaire au moyen âge* (Quebec, 1979), 123–43; Patrick Geary, “Humiliation of Saints,” in Stephen Wilson, ed., *Saints and Their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore, and History* (Cambridge, 1983), 123–40; Edward Peters, *The Magician, the Witch, and the Law* (Philadelphia, 1978); Jeffrey Russell, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1972); and Raoul Manselli, *Magia e stregonaria nel Medio Evo* (Turin, 1976). For a useful historiographic discussion, see Peters, *The Magician, the Witch, and the Law*, 203–12.

⁴ J. van Herwaarden and R. de Keyser, “Het gelovige volk in de late middeleeuwen,” in *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 4 (Haarlem, 1980): 420.

⁵ R. Samuel, ed., *Die Christenheit oder Europa*, in Novalis, *Schriften*, 4 vols. (Stuttgart, 1960), 3: 507; and René de Chateaubriand, *Génie du Christianisme*, ed. Pierre Reboul, 2 vols. (Paris, 1966). There is no single synthetic work on “medievalism” in the Romantic era. But see Raoul Manselli, “Il medioevo come *Christianitas*: Una scoperta romantica,” in Vittorio Branca, ed., *Concetto, storia, miti e immagini del medioevo* (Venice, 1973), 51–89; Gatto, *Viaggi intorno al concetto*, 107–21; Voss, *Mittelalter im historischen Denken Frankreichs*, 312–38; and Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 1978), 3–22. Burke linked the Romantic notion of medievalism to the discovery in the early nineteenth century of “popular” culture and folklore.

⁶ See the essays in V. B. Brezik, ed., *One Hundred Years of Thomism* (Houston, 1981). On the context of *Aeterni Patris*, see Pierre Thibault, *Savoir et pouvoir: Philosophie thomiste et politique clericale au XIX^e siècle* (Quebec, 1972).

back with a certain appreciation—and even with a certain nostalgia—to those spiritually solvent centuries, to that Age of Belief.” Through parochial education such views came to permeate the Catholic community.⁷ But, outside it as well, scholars and ordinary folks alike looked on medieval civilization as predominantly “Christian” or “Catholic” in character.

Just over a decade ago, Jean Delumeau, one of the first Catholics admitted to the prestigious Collège de France, vigorously contested what he called the “legend of the Christian Middle Ages.” Together with Keith Thomas, Carlo Ginzburg, Gerald Strauss, Robert Muchembled, and several others, he argued that medieval folk were at best only superficially Christianized; Christian faith and practice first took hold among the European masses during the Reformation and Counter Reformation movements.⁸ These historians of the early modern era were, at least in part, still engaging in the old practice of setting up a “medieval straw man” to be conveniently knocked over by Luther, Calvin, and Trent. But this interpretation rapidly gained adherents among historians of the medieval period as well. Gabriel Le Bras questioned fashionable new arguments about the origins and pace of Europe’s “de-Christianization” on the grounds that medieval Europe was in reality never all that thoroughly Christianized. André Vauchez and Paolo Brezzi, both Catholic, likewise repudiated the “myth of the Christian Middle Ages.”⁹ Even in studies of medieval philosophy, which were once central to the notion of a Christian medieval Europe, images of a prevailing “Christian spirit” have yielded to an emphasis on logic and nonmetaphysical issues and an insistence on many differing schools of thought. Indeed, one scholar (also a Catholic priest) has interpreted Dante as secretly skeptical of Christian claims to philosophical truth.¹⁰

⁷ See the page facing the imprimatur in the first volume of *Mediaeval Studies* (1939). On Toronto’s institute, see Lawrence K. Shook, *Catholic Post-Secondary Education in English-Speaking Canada: A History* (Toronto, 1971), 210–28, and *Etienne Gilson* (Toronto, 1984), 180, 192–95; Anne Fremantle, *The Age of Belief* (New York, 1954), x; and Philip Gleason, “Mass and Maypole Revisited: American Catholics and the Middle Ages,” *Catholic Historical Review*, 57 (1971): 249–74.

⁸ Delumeau, *Le catholicisme entre Luther et Voltaire*, Nouvelle Cléo, no. 30 (Paris, 1971), 234–35, and “Au sujet de la déchristianisation,” *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 22 (1975): 57. On Delumeau and his views, see M. Despland, “How Close Are We to Having a Full History of Christianity? The Work of Jean Delumeau,” *Religious Studies Review*, 9 (1983): 24–33. Also see Muchembled, *Culture populaire et culture des élites dans la France moderne (XV^e–XVIII^e siècles)* (Paris, 1978), 131–33; Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms* (New York, 1982), esp. 126; and Strauss, *Luther’s House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young in the German Reformation* (Baltimore, Md., 1978), 268–308. For a good review of this literature and viewpoint, see Natalie Z. Davis, “From ‘Popular Religion’ to Religious Cultures,” in Steven Ozment, ed., *Reformation Europe: A Guide to Research* (St. Louis, Mo., 1982), 321–42. For another approach, see Jean Wirth, *Luther: Étude d’histoire religieuse* (Geneva, 1981), 35–90.

⁹ Le Bras, “Déchristianisation: Mot fallacieux,” *Cahiers d’histoire*, 9 (1964): 92–97; and Delumeau, “Au sujet de la déchristianisation,” 52–60. Also see Brezzi, *Metodologia storiografica e problematica medioevale* (Rome, 1975), esp. 163–94; and Vauchez, “Les nouvelles orientations de l’histoire religieuse de la France médiévale (avant le XIII^e siècle),” in his *Religion et société dans l’occident médiévale* (Turin, 1980), 293; “La renaissance catholique de la première moitié du XIX^e siècle qui se fondait sur une vision mythique de la Chrétienté.”

¹⁰ See Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy* (New York, 1936), 404. Gilson in summary of his book described himself as “wishing to set forth a spirit of medieval philosophy, and [as] having identified it with the spirit of Christian philosophy. Compare the introduction to Norman Kretzmann et al., eds., *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, (Cambridge, 1982), 3. The *Cambridge History*, with its quite different emphases, was written partly as a pedagogical corrective, but it was also meant, in the editors’ words, to “help end the era during which [medieval philosophical thought] has been studied in a philosophical ghetto.” Jaroslav Pelikan made similar remarks. See Pelikan, “The

The old Romantic image, in short, has been turned on its head. Jacques Le Goff concluded a lengthy survey of medieval Christianity by declaring that “towards 1500 Europe was still virtually mission country.”¹¹

Were the Middle Ages then a flourishing epoch of Catholic Christianity or a millennium of Indo-European folklore? A number of studies, published since the early 1970s, have offered an easy, but inadequate, answer. The traditional achievements of the Christian Middle Ages are ascribed to an educated “clerical elite” and the folkloric practices pervasive in the medieval era, and newly appreciated by historians, to the rest of the “people.” More noteworthy than the solution, it seems to me, was the emergence of the issue. That such a question—whether medieval culture was essentially “Christian” and what that might mean—could become central to medieval historiography reflected a crucial change. Until fifty years ago the study of medieval religious life was left largely to theologians, church historians, and members of religious orders. Richard Southern recently made this point in the wry opening sentence of his appreciation of Beryl Smalley, his lifelong colleague. “In 1927, when Beryl Smalley began to study the Bible in the Middle Ages,” he wrote, “I think it would be true to say that the Bible had almost no place in the minds of medieval historians.”¹² The present debate derives in no small measure from the emergence of medieval religious life as a field of historical inquiry fully as legitimate as medieval politics, warfare, and economics. How that happened, and its impact on our view of the Middle Ages, can most easily be understood by examining the works and perspectives of influential scholars and by outlining three general interpretive tendencies.¹³ A brief word must also be said about the continuing—and yet changing—influence of confessional considerations, that is, perspectives influenced by or derived from personal religious convictions or affiliations.

IN HIS DISSERTATION, COMPLETED IN 1927, Herbert Grundmann (1902–70) argued that Joachim of Fiore was neither a dangerous “heretic” nor a wild-eyed “millenarian” but a significant witness to and product of the intellectual and

Middle Ages as ‘Age of Faith,’” in his *The Growth of Medieval Theology* (Chicago, 1978), 1–8. Also see Ernest L. Fortin, *Dissidence et philosophie au moyen âge: Dante et ses antécédents* (Montreal, 1983), esp. 160.

¹¹ Le Goff, “Le christianisme médiévale en occident du concile de Nice (325) à la réforme (début du XVI^e siècle),” in *Histoire des religions*, Encyclopédie de la Pléiade (Paris, 1972), vol. 2, p. 856: “La Chrétienté vers 1500 c’est, presque, un pays de mission.”

¹² Southern, “Beryl Smalley and the Place of the Bible in Medieval Studies, 1927–1984,” in Katherine Walsh and Diana Woods, eds., *The Bible in the Medieval World: Essays in Memory of Beryl Smalley* (Oxford, 1985), 1.

¹³ A full survey of recent scholarship in medieval religious history is not possible here. For general orientations, see François Rapp, “Réflexions sur la religion populaire au moyen âge,” in Bernard Plongeron, ed., *La religion populaire: Approches historiques* (Paris, 1976), 51–98; Bernard McGinn, “Medieval Christianity: An Introduction to the Literature, 1957–1977,” *Anglican Theological Review*, 60 (1978): 278–305; Le Goff, “Le christianisme médiévale”; and Vauchez, “Nouvelles orientations de l’histoire religieuse.” On the larger interpretative issues, see the essays in *Cristianesimo nella storia*, 5 (1984): 29–166.

spiritual milieu of his time.¹⁴ To get at that milieu, that larger setting, required another decade of work before Grundmann published his monumental *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*, which has become the foundation for the historical study of medieval religious life.¹⁵ Most of its themes are now commonplace: the twelfth-century quest for the “apostolic life,” with particular sensitivity to the issue of poverty; the common inspiration of groups ending up both inside and outside the church (with comparisons of Francis and Waldo); the centrality of women in those movements; Innocent III’s skillful and crucial handling of the mendicants; and the rise of a vernacular religious culture for the laity, especially lay women. Yet, just because so much subsequent work still stands in the shadow of this book, Grundmann’s distinctly personal approach deserves closer analysis.

The focal point, both scholarly and personal, for all his work remained the individual quest for the truly apostolic (that is, Christian) life.¹⁶ Grundmann’s interest and exposition normally stopped short the moment any movement gained official approbation as an order or reprobation as a sect—the only two long-term options, in his view, possible within the structures of the medieval church. In general, Grundmann was more taken therefore with hermits and wandering preachers than with professed monks, with adult converts than with child oblates, with religious women still partly in the world (Beguines) than with nuns, and with individuals making their own spiritual way (Waldo, Francis) than with spokesmen for established groups.¹⁷ Individualistic “heresiarchs” deserved sympathetic study; “heretics” or the “religious” who joined groups for familial, social, or cultural reasons he mostly left to others. As the new orders produced by religious movements grew ever more “monkish,” he saw that fringe groups would inevitably turn all the more “radical.”¹⁸

What Grundmann taught historians above all was to take seriously both the centrality of these movements in medieval history and the religious motivation of

¹⁴ Grundmann, *Studien über Joachim von Fiore* (1927; reprint edn., Darmstadt, 1966). It is striking how many scholars sought a new and less confessional view of medieval religious life by way of studying Joachim. See Emile Gebhart, *Introduction à l'histoire du sentiment religieux en Italie* (Paris, 1884), and *L'Italie mystique* (3d edn., Paris, 1899); Paul Fournier, *Études sur Joachim de Fiore et ses doctrines* (Paris, 1899); Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1969); Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (London, 1957); Ernst Benz, *Ecclesia Spirituality* (Stuttgart, 1934); Grundmann, *Studien über Joachim von Fiore*; Giovanni Volpe, *Movimenti religiosi e sette eretiche nella società medievale italiana* (Florence, 1922); Ernesto Buonaiuti, *Gioacchino da Fiore: I tempi, la vita, il messaggio* (Rome, 1931); and Raffaello Morghen, *Medioevo cristiano* (Rome, 1951). Reeves began her work in the 1930s. One may wonder in retrospect whether studies of Joachim offered the best approach to medieval religious culture.

¹⁵ Grundmann, *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter* (1935; reprint edn., Darmstadt, 1970). For a good introduction to Grundmann’s work, see the necrology by Arno Borst, in Grundmann, *Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Schriften, no. 25 (Stuttgart, 1976–78), 1: 1–25. The volume includes a complete bibliography. See Grundmann, *Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, 1: 26–37. Also see R. Büchner, “Religiösität, Spiritualismus, geistige Armut, Bildung; Herbert Grundmann’s geistesgeschichtliche Studien,” *Innsbrucker Historische Studien*, 1 (1978): 239–51.

¹⁶ See Borst’s comment in Grundmann, *Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, 1: 2: “Ein eigenes Verständnis vom christlichen Evangelium und seiner Verwirklichung; hier liegt die tiefste Würzel für sein Lebenswerk.”

¹⁷ Grundmann, *Religiöse Bewegungen*, 5–6. All these themes, inherent in *Religiöse Bewegungen*, were developed in separate essays under that same title and gathered into volume 1 of his *Aufsätze*.

¹⁸ See, especially, Grundmann, “Hérésies savantes et hérésies populaires au moyen âge,” in *Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, 1: 417–22, and his “Neue Beiträge zur Geschichte der religiösen Bewegungen im Mittelalter,” in *Religiöse Bewegungen*, 513, and *Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, 1: 67.

their adherents regardless of origins, be they Cathars or Free Spirits.¹⁹ But, while he was clear that these religious movements should not be dismissed by church historians as “heretical” or interpreted by general historians as “social protest,” Grundmann never defined exactly what he understood by the term “movement.” His own book was really a series of connected essays, and he virtually ignored routine religious practices and institutional developments. (Interestingly, Grundmann himself ceased formal practice in the State Lutheran Church.) Indeed, the institutionalization of a religious movement seemed to him neither desirable nor possible, so—to redo his title—ordinary religious life (or practice) in the Middle Ages remained largely untreated and, by implication, unworthy of treatment, since those “moved” to “religion” had to go beyond it.

By contrast, for Etienne Delaruelle (1904–71), a French Catholic, the heart of medieval religious life lay in the “piety” of the “people.”²⁰ Like Grundmann, he was committed to the exposition of authentic Christian experience and much less interested in socioeconomic questions. But he searched for that Christianity in collective expressions of piety, such as crusades and pilgrimages, and in common cults, like those of the cross and the saints. He knew well enough that popular religiosity often expended itself in practices verging on magic, varieties of gross superstition, and perfunctory external rites, but he intuitively focused elsewhere, on taking up the cross to go on crusade rather than on its attendant indulgences, on pilgrimages as penitential acts rather than on shrines, on devotion to the saints rather than on miracles and magic. He also believed that medieval religious life underwent an increasing interiorization—bringing a deepened personal appropriation, moving away from crusades and pilgrimages, for instance, and toward observances such as the stations of the cross. Delaruelle steadily resisted the identification of medieval religious life with either the “professionally” or the “extraordinarily” (that is, heretically) religious, but he conceded deep “tension, even opposition,” between clerical and popular Christianity, and he saw Saint Francis as the only figure truly to transcend it.²¹ Nonetheless, Delaruelle’s work, exemplified best in his contribution to the fourteenth volume in the series *Histoire de L’église*, effectively brought the piety of ordinary people into the mainstream of historical study (and, in another context, directly influenced Vatican Council II). Yet Delaruelle never defined these “people” conceptually or socially, which was

¹⁹ For works by two excellent disciples of Grundmann, see Arno Borst, *Die Katharer*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Schriften, no. 12 (Stuttgart, 1953); and Robert E. Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit* (Princeton, N.J., 1972).

²⁰ Delaruelle never published his thesis on Catherine of Siena. For his most important works, see *L’église au temps du Grand Schisme et de la crise conciliaire*, *Histoire de l’église*, no. 14 (Paris, 1964), *La piété populaire au moyen âge*, ed. R. Manselli and A. Vauchez (Turin, 1975), and *L’idée de croisade au moyen âge*, ed. R. Richard (Turin, 1980). Both collections of essays have important introductions to Delaruelle and his work. Also see M. H. Vicaire, “L’apport d’Etienne Delaruelle aux études de spiritualité populaire médiévale,” in *La religion populaire en Languedoc*, Cahiers de Fanjeaux, no. 11 (Toulouse, 1976), 23–36. Vicaire offered a positive evaluation of Delaruelle’s work. For a more negative view, see J. C. Schmitt, “‘Religion populaire’ et culture folklorique,” *Annales, économies, sociétés, civilisation*, 31 (1976): 941–53.

²¹ For the closest Delaruelle came to a definition of “popular piety,” see his “La vie commune des clercs et la spiritualité populaire au moyen âge,” and “Saint François d’Assise et la piété populaire,” in *La piété populaire au moyen âge*, 165–67, 275.

one of Jean-Claude Schmitt's main criticisms, nor did he confront squarely the gap in piety between their actual practice and the formal prescriptions of the church.

Jean Leclercq (1911–), Delaruelle's contemporary, introduced historians to monastic piety in such a way—and so successfully—that numerous lay and even agnostic scholars are focusing sympathetically on monastic spiritual life, an undertaking almost inconceivable two generations ago. Building on the work of André Wilmart and others, Leclercq placed the development of the monastic orders within general cultural and literary history and transformed monastic "spirituality" into a coherent world view or outlook, which enabled historians to fit monastic thought and devotional literature far better into the larger medieval story.²² But Leclercq's "monastic theology" lacks firm historical definition and is therefore subject, like Grundmann's "religious movements" and Delaruelle's "popular piety," to a certain vagueness or even opportunism in its concrete historical applications. At the same time, and in much the same context, Marie-Dominique Chenu and Yves Congar attempted to elucidate theological and ecclesiological themes contextually.²³ Their purpose, much like that of Delaruelle and Leclercq, was to reform and to promote from within the church through historical understanding, but their effect—not altogether unintended—was to make these materials generally accessible and thus to draw many others into their study.

If Grundmann established the study of medieval "religious movements," Delaruelle "popular piety," and Leclercq "monastic theology," Gabriel Le Bras (1891–1970) founded "religious sociology." An expert in history and law, Le Bras approached religion from the perspective of its organization and practice, in an effort to explain historically the variety and degree of Catholic practice observable in modern France.²⁴ In terms of the *Annales* school, what Delaruelle did for religious "mentalities," Le Bras undertook, at Marc Bloch's specific encouragement, for religious "societies." He called for a "religious geography" to map out local practice and the physical state of churches and cemeteries, studies of parishes

²² Leclercq's most influential work was *The Love of Learning and Desire for God* (2d paperback edn., New York, 1974), first published in 1957 under the title *L'amour des lettres et le désir de Dieu: Initiation aux auteurs monastiques du moyen âge*. For a complete bibliography, see Réginald Grégoire, "Bibliographie de Dom Jean Leclercq," *Studia Monastica*, 10 (1968): 161–80, and 20 (1978): 409–23. For a critical review of Leclercq's historical contribution, see G. G. Meerseman, "'Teologia monastica' e riforma ecclesiastica da Leone IX a Callisto II," in *Il monachesimo e la riforma ecclesiastica, 1049–1123* (Milan, 1971), 257–70; and Gregorio Penco, "La teologia monastica: Bilancio di un dibattito," *Benedictina*, 26 (1979): 189–98. For a partial redefinition of monastic theology, see Leclercq, "The Renewal of Theology," in Robert Benson et al., eds., *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, 1982), 68–87, esp. 71 n. 7.

²³ Chenu, *La théologie au douzième siècle* (Paris, 1957), and *Introduction à l'étude de Saint Thomas d'Acquin* (Paris, 1950); Congar, *L'ecclésiologie du haut moyen âge* (Paris, 1968), and *L'église de Saint Augustin à l'époque moderne* (Paris, 1970). Chenu's *La théologie au douzième siècle* has been partially translated by Lester K. Little and Jerome Taylor as *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century* (Chicago, 1968). Also see the essays by Congar in *Droit ancien et structures ecclésiales* (London, 1982).

²⁴ The best approach to Le Bras is through his two-volume *Etudes de sociologie religieuse* (Paris, 1955–56), where his most important essays have been organized, as it were, programmatically. For a complete bibliography, see *Etudes d'histoire du droit canonique dédiés à Gabriel Le Bras*, 2 vols. (Paris 1965), 1: ix–xxxiii. And for a useful interpretative introduction, see Henri Desroche, "Areas and Methods of a Sociology of Religion: The Work of G. Le Bras," *Journal of Religion*, 35 (1955): 34–47. The subtitle of the first essay (from 1931) in his *Etudes d'histoire* reads "Pour un examen détaillé et pour une explication historique de l'état du Catholicisme dans les diverses régions de la France."

and confraternities to get at local social organization and of canon law, visitation records, synodical statutes, and parish registers to get at local sources. His own masterful account of medieval ecclesiastical institutions revealed a Latin Christendom comprised of several overlapping and competing interest groups (cardinals versus popes, chapters versus bishops, religious versus seculars, parishoners versus vicars, and so on)—all greatly differentiated in time and place and yet, somehow, in the High Middle Ages, roughly amalgamated into a “common law” of the church, a term that suggests “practice” becoming “norm.” Such close examination permanently shattered any hazy Romantic notions of medieval Christendom as singularly unified or pious and disclosed enormous gaps between ideal and reality, Christian doctrine and popular practice.²⁵ Yet Le Bras’s own inspiration clearly arose out of a scholarly effort to recover his childhood experience in a village parish. A posthumous book on “the church and the village” described each village church as a “religious capital” and looked back nostalgically on a time when village life, in all its “lived” dimensions, revolved around the church.²⁶

In England, meanwhile, where the adage “history is past politics” reigned into the 1920s, a historian of strict Dissenter stock established the study of medieval religious life. Maurice Powicke (1879–1963), together with David Knowles (1896–1974) of Benedictine and neo-Scholastic background, produced in Richard Southern, Beryl Smalley, Christopher Cheney, Christopher Brooke, and many others a generation or two of rare accomplishment. Powicke, notably for a Dissenter, concentrated attention on medieval Christianity’s mainstream: the prescriptions of councils and synods, the teachings of schoolmen, the lives of monks. Yet he also said of medieval religious life: “We no longer believe in that well-behaved body of the faithful. . . . Paganism abounded, but it was the literal paganism of the natural man.”²⁷ Powicke’s perception of a blend between the “naturally pagan” and mainstream Christianity’s finest achievements was to find a continuing echo. Richard Southern (1911–) described medieval civilization as a mix between “the practical, business-like and earthy, and the intellectual, spiritual

²⁵ This more critical vision of medieval Christianity is particularly evident in two dissertations directed by Le Bras. See Paul Adam, *La vie paroissiale en France au XIV^e siècle* (Paris, 1964); and Jacques Toussaert, *Le sentiment religieux en Flandre à la fin du moyen âge* (Paris, 1963). Toussaert’s book, widely used in France and America, received critical reviews in Flanders. For a general appraisal with references to other reviews, see Ludo Milis, “De devotionele praktijk in de laat-middeleeuwse Nederlanden,” in J. D. Janssens, ed., *Hoofsheid en devotie in de middeleeuwse maatschappij* (Brussels, 1982) 133–45, and 144 n. 10.

²⁶ See Le Bras, *Prologomènes, Histoire du droit et des institutions de l’église en Occident*, no. 1 (Paris, 1955), and *Institutions ecclésiastique de la chrétienté médiévale, Histoire de l’église*, no. 12 (1959/1964). Compare his *L’église et le village* (Paris, 1976). Le Bras’s work was the inspiration for the “new” history of “lived” Christianity. See Jean Delumeau, ed., *Histoire vécue du peuple chrétien*, 2 vols. (Toulouse, 1979). In general Le Bras’s approach has proved much more fruitful for the study of early modern than of medieval Christianity because of the far greater supply of documentary sources available after about 1400.

²⁷ Powicke, *Christian Life in the Middle Ages and Other Essays* (Oxford, 1935) 5, 3. For an excellent appreciation of Powicke with bibliography by Richard W. Southern, see *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 50 (1964): 275–304. For an earlier bibliography, see *Studies in Medieval History Presented to Frederick Maurice Powicke* (Oxford, 1948), 469–91. For further insight into the historiographical shift since the 1930s, see Richard Southern, “Marjorie Reeves as an Historian,” in Ann Williams, ed., *Prophecy and Millenarianism: Essays in Honour of Marjorie Reeves* (Burnt Hill, England, 1980), 3–9.

and aspiring.” His survey of the medieval church, perhaps the most influential of the last generation, dealt primarily with the practical, “the connexion between religious organizations and . . . social setting,” while leaving the intellectual and spiritual to another volume on Scholasticism, which is still awaited. Partly, like Leclercq, under Wilmart’s influence, Southern identified the “aspiring” especially with monastic spirituality, a theme most evident in his works on Anselm.²⁸ Smalley (1906–84) focused on the schoolmen’s literal and historical study of the Bible, though one of her best books took up precisely the same juxtaposition—intellectuals in politics—that Southern highlighted.²⁹ This notion of a “mix” between the natural and the spiritual man, though much milder in its rhetoric, proved as corrosive of the old Romantic images of medieval Christianity as the ideas of Delumeau, Le Bras, and their colleagues. It was Christopher Cheney (1905–), after all, who laid out the realities of ecclesiastical administration,³⁰ Smalley who demonstrated the Jewish community’s role in developing Christian exegesis, and Southern who discarded as myths the schools of Chartres and early Oxford and insisted that universities were meant to serve very practical ends.³¹

While these scholars, active in England, Germany, and France since the 1920s and 1930s, laid the foundation for a study of medieval religious life in both its ideals and its practical realities, another group, mostly younger and influenced in part by church reform and countercultural movements, set out to explore and to include the religious aspirations of medieval fringe groups. This was a general phenomenon, associated, for instance, with Norman Cohn’s book *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (1957),³² but the approach took especially pronounced forms among scholars in countries with crumbling Catholic orthodoxies and is nowhere better illustrated than in the work of two Italian historians, Raffaello Morghen (1895–1983) and Raoul Manselli (d. 1984). Morghen insisted that “the fundamental theme inspiring and permeating the whole development of medieval

²⁸ Southern, *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies* (New York, 1970), vii, and *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Baltimore, Md., 1970), 15. The essay “Medieval Humanism” in the first book represents, in effect, the paradigmatic interpretation of the greatest achievement of the High Middle Ages as a successful synthesis between the “natural” and the “spiritual.” For a bibliography of Southern’s works, see R. H. C. Davis and J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, eds., *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to Richard William Southern* (Oxford, 1981), 495–502.

²⁹ For insights into Smalley’s and Southern’s historiographical positions, see Southern, “Beryl Smalley and the Place of the Bible in Medieval Studies,” 1–16. Also see Smalley’s preface to the third edition of *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1983), vii–xvii. The title of Smalley’s *The Becket Conflict and the Schools: A Study of Intellectuals in Politics* (Totowa, N.J., 1973) is noteworthy. For a collection of her essays and a bibliography of her work, see *Studies in Medieval Thought and Learning from Abelard to Wyclif* (London, 1981), esp. 417–22.

³⁰ Cheney’s work is well represented in his collected studies, *Medieval Texts and Studies* (Oxford, 1973), and in *From Becket to Langton: English Church Government, 1170–1213* (Manchester, 1956) and *Pope Innocent III and England*, *Päpste und Papsttum*, no. 9 (Stuttgart, 1976). For a complete bibliography to 1975, see *Church and Government in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to C. R. Cheney on his 70th Birthday* (Cambridge, 1976), 275–84. The juxtaposition evident in the title *Church and Government* is again noteworthy.

³¹ Southern, “The Schools of Paris and the School of Chartres,” in Benson *et al.*, *Renaissance and Renewal*, 113–72, and “From Schools to University,” in J. I. Catto, *The History of the University of Oxford* (Oxford, 1984), vol. 1, pp. 1–36.

³² See Jeffrey Russell and Carl Berkhout, *Medieval Heresies: A Bibliography, 1960–79* (Toronto, 1981). For a review of Russell’s *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1984), see Norman Cohn, “Giving the Devil His Due,” *New York Review of Books*, April 25, 1985, pp. 13–14.

civilization was the Christian religious tradition.” But he saw its force as divided between a clerical hierarchy and an unchanneled, virtually uncontrollable religious movement rooted in the “religious conscience of lay society, which rose together with the renewed life of the city and the communes.” Joachim, he contended, not Pope Innocent or Friar Thomas, was “the greatest exponent, master, and prophet of all the spirituality of the thirteenth century.”³³ So, too, Manselli, Morghen’s disciple, specifically defended the Romantic notion of a medieval Christian civilization but located it in “foundational” values rather than hierarchical structures and interpreted critical and heretical movements as signs of vitality. Accordingly, the focus of his research was—to paraphrase the titles of his major works—heretical reformers, Franciscan spirituals, religious deviants, popular religiosity, magic and witchcraft, and, lastly, Saint Francis.³⁴ His entire approach wholly presupposed an institutional church, yet he tended to put the “truly religious” outside it. Manselli sought to include “popular” and even “fringe” elements in the medieval church but was often unclear about their relationship to each other and to medieval Christianity as a whole, and, while rejecting both neo-Scholastic and social determinist interpretations, he still attempted to understand medieval Christianity as a socioreligious unity.

All the historians described thus far, whatever their emphasis or approach, had, it is fair to say, a personal religious interest in the study of a Christian medieval civilization. A new school has emerged comprised of historians, represented here by Jacques Le Goff and Jean-Claude Schmitt, who have approached medieval religious life as historical anthropologists investigating a native culture subjected to the propaganda of Christian missionaries. Missionary is, roughly, Schmitt’s image, in his book *The Holy Greyhound*,³⁵ of Stephen of Bourbon, the Dominican inquisitor. Le Goff first propagated the notion of a wholly distinct religious culture among the people, worthy of serious study and essential to an understanding of earlier European life. From the beginning, he has had a flair for dramatic pronouncements, choosing to write a textbook rather than a *thèse d’état*, to collect his essays under the programmatic French title *Pour un autre moyen âge*, and to focus his one major historical monograph on purgatory, understood as a creative new

³³ Morghen, *Medioevo Cristiano* (1951; 4th edn., Rome, 1974), 19, 253, 257. For a bibliography of Morghen’s works, see *Studi sul medioevo cristiano offerti a R. Morghen*, 2 vols. (Rome, 1974), 1: xi–xxi. Also see Morghen, “La lezione di Medioevo Cristiano,” *Quaderni catanesi*, 2 (1980): 453–68, and “Cultura laica e cultura cattolica in Roma ai primi del’900,” *Archivio della società romana di storia patria*, 102 (1979): 393–411. By way of his teacher, Ernesto Buonaiuti, Morghen had intellectual contacts with Modernist historians condemned by the hierarchy in the early twentieth century. Among Morghen’s own students, Manselli studied “heretics” and Arsenio Frugoni examined a radical evangelical critic of the Roman papacy in the twelfth century. See Frugoni, *Arnoldo da Brescia* (Rome, 1954). On Frugoni and his collected essays, see Giovanni Miccoli, “Gli Incontri nel Medio Evo di Arsenio Frugoni,” *Studi Medievali*, 24 (1983): 469–86.

³⁴ Manselli, “La Christianitas medioevale di fronte all’eresia,” in Branca, *Concetto, storia, miti e immagini*, 90–133, esp. 132–33, *Studi sulle eresie del secolo XII* (Rome, 1953), *Spirituali e Beghini in Provenza* (Rome, 1959), *I fenomeni di devianza nel medioevo* (Turin, 1972), *Magia, and San Francesco d’Assisi* (Rome, 1981). Manselli’s personal views are most evident in the opening and closing chapters of his *La religion populaire au moyen âge* (Montreal, 1975). For a bibliography of his relevant work, see *La religion populaire*, 14–15.

³⁵ Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound: Guinefort, Healer of Children since the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1983), 11–35.

product of medieval man's spatial imagination.³⁶ With this school, and with numerous historians adopting related approaches, the study of medieval religious life has in a sense come full circle. Practices that earlier generations of Protestants and enlightened liberals dismissed as so much superstition, and many Catholics quietly downplayed or entirely overlooked, have been taken up enthusiastically—with a heavy debt to anthropologists and folklorists—as the authentic (and non-Christian) religion of the people.³⁷

The study of both comparative religions and folklore dates from the nineteenth century, and both disciplines have been fitfully applied to the study of medieval religious life. There was a fierce debate in the early twentieth century over the cult of the saints and their relics as a “pagan survival,”³⁸ and several German scholars, especially Catholics, attempted in the 1930s to elucidate sympathetically the role of folklore in various aspects of medieval religious life.³⁹ Le Goff, Schmitt, and others have now set out to draw far more systematically on structural analysis as a way of getting at a submerged popular culture in which religion—that is, a religion common to Indo-European peoples—played a key role as a cohesive force. At the heart of Le Goff's and Schmitt's vision is an argument for two distinct cultures, the one clerical and bookish, the other popular, oral, and customary, the first accessible through traditional intellectual and spiritual categories, the second mainly through cultural anthropology and comparative religions.⁴⁰ Further, these historians have argued that bookish, clerical culture was to some degree an

³⁶ Le Goff's *Pour un autre moyen âge* (Paris, 1977) has been translated. See Le Goff, *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago, 1980). For an illuminating preface on Le Goff's outlook, see *Time, Work, and Culture*, vii–xv. Also see Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago, 1984). For reviews of Le Goff's works, see *Times Literary Supplement*, June 18, 1982, pp. 651–52; Adriaan Bredero, “Le moyen âge et le purgatoire,” *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, 78 (1983): 429–51; Aaron Gurevich, “Popular and Scholarly Medieval Cultural Traditions: Notes in the Margins of Jacques Le Goff's Book,” *Journal of Medieval History*, 9 (1983): 78–98; and E. Mégier, “Deux exemples de ‘prépurgatoire’ chez les historiens: A propos de *La naissance du Purgatoire* de Jacques Le Goff,” *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale*, 28 (1985): 45–62. There is a generally positive presentation of this whole “French” school (but with examples mostly from modern history) by Willem Frijhoff; “Van ‘Histoire de l'église’ naar ‘histoire religieuse,’” *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis*, 61 (1981): 113–53.

³⁷ For the clearest presentation of Le Goff's thesis, see his “Clerical Culture and Folklore Traditions in Merovingian Civilization” and “Ecclesiastical Culture and Folklore in the Middle Ages: Saint Marcellus of Paris and the Dragon,” in *Time, Work, and Culture*, 153–88. Also see Schmitt, “‘Religion populaire’ et culture folklorique,” and “‘Jeunes’ et danse des chevaux de bois: Le folklore méridional dans la littérature des *exempla* (XIII^e–XIV^e siècles),” in *Religion populaire en Languedoc*, 127–58.

³⁸ For the best and most balanced survey of a large body of works, see František Graus, *Volk, Herrscher und Heiliger im Reich der Merowinger: Studien zur Hagiographie der Merowingerzeit* (Prague, 1965).

³⁹ German scholars had a tradition of work in “Volkskunde” going back at least to the Brothers Grimm. See Heinrich Schauerte, “Entwicklung und gegenwärtiger Stand der religiösen Volkskundeforschung,” *Historisches Jahrbuch*, 72 (1953): 516–34. Peter Browe, Otto Höfler, and especially Georg Schreiber (1882–1963) were among the most significant of these scholars. On Schreiber, see Nikolaus Grass, “In Memoriam,” *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, Kanonistische Abteilung*, 49 (1963): 621–26. Broadly speaking, German scholarship in “religious folklore” declined after the Second World War, and French work, stimulated by structural anthropology, increased.

⁴⁰ For the most explicit expression of structuralism, see Le Goff, “Melusina: Mother and Pioneer,” in *Time, Work, and Culture*, 205–22; and Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound*, 40–48. Also see, for Claude Brémond's structural analysis of an exemplum, Jean-Claude Schmitt *et al.*, *L'exemplum*, Typologie des sources, no. 40 (Turnhout, 1981), 113. This interpretive approach also underlies R. Howard Bloch's *Etymologies and Genealogies* (Chicago, 1983). For far greater skepticism about the reliability of literary accounts of “superstition,” see Dieter Harmening, *Superstitio: Überlieferungs- und theoriegeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur kirchlich-theologischen Aberglaubensliteratur des Mittelalters* (Berlin, 1979).

“ideological reflection” of the social elite but operated far more as an instrument of its oppression. This social component, though important to their interpretation, seems the least developed and least convincing. Surely medieval churchmen used their spiritual authority and intellectual abilities to economic and political advantage, as demonstrated, for instance, in Joseph Lynch’s study of simoniac entrance into monastic life. But learned clerics comprised, as Le Bras insisted, a congerie of mutually competing interests, not a uniform class, and in any case two-thirds or more of the landed estates—and the power that came with them—were not in the possession of a clerical elite.⁴¹ More important and much more fruitful are the attempts made by this school to dredge up from the bottom, as it were, the residues of peasant religious “folklore.” Insights from the analysis of comparative religions have stimulated historians to deal with folk practices on their own terms, and not just as some degraded form of Christianity or as the “paganism of the natural man.” These insights have also forced historians to reflect again on the import of the church doing its business and developing its culture in a language unknown to most of its people—a point to which the members of this school repeatedly return.⁴² Indeed, their work reflects a broader concern to recover medieval traditions outside those recorded and upheld by a clerical elite.⁴³

But to argue that the people had a wholly distinct religious culture, not somehow amalgamated into Christian practice, is quite another matter. Before adopting such a view, historians must examine more closely the sources used to argue for it and the interpretive presuppositions that have guided it. The main evidence cited by proponents of separate cultures derives from *exempla*⁴⁴ and from inquisitorial records.⁴⁵ Both record the stories and sometimes the words of people

⁴¹ The thesis is generally argued more forcefully by Schmitt; *The Holy Greyhound*, 169–70, and *L'exemplum*, 107: “L'exemplum a compte parmi les moyens le plus remarquables des échanges culturels, parce qu'il était d'abord l'un des instruments les plus efficaces du pouvoir idéologique.” To view the “clerical establishment” as a relatively unified whole is central to the structure of this thesis. See Le Goff’s introduction to Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Mort d'une hérésie: L'église et les clercs face aux béguines et aux béghards du Rhin supérieur du XIV^e au XV^e siècle* (Paris, 1978), 6. But also see Le Bras, *Institutions ecclésiastiques*; and Lynch, *Simoniacal Entry into Religious Life from 1000 to 1250* (Columbus, Ohio, 1976), 25–60. Lynch thought “oppression” stemmed mostly from the perceived and desired religious power of the monastic habit.

⁴² See Thomas Tentler, “Seventeen Authors in Search of Two Religious Cultures,” *Catholic Historical Review*, 71 (1985): 248–57. Tentler’s review here of *Faire Croire: Modalités de la diffusion et de la réception des messages religieux du XII^e au XV^e siècle*, Collection de l’école française de Rome, no. 51 (Rome, 1981), offers a good schematic survey of the issues. In the introduction to that volume, André Vauchez’s “Présentation” (pages 7–16) suggests, in a kind of reversal, that the new learning of a university-trained clergy after 1200 was responsible for dividing the religious culture.

⁴³ This is explicit throughout Le Goff’s *Time, Work, and Culture*. Also see, for instance, Georges Duby’s *Medieval Marriage: Two Models from Twelfth-Century France* (Baltimore, Md., 1978). Duby’s book contains a similar thesis of two competing cultures, primarily on the social rather than on the religious plane.

⁴⁴ *Exempla* were the essential sources for Schmitt’s *The Holy Greyhound*. See the joint introduction to this genre by Schmitt, Le Goff, and Bremond in *L'exemplum*. For a good orientation to the sources, see Jean-Claude Schmitt, “Recueils franciscains d'exempla et perfectionnement des techniques intellectuelles du XIII^e au XV^e siècles,” *Bibliothèque de l'école des chartes*, 135 (1977): 5–21. For references to more works, mostly on the literary aspects of the *exempla*, see Peter von Moos, “The Use of *exempla* in the *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury,” in M. Wilks, ed. *The World of John of Salisbury* (Oxford, 1984), 210–13.

⁴⁵ Inquisitorial records were the essential sources for Carlo Ginzburg’s *The Cheese and the Worms* and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie’s *Montaillou, village occitan de 1294 à 1324* (Paris, 1975). On Ladurie’s use

at odds with approved practice or orthodox doctrine. Because these materials originated or first abounded in the thirteenth century, Le Goff and Schmitt have renamed this “age of faith” a great “age of folklore.”⁴⁶ Most of these “folkloric” stories and accounts stemmed, however, from attempts at clerical instruction (*exempla*) or suppression (inquisition), which has clearly influenced the interpretation of Latin Christian culture as essentially “repressive.” Crucial to the argument of this school is the conviction that these stories, despite stereotyping, repetition, and elaboration, preserve a core of authentic experience and belief alien to the Christian establishment. However true that may be—and it is ultimately unverifiable except by using structural or comparative analysis—the impulse to compile exemplary stories and inquisitorial records originated with learned clerics, making these sources at best only a very indirect indicator of the strength and quality of popular folklore and a much better indicator of clerical zeal to deepen Christian faith and practice. Even Schmitt conceded that the uncovering of strange happenings in a remote village suggests a deep penetration of Christianity into the countryside.⁴⁷ Moreover, Alexander Murray, in a recent study of this same genre, found stories of plenty of people who struggled with moral and cultic questions pertinent to Christian practice but accounts of only one or two who stood altogether outside or against medieval Christendom.⁴⁸ Similarly, new studies using the sermon literature of the thirteenth century—a collection of documents that underwent enormous expansion then and within which *exempla* are merely a subcategory—have yielded much information on common practices and beliefs. Those texts reveal an outlook shared, more or less, between preacher and audience, even when the audience—not so surprisingly—might sometimes have appeared terribly sinful or even maddeningly indifferent.⁴⁹

These sources comprise a relatively meager harvest of materials. From them historians can produce a separate religious culture only by inferring from selected stories—admittedly, with striking parallels to Indo-European folklore—a supposed majority culture and by assuming that this culture remained essentially unchanged from prehistoric times to the late Middle Ages and beyond. This is no less dogmatic and ahistorical in its interpretive approach than the neo-Scholastic Catholic who inferred from Bernard or Thomas a thriving Christian culture across the whole sweep of the Middle Ages. But this assumption of two cultures, including

of sources, see Leonard Boyle, “Montaillou Revisited: ‘Mentalité’ and Methodology,” in J. A. Raftis, ed., *Pathways to Medieval Peasants* (Toronto, 1981), 119–40.

⁴⁶ Jacques Le Goff and Jean-Claude Schmitt, “Au XIII^e siècle: Une parole nouvelle,” in Delumeau, *Histoire vécue*, 271–75. Essays by Pierre Riché, C. M. de la Roncière, Alexandre Geystor, and François Rapp, each with references to additional works, also recognize, but in a more balanced way, a folk religion; *ibid.*, 195–221, 281–314, 315–34, 335–64.

⁴⁷ Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound*, 177. In the *L'exemplum*, Schmitt spoke, with greater nuance, of an effort to “reinforce the process of Christianization”; *L'exemplum*, 102–03.

⁴⁸ Alexander Murray, “Confession as a Historical Source in the Thirteenth Century,” in Davis and Wallace-Hadrill, *The Writing of History*, 275–322.

⁴⁹ Alexander Murray, “Piety and Impiety in Thirteenth-Century Italy,” in G. Cumming and D. Baker, eds., *Popular Belief and Practice* (Cambridge, 1972), 83–107, and “Religion among the Poor in Thirteenth-Century France: The Testimony of Humbert of Romans,” *Traditio*, 30 (1974): 285–324; and, especially, D. L. D'Avray, *The Preaching of the Friars: Sermons Diffused from Paris before 1300* (Oxford, 1985).

a silent majority largely untouched by society's religious leaders for nearly a thousand years, has not gone unchallenged. Recent studies of the cults of the saints and relics—the point of origin for many studies of popular religion—have rejected any such notion of a dual or bilevel religious culture. Gregory the Great wrote his *Dialogues* to instruct and please Roman aristocrats, not just to pander to peasants; Gregory of Tours described peasants and bishops alike attempting to gain access to the holy power of relics; and Carolingian reliquary shrines attracted the veneration of learned monks and bishops as well as lords and peasants.⁵⁰ There certainly was much more to medieval religious culture than a naive reading of the prescriptive sources might suggest, but medieval Christianity is better conceived as comprised of complex and diverse elements spread across a very wide but more or less continuous spectrum. The burden of proof still lies with those who argue for two radically different religious cultures. For they must then also demonstrate—and not just assume—a disjunction between popular practice and ecclesiastical institutions, between “low” and “high” culture, so great and so absolute as to exclude any appreciation of mutual influence, thus driving a very deep and quite improbable wedge between religious mentalities and religious institutions. Yet this thesis has probably done more than anything else in the last two decades to make religious culture, encompassing all the people and all aspects of medieval society, central to medieval historiography.

AS HISTORIANS SUCCEEDED IN BRINGING religious life into the mainstream of medieval history, interpretations of medieval Christianity inevitably fell subject to the same forces or predispositions affecting historiography generally since the Second World War. The resultant impact on our conception of a “Christian Middle Ages” may be illustrated in three general tendencies or emphases.

First, historical study has become particularized and localized. Only forty years ago a French author could begin a book on the “medieval Christian empire” containing the declaration that medieval Christendom offered a “stable climate,” a “unified whole (*bloc*)” within which “medieval men lived and moved.” An Italian author of the same era referred to a “Holy Roman Republic” that included a “universalism of church and empire, of Romanism and Christianity [that] excluded any possibility of civilized life outside itself.” Only a generation later such views seem illusory. This thousand-year stretch of history produced a variety of Christian ideals and societies or, if one prefers, of “Christendoms.”⁵¹ Such

⁵⁰ Adalbert de Vogüé, *Grégoire Le Grand, Dialogues*, Sources chrétiennes, no. 251 (Paris, 1978); Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, 1981); and J. Hubert and M.-C. Hubert, “Piété chrétienne ou paganisme? Les statues-reliquaires de l’Europe carolingienne,” in *Cristianizzazione ed organizzazione ecclesiastica delle campagne nell’alto medioevo: Espansione e resistenze* (Spoleto, 1982), 235–68. For Brown’s own change of outlook, see his “The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity,” *Representations*, 1.2 (1983): 1–25.

⁵¹ Henri Brémond, *L’empire chrétien et ses destinées en occident du XI^e au XII^e siècles* (Paris, 1944), 10–22; and Giovanni Falco, *The Holy Roman Republic: A Historic Profile of the Middle Ages*, trans. K. Virginia Kent (New York, 1964), 22. By way of contrast, see Delumeau, “Au sujet de la déchristianisation,” 56. Similarly, in secular history, Georges Duby’s inaugural lecture at the Collège de France spoke of “des

particularization, altogether expected in regional studies, has also begun to affect our understanding of broader subjects, in particular, Christian religious organization and culture. Scholars have shown, for instance, that “territorial” churches, “episcopal” in structure and with distinct traditions in law, liturgy, and devotional practice, predominated at least to 1050, and in the later Middle Ages “national” churches emerged strengthened from the crisis of the Great Schism. Indeed, one scholar said that interventions from Rome and enhanced papal authority during the Gregorian Reform “ruined” the church in the province of Narbonne.⁵² In monastic history, too, the “Benedictine centuries” and “Cluniac reform” have dissolved into a variety of competing Benedictine enterprises,⁵³ which has resulted in a new perspective on the innovative Cistercian effort to reform by centralization and institutionalization. In philosophy, scholars over the last generation have rediscovered the influence of Platonic thought as well as the importance of differing receptions of Aristotle; in theology, many different schools of thought, usually linked to particular universities or religious orders, have replaced any vague notion of a single or continuous “Scholastic” tradition.⁵⁴ Even the Christian ideal itself, as represented by its saints, has been shown to differ widely in space (north and south of the Alps) and in time (eighth-century Aquitaine versus thirteenth-century Lombardy).⁵⁵ In sum, few medieval historians speak with any confidence of some common ideal animating all of medieval Christianity irrespective of particular places, times, schools, orders, and authors.

sociétés médiévales,” not “la société médiévale.” The lecture was reprinted as “Les sociétés médiévales: Une approche d'ensemble,” in his *Hommes et structures du moyen âge* (Paris, 1973), 361–79.

⁵² The early medieval “episcopal” church has been much studied since the Second World War but was first explicated by Theodor Schieffer. See Schieffer, “La chiesa nazionale di osservanza romana,” in *Le chiese nei regni dell'Europa occidentale e i loro rapporti con Roma sino all'800* (Spoleto, 1960), 73–94. Also see Fredrich Kempf, “Chiesa territoriale e chiesa romana nel secolo VIII,” in *I problemi dell'occidente nel secolo VIII* (Spoleto, 1973), 293–317; and Horst Fuhrmann, “Das Papsttum und das kirchliche Leben im Frankreich,” in *Nascità dell'Europa ed Europa carolingia: Un'equazione da verificare* (Spoleto, 1981), 419–56. For surveys of the late medieval church, see J. A. F. Thomson, *Popes and Princes, 1417–1517: Politics and Polity in the Late Medieval Church* (London, 1980); Francis Oakley, *The Late Medieval Church* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1979), 23–79. On the church in Narbonne, see Elizabeth Magnou-Nortier, *La société laïque et l'église dans la province ecclésiastique de Narbonne de la fin du VIII^e à la fin du XI^e siècle* (Toulouse, 1974).

⁵³ See Kassius Hallinger, *Goze-Kluny*, *Studia Anselmiana*, nos. 22–25 (Rome, 1950–51). For an appreciation of Hallinger and a discussion of the context of his work, see Giles Constable, “The Study of Monastic History Today,” in Constable, *Religious Life and Thought (11th–12th c.)* (London, 1979), chap. 1.

⁵⁴ On Platonism, see the work of Stephen Gersh, for instance, his *From Iamblichus to Eriugena* (Leiden, 1978). For a pioneering essay, see M.-D. Chenu, “The Platonisms of the Twelfth Century,” in his *Nature, Man, and Society*, 49–68. On Aristotelianism, see Ferdinand van Steenberghen, *La philosophie aux XIII^e siècle* (Louvain, 1966), together with the essays and bibliography in the *Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*. On theology, see, for instance, Heiko Oberman, “Fourteenth-Century Religious Thought: A Premature Profile,” *Speculum*, 53 (1978): 80–93; William Courtenay, *Covenant and Causality in Medieval Thought* (London, 1984); and J. I. Catto, “Theology and Theologians, 1220–1320,” in Catto, *The History of the University of Oxford*, vol. 1, pp. 471–517.

⁵⁵ Among many works, see Wilson, *Saints and Their Cults*, esp. 309–417; Joseph-Claude Poulin, *L'idéal de sainteté dans l'Acquitaine carolingienne d'après les sources hagiographiques, 750–950* (Quebec, 1975); André Vauchez, *La sainteté en occident aux derniers siècles du moyen âge* (Rome, 1981); Michael Goodich, *Vita perfecta: The Ideal of Sainthood in the Thirteenth Century* (Stuttgart, 1982); and Donald Weinstein and Rudolph Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christianity, 1000–1700* (Chicago, 1982).

Second, widespread enthusiasm for sociological interpretations of historical phenomena has also had its impact on our comprehension of medieval religious life. Vague talk about the “spirit,” “genius,” or underlying “faith” of medieval Christendom has given way to depictions of a church that functioned virtually as a “state” with a strong sense of its own socioeconomic and political interests, of religious houses that acted as major socioeconomic forces in their regions, and of a papacy seated firmly in its social setting in Rome. From one of Robert Brentano’s studies, one could easily conclude that the thirteenth-century church’s most important figure was not a pope, theologian, or mystic but the proctor, the facilitator of endless routine business.⁵⁶ A series of contrasts may help make plain the dimensions of this historiographical shift. Where Hippolyte Delehaye attempted to place medieval hagiography in a larger spiritual and literary tradition, Vauchez and many others have concentrated on its social outlook and setting.⁵⁷ Where Walter Ullmann ascribed the papacy’s ascendancy to its inherent legal and theological principles, Jeffrey Richards, Jane Sayers, and many others have traced the rise of papal authority to sociopolitical and administrative developments in Rome and the curia.⁵⁸ Where Grundmann ascribed the twelfth-century religious revival to a quest for the apostolic ideal, a whole generation of scholars has focused on varying reactions to the so-called Commercial Revolution, whence the reformers’ troubled fascination with religious poverty.⁵⁹ Where Grundmann again ascribed the rise of universities to a quest for learning, Southern, Peter Classen, and John Baldwin, hardly social determinists, have stressed the function of university men in society and the development of a new “learned elite” (*Bildungsstand*).⁶⁰ And where an earlier generation of historians of theology was endlessly fascinated with uncovering the intellectual roots of Scholasticism, more recent scholars have taken up such “social” questions as the sacramentality of

⁵⁶ Southern, *Western Society and the Church*, 15–23; Pamela Johnson, *Prayer, Patronage, and Power: The Abbey of La Trinité, Vendôme, 1032–1187* (New York, 1981); Jeffrey Richards, *The Popes and the Papacy in the Early Middle Ages, 476–752* (London, 1979); and Brentano, *Rome before Avignon: A Social History of Thirteenth-Century Rome* (New York, 1974), *Two Churches: England and Italy in the Thirteenth Century* (Princeton, N.J., 1968).

⁵⁷ Delehaye, *Sanctus: Essai sur le culte des saints dans l'antiquité* (Brussels, 1927); and Baudouin de Gaiffier, *Recherches d'hagiographie latine* (Brussels, 1971). And, for a work still mainly literary and religious in approach, see Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu* (Chicago, 1984). Important examples of works that follow the sociological approach are listed in note 55, above.

⁵⁸ Walter Ullmann, *The Growth of Papal Government in the Middle Ages: A Study in the Ideological Relations of Clerical to Lay Power* (London, 1955). Also see Francis Oakley, “Celestial Hierarchies Revisited: Walter Ullmann’s Vision of Medieval Politics,” *Past and Present*, 60 (1973): 3–48; and Friedrich Kempf, “Die päpstliche Gewalt in der mittelalterlichen Welt: Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Walter Ullmann,” *Miscellanea Historiae Pontificiae*, 21 (1959): 117–69. Compare Richards, *The Popes and the Papacy*; Jane Sayers, *Papal Government and England during the Pontificate of Honorius III (1216–27)* (Cambridge, 1984); and Cheney, *Innocent III and England*.

⁵⁹ For a summary of many works, see Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1978); and Lester K. Little and Barbara Rosenwein, “Social Meaning in the Monastic and Mendicant Spiritualities,” *Past and Present*, 63 (1974): 4–32.

⁶⁰ Herbert Grundmann, “Vom Ursprung der Universität,” in *Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, 3: 292–342. Contrast Peter Classen, *Studium und Gesellschaft*, ed. J. Fried, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Schriften*, no. 29 (Stuttgart, 1983); John Baldwin, “Masters at Paris from 1179 to 1215: A Social Perspective,” in Benson *et al.*, *Renaissance and Renewal*, 138–72; and Southern, “The Schools of Paris and the School of Chartres,” and “From Schools to University.”

marriage and such “practical” matters as the development of pastoral care.⁶¹ All this is not even to discuss a host of studies on the social composition of individual religious houses, dioceses, and so on—for example, recent attempts to apply the modern sociological concept of “anomie” to the conditions in which Cluny arose or to move beyond the theoretical dimensions of the Franciscan dispute over the issue of poverty by analyzing the actual wealth and social position of one city’s mendicant houses.⁶² Indeed, scholars are now using religious data to draw social inferences: the existence of a “city” from its mendicant foundations, familial and social relationships from hagiographical accounts, social “mentalities” from shifting attitudes toward Beguines and Beghards, and even a “sociological” interpretation of the mass.⁶³

The third general trend in recent historiography is its dramatic shift downward. For studies of medieval religious life, this means the examination of “popular religion” now threatens to eclipse work on popes, theologians, and bishops.⁶⁴ The impact of this shift is most evident in the themes chosen for research. Doctrinal disputes and papal policies have given way to relics, the cult of the saints, pilgrimages, miracles, purgatory, and the like. Even Rosalind Brooke and Christopher Brooke, moderate scholars on this question, judged that it was appropriate to begin their recent work with relics, pilgrimages, and the cult of the saints before concluding with the sacraments and teachings of Scripture.⁶⁵ Only thirty-five years ago, Christopher Dawson in his Gifford lectures found true Christianity much more deeply rooted among the people than among a corrupt clerical elite.⁶⁶ Today, on the other extreme, there is a curious and quite unjustified tendency, as in LeRoy Ladurie’s *Montaillou*, to identify the “popular” with the

⁶¹ Hans Zeimentz, *Ehe nach der Frühscholastik* (Dusseldorf, 1973); and Leonard Boyle, *Pastoral Care, Clerical Education, and Canon Law, 1200–1400* (London, 1981), and “*Summae confessorum*,” in *Les genres littéraires dans les sources théologiques et philosophiques médiévales* (Louvain, 1982), 227–37.

⁶² Barbara Rosenwein, *Rhinoceros Bound: Cluny in the Tenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1982); and B. Neidiger, *Mendikanten zwischen Ordensideal und städtischer Realität: Untersuchungen zum wirtschaftlichen Verhalten der Bettelorden in Basel* (Berlin, 1981).

⁶³ Jacques Le Goff, “Apostolat mendiant et fait urbain dans la France médiévale: L’implantation des ordres mendiants,” and “Ordres mendiants et urbanisation dans la France médiévale: Etat de l’inquête,” *Annales, économies, sociétés, civilisation*, 23 (1968): 335–52, and 25 (1970): 924–46; John Freed, *The Friars and German Society* (Cambridge, Mass., 1977); Bell and Weinstein, *Saints and Society*; Schmitt, *Mort d’une hérésie*; and John Bossy, “Essai de sociographie de la messe,” *Annales, économies, sociétés, civilisation*, 36 (1981): 44–70. For a review of Schmitt’s *Mort d’une hérésie* by Robert Lerner and one by Lawrence Duggan, see, respectively, *Speculum*, 54 (1979): 842–44 and *AHR*, 84 (1979): 1034–35.

⁶⁴ For orientation to a vast number of new works, see Manselli, *Religion populaire*; Rapp, “Reflexions sur la religion populaire;” and Natalie Davis, “Some Tasks and Themes in the History of Popular Religion,” in Charles Trinkaus and Heiko Oberman, eds., *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion* (Leiden, 1974), 307–36.

⁶⁵ Jonathon Sumption, *Pilgrimage: An Image of Medieval Religion* (Totowa, N.J., 1976); Barbara Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind* (Philadelphia, 1982); and Brooke and Brooke, *Popular Religion in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1983).

⁶⁶ Christopher Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture* (London, 1950), 219: “And [Langland’s] poem seems to prove that the fundamental principles of the creative period of medieval religion had been more completely assimilated and incorporated by the new vernacular culture of the common people than it had been by the higher and more literary culture of the ruling elements in Church and state.” This is virtually the exact opposite of the views fashionable today. But Dawson also recognized that “the early centuries of the Middle Ages saw the rise of a new Christian mythology [meaning, the legends of the saints]” and that “it was inevitable that the Christian ascetic and saint should acquire some of the features of the pagan shaman and demigod”; *ibid.*, 34.

“outlandish” or the “extraordinary.” Studies of a “routine” religious life at lower social levels that was neither learned nor extraordinary nor a vehicle of protest are just beginning to make their appearance. Yet what some of the first of these revealed of ignorant superstition and indifferent sacramental practice probably did more than anything else to tarnish the old Romantic image of medieval Christianity. One recent study, on the other hand, based on wills and combining all these new emphases on the local, the social, and the popular, discloses a vigorous Christian practice shared by both clerics and laity in late medieval Norwich and argues that the Reformation was built there on strength rather than on failure.⁶⁷ While the inclusion of new approaches to medieval Christianity has certainly done much to undermine the image of it created by reading the accomplished texts of monks and mendicants, the eventual integration of this material will actually deepen our understanding of the way in which religious teachings and institutions shaped ordinary lives, and ordinary lives in turn those teachings and institutions.

A brief word should be said about the way in which the introduction of religious life into the mainstream of medieval historical inquiry has intersected with traditional confessional considerations. A topic such as medieval Christianity has inevitably—and quite understandably—attracted many historians with distinct confessional interests. Change over the last generation or so within the Christian church has had a noticeable affect on the study of medieval Christianity. The rapprochement between Catholics and Protestants broadly called “ecumenism” has not altogether blurred their differing perspectives, but it has decreased the tendency to adopt interpretations derived more from religious affiliation than from historical inquiry. Protestant as well as Jewish and agnostic historians now approach medieval religious life far more sympathetically, and Catholic historians in turn far more critically, than was conceivable in the past. At times inherited roles and outlooks have been virtually reversed. Plainly put, medieval Christianity is no longer an overwhelmingly “Catholic” subject attracting mainly “Catholic” scholars.

Great changes have come within the Roman Catholic Church where traditionally the largest number of medieval religious historians have been found. These Catholic scholars, perceptibly caught up in all the issues that arose from the Second Vatican Council, have done as much as any other group to change our understanding of medieval Christianity. At the risk of oversimplifying, three tendencies seem most apparent. First, where an earlier generation saw medieval Christianity as a complete entity or as “development of doctrine,” recent scholars, led by Catholics such as Gerhart Ladner, have approached it as a series of reform movements, pointing up not only the centrality of reform both as an idea and an impulse but also, implicitly, the recurring need for reform. Second, where an earlier generation saw the medieval church as quintessentially papal, recent scholars, led by Catholics such as Brian Tierney, Francis Oakley, Congar, and

⁶⁷ Jocelyn Hillgarth, “Popular Religion in Visigothic Spain,” in E. James, ed., *Visigothic Spain: New Approaches* (Oxford, 1980), 3–60; Toussaert, *Sentiment religieux en Flandre*; and Norman P. Tanner, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich, 1370–1532*, Studies and Texts, no. 66, (Toronto, 1984). Also see François Rapp, *Réformes et Réformation à Strasbourg: Eglise et société dans la diocèse de Strasbourg, 1450–1525* (Paris, 1974).

many others, have discovered its conciliar dimension, predominant in practice in the early and late Middle Ages and vital in theory even during the strongest papal period. And, third, where an earlier generation located medieval Christianity's main intellectual achievement in a kind of philosophical theology, recent scholars, led by Catholics such as Smalley, Henri De Lubac, van Steenberghen, Stephen Kuttner, and Ullman, have sought that achievement in biblical theology, philosophical pluralism, and ecclesiastical jurisprudence. Add what I have said about Le Bras's emphasis on local practice, Delaruelle's on lay piety, and Manselli's on dissenting religions, and it is clear that Catholics themselves have radically redone the Ultramontane, neo-Scholastic image of medieval Christianity on which they were reared only a generation ago.

ALL IN ALL, TO PARAPHRASE A LINE from Lynn White, Jr., one of my teachers, medieval Christianity is not what it used to be. This is less the result of new findings (important as they are) than of new questions. In an age frequently labeled "post-Christian," in which secular governments must spend large sums of money to preserve "redundant" churches as museum pieces, scholars and other people alike have begun to wonder how the European countryside ever came to be dotted with so many churches, how clerics came to be counted as the "first order" in society, and how culture came to be shaped and censored by religious norms. Was this not all imposed by an ambitious "clerical elite"? Is not secularization or "de-Christianization" simply a return to the views most people have always held? Were not most medieval folk far less caught up in Christian culture than has been assumed? In their boldness and bluntness, these questions can seem almost rhetorical. So much older work on medieval culture then suddenly seems beside the point, particularly if scholars are prepared to dismiss that culture as the product and outlook only of a minuscule elite. The question, in the jargon of our day, is the extent of the "Christianization" of medieval society, that is, the degree to which specifically Christian teachings and practices shaped the cultural milieu of medieval folk both high and low.⁶⁸ It is a question fundamental to the interpretation of European medieval culture.

Long before the Restoration Romantics, most Europeans took for granted the formative influence of Judeo-Christian religion in the shaping of European culture. And Le Goff, building on the work of Michelet, emphatically declared the medieval epoch crucial to the formation of a distinctive European civilization—mentioning every area except religion. What is needed, then, is a way of getting at the truth about medieval religious life and of stating the reality of its imprint and legacy without falling prey to either extreme, a mythical golden age of Catholic Christianity or an equally mythical millennium of Indo-European folk religion. Scholars must recognize, as reflective medieval folk did, that medieval religious life included a constant struggle to establish or renew Christian religious culture in the

⁶⁸ "Christianization" has become something of a catchword now, and it would be futile to list all the books that refer to it. But see, for instance, Jean Delumeau, *Un chemin d'histoire: Chrétienté et déchristianisation* (Paris, 1981); *Cristianizzazione ed organizzazione*; and Ramsey MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100–400)* (New Haven, Conn., 1984).

face of various other religious practices, some derived from what Powicke described as the “paganism of the natural man,” some of more ancient heritage, as Le Goff and Schmitt would rightly insist. Some of these practices and outlooks were rejected outright, others absorbed, even “baptized.” The struggle was a real one and did not end, as older interpretations sometimes imply, with the official conversion of a people.⁶⁹ Medieval folk understood well enough that they did not live in a golden age of Christian religious life, though they constantly invoked Christian norms and practices as the ideal toward which they strove. Indeed, medieval churchmen acted so forcefully at times to repress dissent and superstition precisely because they understood just how tenuous Christianity’s hold was and believed people’s eternal fate truly hung in the balance (to borrow an image common on sculpted church fronts).

No single short essay could hope to survey all the recent work or even the basic problems pertinent to the question of Christianization, for in one sense it touches on nearly all aspects of medieval cultural history and much institutional history as well. The question is in fact much too broad, much too ill defined, and as such it will never receive a satisfying answer. The question must be brought into sharper focus, and what can be done in a brief essay is to direct attention toward six key issues or problems that bear scrutiny. But, first, two caveats.

Apart from the Indo-European folkloric tales accentuated by Le Goff, Schmitt, and others, most of the evidence for a failure of Christianization in the medieval period has come from accounts of incompetent clerics, ignorant peasants, superstitious women, infrequent communion, and the like.⁷⁰ Destructive as these accounts may be to the image of a “golden age” of medieval Christendom, they hardly prove that medieval culture was “non-Christian.” To offer a simplistic counterexample, the fact that in the past election many Americans had only a superficial understanding of the issues and that barely half of them voted hardly proves that half of American voters are “monarchists” or “anarchists.” Medieval Christian culture in fact saw and attempted to explain such lapses: increased demonic attacks on the advancing kingdom of the saints, the sinfulness of mankind, the differing levels of devotion expected of saints, clergy, and laymen, and so on. Moreover, that a record of such lapses exists is the result at least as much of intensified efforts at reform as of laments over failure. Whether similar evidence points up failure or efforts at reform has too often been a largely subjective matter. But historians should not discount the reality and actual degree of failure or the evidence of outright rejection. We must take seriously numerous reports of non-Christian practices, of peasants returning to older charms in moments of crisis, of princes and clerics tempted to join the Muslim or especially the Jewish faith, of scholars attracted by another vision of cosmology and causation. No doubt these phenomena received too little attention in the past. But to concentrate on

⁶⁹ Le Goff, *Time, Work, and Culture*, x–xi; and Powicke, *Christian Life*, 8: “The history of the Church is the record of the gradual and mutual adaptation of Christianity and paganism to each other. The complete victory of the former has always been a remote vision.”

⁷⁰ See Toussaert, *Sentiment Religieux en Flandre*; Adam, *Vie paroissiale*; Murray, “Piety and Impiety”; and Delumeau, *Le Catholicisme*.

them alone risks error as well by overlooking the larger cultural context in which clerics saw fit to record these instances as part of their continuing effort to instill Christian practices.

Second, if the new critics of a golden age of medieval Christendom have made some unwary assumptions in their use of evidence, so too have both old and new proponents of a Christian Middle Ages in their sense of Christianity's chronological advance. The basic scheme—more often assumed than stated or argued—rests on a vague sense of evolutionary development—so frequently applied in the nineteenth century to social, political, and religious events. The process of Christianization was conceived as beginning after the collapse of the Roman empire with the mass baptism of Germanic, Celtic, and Slavic peoples whose grasp of Christian doctrine and practice must have been embryonic at best. The process then advanced to an effective implanting of Christianity during the Carolingian era (and about the year 1000 on the northern and eastern peripheries of Europe), a first real “taking root” in the period of the reform movements (1050–1150), and a flowering from the time of Francis (d. 1226) and Lateran Council IV (1215), followed at some point in the fourteenth century by decay or, in the image projected by Johan Huizinga's famous book, a kind of “autumnal over-ripeness.” A newer scheme, which attempts to include religious culture within the interpretive schemes of social history favored by the *Annales* and related schools, accepts the first three stages with some reserve, then puts the real turning point in the process of Christianization in the later twelfth century, followed by relative continuity in religious practice until much later in the history of “Old Europe” or the *ancien régime*. Neither scheme adequately takes account of great regional and cultural variations over a period of one thousand years. The point here is not to reject these schemes as wholly false or to repudiate all such schemes but to register a warning about the arbitrariness of their imposition. The word “Christianization” suggests an unfolding process, and it is all too tempting to fill in the stages of development from too little evidence or to fix the temporal boundaries of each stage. Historians must accept that there were periods of sporadic change, when a pattern of advance or regression is not perceptible, periods of discernible change whether for good or ill, and periods of relative stability, without the whole necessarily fitting into a continuing, evolutionary process.

There follow, then, six observations on Christianization, understood as an object of historical study and as an essential part of the medieval cultural legacy. First, an examination of the word and the concept. Unlike so many historical labels, such as feudalism, “Christendom” (*Christianitas*) was a term medieval writers applied to themselves and their civilization. What they understood by it has received too little attention. Manselli ascribed the origin of the concept and the term to a self-conscious, defensive reaction to Islam. Most other scholars have focused their attention primarily upon uses of the term in reference to ecclesiastical polity, that is, Christendom as a universal society of believers subject to the vicar of Christ in Rome, with all that implies for the relations of “Christians” to kings and of

“Christian kings” to popes.⁷¹ Both ideas represent one part of the truth, but there is another more basic meaning that is especially pertinent here and found as well in vernacular texts.

King Edmund’s *Code*, issued in the 940s, enjoined tithes on “every Christian man by reason of his Christianity” (aelcun Christene men be his Cristendome), and in the prologue to his second code King Edmund spoke of taking council with people both high and low on how best to cultivate Christianity in his kingdom (hu ic maekte Cristendomes maest araeran). Laws from the early eleventh century, probably written by the cleric Wulfstan, spoke of “violating one’s Christianity [*Cristendom*] or honoring heathendom [*haethendom*] in word or deed.” And Ethelred began his law code with a common pledge to love God, to hold zealously to a single Christianity (*aenne Cristendom*), to cast off all paganism (*aelcne haethendome*), and to hold to one Christianity under one kingship (thaet we under anum cyndome aenne Cristendom healdan willath). A Latin version of Ethelred’s code, containing various nuances and amplifications, speaks of “Christ-worshippers [*Christicolorum*],” the “observance of the Catholic religion” (catholice cultu religionis), and a “Christian religious practice [*cultu religionis Christianae*] wholly free of superstition”—all synonyms, it seems, for *Christianitas*.⁷²

The meaning of *Christianitas* in the vernacular is clear enough from these texts: a common religious observance (*cultus*) overseen and enforced by the king together with his lords and bishops. Observance began with baptism, the simplest meaning of *Christianitas*, as in the English word “christening.” This society of the baptized could assume a vague territorial sense—quite apart from the threat of Islam—as when anyone who dared marry a nun was declared “an outlaw before God, banned from ‘Christendom,’ and forfeit of his properties.”⁷³ But a “ban from Christendom” meant first of all a ban from the sacraments, the heart of religious practice, for in Latin the term *Christianitas* covered all the sacramental and liturgical ministrations suspended by an interdict. Thus, one English chronicler could laconically report that, “on the order of the pope, Christianity was prohibited.” Scholastic theologians did not lose sight of the most basic meaning of *Christianitas*. Albertus Magnus declared a Christian “perfect [or complete] whose Christianity sufficed for salvation” (perfectus Christianus est, cui Christianitas sufficit ad salutem),⁷⁴ by which he meant a person whose faith and practice, liturgical and moral, sufficed for salvation. *Christianitas* could also be a term for

⁷¹ Raoul Manselli, “La *respublica christiana* e l’Islam,” in *L’Occidente e l’Islam nell’alto medioevo* (Spoleto, 1965), 115–47, and “Christianitas,” in *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, vol. 2, 1915–16. For interpretations focusing on ecclesiastical polity, see Jean Rupp, *L’idée de la chrétienté dans la pensée pontificale des origines à Innocent III* (Paris, 1939); Gerhart Ladner, “The Concepts of ‘Ecclesia’ and ‘Christianitas’ and Their Relation to the Idea of Papal ‘Plenitudo potestatis’ from Gregory VII to Boniface VIII,” in *Sacerdotio e regno da Gregorio VII a Bonifacio VIII* (Rome, 1954), 49–77; Jan van Laarhoven, “‘Christianitas’ et réforme grégorienne,” *Studi Gregoriani*, 6 (1959/1961): 1–98; and Friederich Kempf, “Das Problem der Christianitas im 12.-13. Jahrhundert,” *Historisches Jahrbuch*, 79 (1960): 104–23.

⁷² Dorothy Whitelock *et al.*, *Councils and Synods* (Oxford, 1981), 1: 62, 65, 305, 344, 362–63. Whitelock normally translated *Cristendom* as “Christian faith,” which seems partly to miss the element of observance and practice that was actually so basic.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 440.

⁷⁴ “Quibus iussu papae . . . christianitas prohibita est.” *Annales Waverly*, ed. H. R. Luard, Rolls series, vol. 36.2, p. 229. Albertus *De sacramentis* 65, in *Opera Omnia*, vol. 26, pp. 45, 52. For more examples,

such a person (*vestra christianitas*) both in Latin and in the vernacular. In French epic literature, *Christientet* was probably used most often to distinguish Christians from Saracens, but what underlay that distinction was an evident set of beliefs and especially practices. Dante had *cristianesimo* rhyme once with *battesmo* and *battesmo* rhyme twice with *paganesmo*, establishing the same verbal and conceptual associations.⁷⁵ In its most basic sense, then, the word *Christianitas* referred neither to an ecclesiastical polity nor to the opponents of Islam but to the religious faith and practice that medieval men entirely presupposed when elaborating their political policies and philosophical propositions. Or, as one of the earliest Dutch-Latin lexicons put it at the end of the Middle Ages (ca. 1480), “*Christianitas* is the rite and/or property [ritus vel proprietas] by which people are called Christian.”⁷⁶

This meaning also had an institutional manifestation—and not just in the sense of “all Christendom” or the whole society of believers in Europe. From the mid-ninth century, bishops appointed rural deans to oversee country pastors and their ministrations; especially after the later twelfth century, these deans came to be called “deans of *Christianitas*,” their districts sometimes simply *Christianitates*, their courts “court Christian,” and their meetings or rulings a “council [*concilium*] of *Christianitas*.”⁷⁷ Such deans of Christianity had responsibility precisely for the way in which country priests carried out all the duties and rites essential to the maintenance of *Christianitas*, thereby insuring the Christian character of the people. The extant sources pertinent to these deans and the religious culture they supervised are few, partly because of the odds against preserving such local archival records and partly because much of the deans’ supervision must have taken place in ways never committed to writing.⁷⁸ But the point still stands: the figure, beyond the local priest himself, with responsibility for religious culture in the countryside was called the “dean of *Christianitas*.” “Christendom” was the term medieval folk at every level used to identify their religious culture.

Second, Christianization therefore required, in cultural terms, the putting in place of the means to structure Christian profession and practice, that is, the rituals

see the *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* (London, 1981), vol. 2, p. 333; and *Mittellateinisches Wörterbuch* (Munich, 1971), vol. 2, pp. 554–55.

⁷⁵ *The Song of Roland*, ll. 431, 3164, 3980; and *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française* (Paris, 1938), vol. 2, pp. 130–31. Dante *Inferno* 4.37, *Paradiso* 24.106, *Purgatorio* 22.91, and *Paradiso* 20.125. My thanks to Christopher Kleinhenz of the University of Wisconsin for calling Dante’s passages to my attention.

⁷⁶ *Conflatus vocabularum*, cited in the *Lexicon Latinitatis Nederlandicae mediæ ævi* (Leiden, 1981), vol. 2, p. 1186.

⁷⁷ See Paul Hinschius, *Das Kirchenrecht der Katholiken und Protestanten in Deutschland* (1878; reprint edn., Graz, 1959), vol. 2, pp. 269–77. For older works, see Hans E. Feine, *Kirchliche Rechtsgeschichte: Die katholische Kirche* (5th edn., Cologne, 1972), 201, 203–04, 427–28. Compare Paul R. Hyams, “Deans and Their Doings: The Norwich Inquiry of 1286,” in Stephen Kuttner and Kenneth Pennington, eds., *Proceedings of the Sixth International Congress of Medieval Canon Law* (Vatican City, 1985), 619–46. The vocabulary can be followed through the standard medieval Latin dictionaries, such as those mentioned in notes 74 and 76, above.

⁷⁸ For a summary of the pertinent Carolingian legislation, see Regino of Prüm *De synodalibus causis et disciplinis ecclesiasticis*. One interesting set of records from the fourteenth century and the diocese of Liège has been published; “Droit coutumier du Concile de Bastogne,” *Annales de L’Institut Archéologique du Luxembourg*, 58 (1927): 16–26. Also see Hyams, “Deans and Their Doings”; and Jean Burcklé, *Les chapitres ruraux des anciens évêchés de Strasbourg et de Bâle* (Colmar, 1935).

and institutions deans and priests supervised.⁷⁹ The official christening of a king or people hardly produced deep faith or organized practice overnight; in anthropological terms, it did not in itself transform a customary culture. Two Spoleto conferences (often good barometers of historical interests), less than fifteen years apart, nicely addressed this shift in historiographical perception. The first dealt with the conversion to Christianity in Europe; the second was entitled “Christianization and Ecclesiastical Organization of the Countryside: Advances and Resistance,” thereby getting at what was actually required for “conversion of Europe.”⁸⁰

In the early Middle Ages, observance of Christian ritual and practice normally preceded local institutional organization, often by generations. Until the year 1000, it remained common for people simply to assemble from time to time around a cross. But eventually and at varying times throughout Europe, the parish church emerged as the seat of ritual and practice. Recently, scholars have begun to place great emphasis on the parish as one of the fundamental institutions of medieval and Old Europe, but these studies have also demonstrated its relatively slow and late formation. Basic parish organization was not complete until the eleventh or twelfth century, even in Italy, where Christianity first reached Europe, and parishes developed correspondingly later as Christianity moved toward the northern and eastern peripheries of Europe.⁸¹ Well into the eleventh century, “parish” (*parochium*) usually still meant “diocese,” and “priest” (*sacerdos*) meant the bishop. Most country parishes, by contrast, were formed at local initiative, that is, most grew slowly out of the needs or interests (spiritual as well as financial) of local communities and almost never from any hierarchical masterplan, although some churches certainly were established by force, for example, by Charlemagne’s Saxon campaigns. Local formation of parishes created the nearly insoluble problem of “private” or “proprietary” churches with a mixture of religious, political, and economic motives quite impossible to disentangle. A sense of territoriality increased only slowly and primarily as a result of Carolingian tithing legislation.⁸² But, in time, the way parishes developed locally across Europe had an enduring effect. The parish became the center of medieval village life.

⁷⁹ A simple description from a charter dated 1204 reads as follows: “Per sacerdotem eius capelle ibidem baptizentur parvuli, sepeliantur mortui, visitentur infirmi, introducuntur nupte, et cetera que ad christianitatem pertinent debite peragantur.” Klaas Heeringa, *Oorkondenboek van het Sticht Utrecht* (Utrecht, 1959), vol. 2, no. 568, p. 34.

⁸⁰ *La conversione al cristianesimo nell'Europa dell'alto medioevo* (Spoleto, 1967); and *Cristianizzazione ed organizzazione ecclesiastica*.

⁸¹ For orientation to this complex subject, see Jean Gaudemet, “La paroisse au moyen âge,” *Revue d'histoire de l'église de France*, 59 (1973): 5–21. For new recognition of the parish as a fundamental element of “Old Europe,” see Susan Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900–1300* (Oxford, 1984), 79–100; and Robert Fossier, *Enfance de l'Europe: Aspects économiques et sociaux* (Paris, 1982), 345–64. For newer work on parishes and religious life, see *Cristianizzazione ed organizzazione*; Cinzio Violante, “Pievi e parrocchie dalla fine del X all'inizio del XIII secolo,” in *Le istituzioni ecclesiastiche della “societas christiana” dei secoli XI–XII: Diocesi, pievi, parrocchie* (Milan, 1978), 643–799; and *Pievi e parrocchie in Italia nel basso medioevo (sec. XIII–XV)*, 2 vols. (Rome, 1984).

⁸² Josef Semmler, “Zehntgebot und Pfarrtermination in karolingischer Zeit,” in *Aus Kirche und Reich: Festschrift für Friedrich Kempf* (Sigmaringen, 1983), 33–44; Caroline Boyd, *Tithes and Parishes in Medieval Italy* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1952); and Jerzy Kloczowski, “Les paroisses en Bohême, en Hongrie et en Pologne (X^e–XIII^e siècle),” in *Le istituzioni ecclesiastiche*, 187–99. In Kloczowski’s article, the Polish word for church is linked to the Latin word *castellum*.

Anglo-Saxon, for instance, did not include a word for parish (“priest-shire” referred to the area of a priest’s rule or responsibility), but “parish” in Middle English, almost from the beginning and certainly by the thirteenth century, could refer indiscriminately to village and church.⁸³ So, too, in French, the local commune (in recent studies treated as the *encadrement* of the countryside and folk) was most commonly known before the Revolution as the “parish.” The village community found its identity in its “parish.”

At the heart of parish life were its rituals. Synodical statutes reveal not only the practices normative for Christian observance but also, by implication and sometimes explicitly, the transgressions of that norm. Visitation records disclose what matters bishops, archdeacons, and their associates thought most in need of correction. Liturgical sources, though much harder for historians to deal with, are equally important. The real measure of Christian religious culture on a broad scale must be the degree to which time, space, and ritual observances came to be defined and grasped essentially in terms of the Christian liturgical year. Carolingian legislation placed great emphasis on Sunday as a required day of rest, thus punctuating the “secular” week and drawing attention to religious obligations. After the year 1200 or so, and much earlier in some instances, ordinary legal and administrative documents were routinely dated in terms of the appropriate saints’ day or feast day. Of those rituals that touched each individual in the parish personally, the Christianization of birth and death seems to have proceeded rapidly in the ceremonies surrounding “christening” and “last rites.”⁸⁴ Marriage, however, was not brought literally into the church and before the altar until the end of the Middle Ages, though Christian guidelines began to transform that institution in the ninth century and its sacramentality was established in the twelfth. The result, typically, was an overlay of Christian and other notions of marriage, but to imagine wholly separate and distinct conceptions of marriage competing over centuries is an exaggeration.⁸⁵ Similarly, private confession, which originated in the monastery, only gradually became a ritual practiced in the country parish, a routine rather than an extraordinary event required annually of every Christian after 1215. In the High Middle Ages it became the chief means of personal religious formation, chiefly by examining each individual against a standardized list of vices and virtues; even Dominican preaching aimed ultimately at bringing souls to confession. Two of the most sophisticated and successful pastoral manuals

⁸³ See “parish” in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, 1933), vol. 7, p. 479.

⁸⁴ Jean Chelini, “La pratique dominicale des laïcs dans l’église franque sous le règne de Pépin,” *Revue d’histoire de l’église de France*, 42 (1956): 161–74. For general orientation, see Arnold Angenendt, “Die Liturgie und die Organisation des kirchlichen Lebens auf dem Lande,” in *Cristianizzazione ed organizzazione*, 169–226. On baptism and last rites, see, for instance, Arnold Angenendt, *Kaiserherrschaft und Königstaufe* (New York, 1984); and Damien Sicard, *La liturgie de la mort dans l’église latine des origines à la réforme carolingienne* (Munster, 1978).

⁸⁵ See J. B. Moulin and P. Mutembe, *Le rituel du mariage en France du XII^e au XVI^e siècle* (Paris, 1974); Suzanne Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister, 500–900* (Philadelphia, 1982); and Zeimentz, *Ehe*. Contrast Georges Duby, *The Knight, the Lady, and the Priest* (New York, 1983). There is, once again, a good Spoleto volume; *Il matrimonio nella società alto medioevo* (Spoleto, 1977). For a short, but balanced, essay, see Christopher Brooke, “Marriage and Society in the Central Middle Ages,” in B. Oathwaite, *Marriage and Society* (Baltimore, Md., 1983), 17–34.

to come out of the Middle Ages, those by William of Pagula and Guido of Montrocher, both appeared in the early fourteenth century, and both are divided into three books that treat, respectively, the creed, commandments, and vices and virtues, the sacraments with particular emphasis on the eucharist, and penance. To highlight this last point is therefore appropriate, though to argue whether penance aimed at “religious formation” or “social control” is somewhat beside the point. Confession and penance shaped Christian faith and practice in all spheres of life, from the more overtly “spiritual” to matters of business (usury) and sexuality.⁸⁶

However slowly and fitfully such ritual and juridical structures were put in place, they hold the key to the process of Christianization. The study of parochial organization, liturgy, confraternities, pastoralia, and so on will in time bring historians much closer to understanding “routine” religious life in the Middle Ages than the study of unusual instances, for example, of an isolated Cathar village, a holy dog, or an eccentric miller. Indeed, if the line of interpretation recently adopted by Bernd Moeller, Steven Ozment, Thomas Tentler, and other historians of the Reformation is correct, the problem by the late Middle Ages was of another order. The ecclesiastical culture and practices meant to Christianize the people, to shape their naming, marriage, formation, and burial, had so piled up as to become “burdensome,” even insupportable, hence, the appeal of Luther’s message of “liberty” for the Christian man.⁸⁷ This is not to argue that all medieval folk were deeply “Christianized” but only that the ecclesiastical and cultural mechanisms became, ironically, part of the problem.

Third, any study of religious culture must take religion seriously. Recent studies have made medieval religion important by treating it essentially in functionalist terms, setting out the ways in which religious culture dealt with human relations, illness, death, the fertility of fields and animals, and so on. Such an approach makes religion central and accessible without raising confessional issues. But it can easily become reductionist, thus ultimately unsatisfactory and even erroneous. Historians of religious culture must take “religious man” seriously, just as economic historians take “economic man,” or political historians “political man,” seriously.⁸⁸ Anything less will ultimately fail to do justice to the phenomena under investigation and, in particular, fail to account for the dynamic inherent in people acting on religious conviction.

⁸⁶ For the best approach to the enormous number of recent works, see Thomas Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, N.J., 1977); and Boyle, “*Summae confessorum*.” For a debate between Tentler and Boyle, see *Pursuit of the Holy*, 103–37. Also see Roberto Rusconi, “De la prédication à la confession: Transmission et contrôle des modèles de comportement au XIII^e siècle,” in *Faire Croire*, 67–85. On William of Pagula, see Leonard Boyle, “The *Oculus Sacerdotis* and Some Other Works of William of Pagula,” in his *Pastoral Care*, chap. 4. On Guido, see Louis Binz, *Vie religieuse et réforme ecclésiastique dans la diocèse de Genève pendant le Grand Schisme et la crise conciliaire (1378–1450)* (Geneva, 1973), 347–52.

⁸⁷ For a critical review of this interpretation, see Lawrence Duggan, “Fear and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation,” *Archiv für Reformations geschichte*, 75 (1981): 153–75.

⁸⁸ For a similar point, but with an emphasis slightly different from mine, see Richard C. Trexler, “Reverence and Profanity in the Study of Early Modern Religion,” in K. von Greyerz, ed., *Religion and Society in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1984), 245–69.

In medieval Christendom, religious culture rested ultimately on “faith” or “belief,” meaning professed assent to certain propositions as well as inner conviction. Those propositions were articulated in the Apostles’ Creed, or, as it was most commonly called in medieval Latin, “the articles of the faith,” and those articles were binding on all alike from peasant to pope. The first statutes prescribing the duties of priests, issued in the Carolingian era and then revived beginning in Paris shortly after 1200, more or less uniformly insisted that “all endowed with the name of Christian know the Lord’s Prayer and the Creed.”⁸⁹ Both the prayer and the creed were normally repeated at Sunday mass and by godparents at baptism; both were among the earliest texts translated into the vernacular languages. And such preaching as there was must have centered on them—together with the commandments, vices, and virtues—for they were given a basic exposition in nearly every known pastoral manual. So, too, nearly every inquisitorial proceeding began with some kind of question about adherence to the creed or “articles of the faith.”

But medieval religious culture was also capable of a radical disjunction between knowledge and belief. The standard textbook in theology, compiled in the mid-twelfth century, noted that “there are those in the church who are less able, who cannot identify or distinguish the articles of the Creed; yet they believe what is contained in the Creed, for they believe what they do not know [credunt enim quae ignorant].” Out of this distinction developed the doctrine of an “implicit faith” held by the many “simple folk” who intended to believe what the church believed.⁹⁰ Both the doctrine and its varying application were of central importance in medieval religious culture. The authorized law book (and textbook) of the medieval church, Pope Gregory IX’s Decretals of 1234, for example, begins with a profession of faith (taken from the first article of Lateran Council IV), thus making faith a matter of law. In an influential commentary, Pope Innocent IV (d. 1254) explained that all Christians were bound to believe that there is a God who rewards the good, and, implicitly, all Christians were bound to believe all the articles of faith held by the church. But priests charged with the cure of souls were to know the articles explicitly, though poor and unlearned minor clerics might also be dispensed from this.⁹¹ In medieval religious culture, the element of cognitive

⁸⁹ “Ut praebiteri praevideant ut omnes qui christiano censentur nomine orationem dominicam vel symbolum memoriter teneant,” ed. Emil Seckel, *Neues Archiv*, 29 (1904): 292. Also see Peter Brommer, ed., *Capitula episcoporum I*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica (1984); and “*Capitula episcoporum: Bemerkungen zu den bischöflichen Kapitularien*,” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 91 (1980): 207–36. For an excellent discussion of the whole genre, see “*Capitula Episcoporum*”: *Die bischöflichen Kapitularien des 9. und 10. Jahrhunderts*, Typologie des sources, no. 43 (Turnhout, 1985). For the early thirteenth century, compare the statutes from Paris: “Exhortentur populum semper presbyteri ad dicendam dominicam orationem et ‘Credo in Deum’ et ‘Salutationem Beate Virginis,’” ed. Odette Pontal, *Les statuts synodaux français du XIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1971), vol. 1, pp. xxv–lxxvii, 74. For a good example of the genre’s use to historians, see Joseph Avril, *Le gouvernement des évêques et la vie religieuse dans le diocèse d’Angers (1148–1240)*, 2 vols. (Paris, [1984]).

⁹⁰ Petrus Lombardus, *Sententiae*, Liber III, D. 25, c. 2 (3d edn., Grottaferrata, 1981), vol. 2, p. 155. Schmitt has recently given the doctrine of implicit faith more attention; “Du bon usage du *Credo*,” in *Faire Croire*, 337–61.

⁹¹ “De fide teneas quia quaedam est fidei mensura ad quam quilibet tenetur et quae sufficit simplicibus et forte etiam omnibus laicis, scilicet, quia oportet quemlibet adultum accedentem ad fidem credere quia Deus est et quia est remunerator omnium bonorum. Item oportet omnes alios articulos

confession was never absent and may never be discounted. Yet it usually followed rather than preceded the liturgical practice that all took for granted—as in Innocent’s reference to clerics who attended the altar without necessarily knowing exactly what happened there.

Fourth, after about the year 1000, Christendom, rooted in practice and profession and given shape by liturgical, ecclesiastical, and creedal structures, included every person in medieval Europe except the Jews. Certain religious observances were therefore expected of, and certain elements of religious culture were common to, all: baptism at birth and last rites at death to secure eternal salvation, rudimentary knowledge of the Apostles’ Creed and Lord’s Prayer, rest on Sunday and feast days (holy days) with attendance at mass, fasting at specified times, confession once a year after 1215 (usually Shrove Tuesday), communion at Easter, the payment of various fees and tithes at specified times, and alms for the needy (partly as a penitential exercise). Whatever their level of indifference, superstition, or immorality, every European grounded his or her religious life in this basic cultural structure.⁹² But, since baptism now included all people, real differences, even “dualities,” in expectations arose—and not just those between a literate clerical and a customary popular culture.

Medieval Christian texts refer constantly to the need for “conversion” and for “winning souls” (*lucrum animarum*). Between the eighth and twelfth centuries these expressions usually meant entry into a monastic order, an option taken by many “secular” clerics and noble laymen late in life but increasingly chosen by members of all social classes, for example, by the “lay brothers” (*conversi*). “Religious” referred most commonly therefore, as it still does in many languages today, to the professed and professionally religious.⁹³ After the thirteenth century, “winning

fidei credere implicite, idest credere verum esse quicquid credit ecclesia catholica. Hanc autem mensuram extendere debent praelati ecclesiarum quicumque curam animarum habent, quia debent scire articulos fidei explicite et distincte. . . . Non negamus tamen papa et alii superiores praelati possint dispensative ex certis causis minus literatos et minus industriosos in temporalibus sustinere. . . . De clericis autem inferioribus satis est—si essent pauperes qui non possent intendere studio, qui non habent magistros vel expensas, quia oportet eis propriis manibus quaerere victum—quod eis sufficiat scire sicut simplicibus laicis et aliquantulum plus, sicut de sacramento altaris; quia oportet eos credere quod in sacramento altaris conficitur verum corpus Christi, et hoc ideo quia circa illud quotidie et continue versantur plus quam laici.” Innocentius IV, *In quinque libros decretalium Commentaria* (Venice, 1610), 2.

⁹² Delaruelle culled the following from a fourteenth-century inquisition document: “Ut asserit, ut verus et fidelis christianus . . . frequentando ecclesias, divina officia audiendo, oblationesque faciendo, necnon annis singulis sua peccata confitendo et corrigendo, ac religiosas mendicantes in domo suo recipiendo”; *L’église*, 728.

⁹³ See Peter Biller, “Words and the Medieval Notion of ‘Religion,’” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 36 (1985): 351–69. Biller qualified the claim of an early modern historian that in the Middle Ages “religion” for the most part meant only the monastic life. See John Bossy, “Some Elementary Forms of Durkheim,” *Past and Present*, 95 (1982): 4–5. Biller was right to point out that in the Middle Ages “religion” could also be understood as a “system of faith and morals” and that laymen could also be “religious.” But it is important to note that in the passage from Cardinal Hostiensis’ *Summa Aurea* on the *Decretals*, which Biller cited, people are “religious” because they live “stricter” and “holier” lives than others live: “Largo modo dicitur ‘religiosus’ qui in domo propria sancte et religiose vivit, licet non sit professus. . . dicitur talis ‘religiosus’ non ideo, quod astrictus sit alicui regulae certae, sed respectu vitae, quam arctiorem et sanctiorem ducit quam ceteres seculares qui omnino saeculariter, idest dissolute vivunt.” *Summa Aurea* (Venice, 1574 edn., reprint edn., Turin, 1963), 1108; and Biller, “Words and the Medieval Notion of ‘Religion,’” 358 n. 24. The language of a “stricter” life style was taken over from monasticism, and those other “dissolute worldly folk” were baptized Christians.

souls" referred more often, especially among the mendicants, to bringing people to penance through preaching, though mendicant houses also had more and more *conversi*, confraternities, and other religious groups associated with them. The later Middle Ages produced a whole series of formal and informal groups comprised of laymen and secular clerics who wished to live more "religiously" by engaging in particular liturgical and penitential exercises.⁹⁴ That is to say, medieval folk themselves recognized real distance between the mass of baptized Christians and the "converted," between the "simple faithful" and the "religious," between those whose souls had and had not been "won."

The means to close the gap between "implicit" and "explicit" faith was instruction, but for men and women to go beyond the status of the merely baptized to the securely won required regular participation in the sacraments, especially confession and the eucharist, or entry into the formal religious life. Both instruction and the sacraments required an ordained priesthood. In the early Middle Ages, the intercession of the saints, the power of relics, and the prayers of monks seemed almost to overwhelm ordinary priestly functions, despite the importance of the viaticum and Christian burial. But from the twelfth century onward, the duality between ordained priests, at whatever social, intellectual, or even moral level, as dispensers of the life-bringing sacraments and a dependent laity obligated spiritually and materially to such intermediaries affected nearly every aspect of the religious culture.⁹⁵ Much of the talk about "lay piety" during the last twenty years has therefore been somewhat misleading. The whole inner dynamic was for the laity to acquire parts of the priestly sacred culture, whether it be abbreviated books of hours for noble women, set prayers for confraternities and tertiaries, chantry priests for guilds and patricians who could afford them, windows and burial sites in churches, or even stolen hosts and oils to use as charms. It is striking to note, for instance, that the Middle Dutch text with the largest number of extant manuscripts, more than eight hundred, is Geert Grote's translation of certain liturgical hours for the use of laymen and laywomen. Although there were certainly those, as Schmitt and Le Goff have argued, who sought access to the holy outside church-approved means, all the evidence suggests that the dynamic shaping religious culture from the eleventh century onward lay in the efforts of medieval folk to go beyond baptism, implicit faith, and days of obligation to acquire for themselves what ordained holy men, at whatever level, possessed as a privilege and maintained as a duty. The dynamic, that is, lay in movement from one set of expectations toward another, expectations that in

⁹⁴ For the religious and structural issues raised here, see Duane Osheim, "Conversion, *Conversi*, and the Christian Life in Late Medieval Tuscany," *Speculum*, 58 (1983): 368–90; Delaruelle, *L'église*, 666–94; Daniela Rando, "Laicus religiosus' tra strutture civili ed ecclesiastiche: L'ospedale di Ognissanti in Treviso (sec. XIII)," *Studi Medievali*, 24 (1983): 617–56; and Kaspar Elm, "Die Bruderschaft vom Gemeinsamen Leben: Eine geschichtliche Lebensform zwischen Kloster und Welt, Mittelalter und Neuzeit," *Ons gestelijk erf*, 59 (1985): 470–96. The example that Hostiensis gave of a "religiosus" concerned a "hospital"; Biller, "Words and the Medieval Notion of 'Religion,'" n. 9.

⁹⁵ Among many studies on the importance of the sacerdotal-lay division, two recent works treat different aspects of its impact on religious culture. See Caroline W. Bynum, *Jesus as Mother* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1982), 3–8, 170–72; and Johannes Laudage, *Priesterbild und Reformpapsttum im 11. Jahrhundert* (Cologne, 1984).

principle cut across social and intellectual lines. Such expectations might well have reinforced and coalesced with other social, economic, and cultural divisions. For example, monks and university men came predominantly from the upper social ranks, and simple country priests could enjoy sizable livings. The issue, however, is to recognize in a society of the baptized both the common elements underlying all of medieval religious culture and the distinctions in law and the social order as well as in religious expectations.

Fifth, the practice and profession that encompassed *Cristendom* was expounded in books and yet was learned chiefly by doing. Here the new school of historical interpretation has pinpointed one of the principal problems in interpreting medieval religious culture. Illiterate folk had somehow to appropriate religious teachings from books in another language—from the Bible, service books, law books, and so on—and to shape their religious lives accordingly. Using an anthropological perspective, historians of the new school have concluded that such a process was well nigh impossible or transpired mainly under duress. Kings forced their people to conform; priests compelled illiterate men and women to mumble certain words and perform certain rituals to guarantee their happiness in the hereafter; confessors tried to reshape the inner lives of reluctant penitents, and so on. To describe this process, these historians now use the term “acculturation,” first coined by American anthropologists to describe what happens when an indigenous culture is colonized or subject to proselytizing by another, dominant culture.⁹⁶ A half-dozen papers (rather than a half-dozen sentences) would be required to review adequately this question of the interaction between an oral and a literate culture. Brian Stock has recently argued that “textual communities,” as he nicely put it, formed during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, which reached out to include and to influence illiterate laymen high and low.⁹⁷ And, indeed, one reform movement after another in that period and later revolved around access to and implementation of a normative text. Yet Stock’s argument, to work historically, requires him to “see through” well-known “clerical” texts and to discover oral communities behind them. This form of argument, much like Schmitt’s and Le Goff’s, is inevitably circular, for the state of those oral communities can only be inferred from texts that were supposedly the product of another culture. A significant expansion of textual communities (the plural is important) may have occurred in the twelfth century, but the medieval Christian community was, like the Jewish and Muslim communities to which it can be compared on this point, by its very nature a textual community.

Medieval Christians were notoriously slow in their development of a widespread literate religious culture. And yet every baptized person had some vague notion that the mysteries of his religion were contained in books, and more than a few

⁹⁶ For an excellent survey of the issues, see *Faire Croire*, 2–5. Also see Elikia M’Bokolo, “Acculturation,” in *La nouvelle histoire*, ed. J. Le Goff *et al.* (Paris, 1978), 21–24. For a more critical view, see Jean Wirth, “Against the Acculturation Thesis,” in von Greyerz, *Religion and Society in Early Modern Europe*, 66–78.

⁹⁷ For an introduction to this complicated subject, with helpful references, see, especially, the opening and closing chapters of Brian Stock’s *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton, N.J., 1983).

must have harbored some natural sense or curiosity about what the books said. Moreover, despite undeniable and continuing complaints in medieval visitation records about inadequate or missing liturgical books and the like, newer studies seem to indicate that by the Carolingian era those books were fairly well distributed, even at the lowest level of society.⁹⁸ The real interpretive issue must therefore turn on the ways and means found to transmit the mysteries of those religious texts and the people's reception or understanding of what was transmitted. The methods employed to teach religious ideas and practices included, especially, materials now studied by art and literary historians: mystery plays developing out of the mass, wall paintings as "books for the illiterate," vernacular sermons, saints' lives in epic form, and so on. A difficult area, this, and one in which historians often must work from hints rather than solid sources. For example, if Waldensians made a point of averting their eyes from the "images" on entering a church, Catholic folk, presumably, naturally looked to wall paintings and stained glass windows for the mysteries of their faith. If vernacular literature cannot be understood properly apart from its use of Scripture and figurative interpretations, as Friederich Ohly and D. W. Robertson have contended, clearly at least some knowledge of Scripture had made its way into lay culture.⁹⁹ And, if sculpted cathedral fronts really bore antiheretical messages, as some art historians argue, churchmen assumed evidently that laymen could understand them. There are, in addition, all those treatises—many in the vernacular—on the commandments, the creeds, the vices, and the virtues, which may well prove the most crucial sources through which to explore this question.¹⁰⁰ That the great majority of medieval folk were cut off from direct access to the written norms of a Christian culture is undeniable. But the real question is the degree to which their rituals, art, literature, and cosmology had nonetheless been shaped or influenced by those norms, that is to say, the degree to which Christian culture had over time become their oral culture. That concerned Christians were inevitably oriented toward the texts must also be taken seriously. Think of Waldo, Francis, and any number of others attempting to learn and implement the gospel. The process of increasing Christianization was not some brutal "acculturation" but rather an impetus built into a religious community based on books.

All this is difficult enough, but it is even more difficult to assess how medieval folk received and understood all that church practices and texts prescribed. The end product was inevitably some synthesis between the old and new cultures under the aegis of Christendom—my sixth point. Cultures do change, even oral and

⁹⁸ See, for instance, Carl Hammer, Jr., "Country Churches, Clerical Inventories, and the Carolingian Renaissance in Bavaria," *Church History*, 49 (1980): 5–17.

⁹⁹ Part of a fourteenth-century inquisitorial record from Piedmont reads as follows: "Nos bene vadimus ad ecclesiam et dicimus illud quod videtur nobis sed nos noluimus adorare picturas." "Quando erat in ecclesia, non debebat aspicere ymagines nec orare, sed solum habere cor Deo celli," as quoted by G. G. Merlo, *Eretici e inquisitori nella società piemontese del trecento* (Turin, 1977), 24 n. 27, and 25 n. 32. Friederich Ohly, *Schriften zur mittelalterlichen Bedeutungsforschung* (Darmstadt, 1977); and D. W. Robertson, *Essays in Medieval Culture* (Princeton, N.J., 1980).

¹⁰⁰ For one example, newly edited by I. Sullens, see Robert Mannyng of Brunne, *Handlyng Synne* (Binghamton, 1983), a Middle-English translation of an Anglo-French *Manuel des Pechiez*.

customary ones, and at some undeterminable point most people in Europe came to consider themselves “Christian.” This transition, from one customary religious culture to another, can only have been very slow with much retained from the old and absorbed from the new. But it is absurd to draw an absolute social and intellectual line between the “bookish” and the “customary” cultures. Clerics, after all, also came from among the folk and continued to work with them in villages, towns, and courts; villagers thought of the church, especially the nave, as “theirs”; great families often considered abbeys or bishoprics, including Rome’s, as “theirs”; and even university men dealt routinely with bakers and innkeepers, magistrates and courtiers. A recent study of Thomas Aquinas, for instance, indicates that he understood a great deal of popular religious culture.¹⁰¹

Certainly, as Schmitt, Le Goff, and others have demonstrated, Christian materials could be—and were—appropriated and employed within mental frameworks still essentially of another religious sort. Christian motifs often functioned in non-Christian ways, and this must be taken seriously. But here two important qualifications must be made. First, while non-Christian attitudes often governed Christian usages—say, a “magical” view of the sacraments—practices of non-Christian origin early became endowed with Christian meaning. To retain the old name for the first day of the week (as in Germanic languages), though an interesting mark of the uneven process of conversion, was not after a while consciously to honor the sun rather than the Lord (as in the Romance languages). To cast a host into a raging fire, whatever the non-Christian roots of this practice, was to deploy the power believed inherent in the Body of Christ. Even to call on the powers ascribed to saints and relics was not to intercede with some non-Christian deity but with the person described in the legends read out on the appointed feast days and at the shrines. All this is not to deny the maintenance of much in medieval religious culture that was non-Christian in practice and belief, but it is to qualify the exaggerated claims made on the basis of studies into selected bits of medieval folklore. The synthesis was total, from the Christian as well as the non-Christian side, and the cultural dynamic lay with Christianization, recurring efforts to purify, domesticate, and rationalize.

Influence cut both ways. All the emphasis of late has fallen on the imposition of a new religious culture from on high by a clerical elite, its brutal disregard for the indigenous religious culture, and its failure to gain much ground (this slightly contradictory) until the seventeenth century, and there is certainly truth in such observations, however much they must be qualified by particular times, places, and instances. Written clerical culture, however, also absorbed a great deal from popular religious culture, as demonstrated plainly and most obviously in the various reform movements that recalled people from a “compromised” religious life style to one following more strictly the prescriptions of a given text (biblical, monastic, legal, or whatever).

¹⁰¹ B. Lacroix and A. M. Landry, “Quelques thèmes de la religion populaire chez le théologien Thomas d’Aquin,” in *La culture populaire*, 165–79.

University-trained intellectuals frequently took as their point of departure the practice of Christianity, not just an internal analysis of its texts. This is overwhelmingly obvious in Gratian's *Decretum*, the university textbook for canon law, but the same holds true in theology. Hugh of St. Victor's summary gathering of texts "on the mysteries [sacraments] of the Christian faith" seeks precisely, especially in its second part on redemption, to explain practice, various acts of worship, grades of churchmen, signification of vestments, and so on. Even Peter Lombard's theological textbook, especially in Book IV on the "signs" the Christian community was to "use" (in Augustinian language from his *On Christian Learning*), presupposed practice. When schoolmen discussed at length, for instance, the validity and effectiveness of a baptism performed with incorrect, ungrammatical, or mixed-up words (and a host of similar questions),¹⁰² they took up issues deeply rooted in practice, not just verbal gymnastics, and by making distinctions or stressing "intentionality" sought to move beyond the anxieties arising from what might be called a "magical" mentality. But in so doing they also gave new shape and form to many Christian teachings. Indeed, purgatory seems to have been one such notion,¹⁰³ and, ironically, Le Goff's own argument hinges on the point at which the Latin word made its appearance in clerical texts. The cult of the saints and of relics is another instance where popular practice outran theological articulation and ecclesiastical control; both were forced to catch up later. So, too, indulgences, accompanied by vague notions of "forgiveness" or "entry into heaven," were sought and dispensed long before the theological explanations or ecclesiastical manipulations of the "elite" could rationalize and exploit them. Admittedly, questions and texts on the how, why, and what of practice moved things ever further toward intellectual abstraction, especially after the universities reached full maturity as autonomous corporations in the course of the thirteenth century. But, to come full circle, the very gathering and ordering of the *exempla* in written documents reveals real concern with reaching, assessing, and encouraging, as well as repressing, popular religiosity. Scholars must take full account of both the syncretism and the recurrent Christianizing dynamic.

ADHERENCE TO THE PRACTICES, STRUCTURES, and obligations of Christendom could well be imposed, but Christianity could endure and shape religious culture only if it sprang from internal assent, however socially conditioned. No acculturation theory will adequately account for the people's concern to acquire and to preserve their Christendom. But neither can historians describe or measure those convictions in any detail, except when they are recorded in biographical or autobiographical accounts, rarely written by the great mass of ordinary medieval folk, or when they generated "conversions" and the accompanying changes in life style. Historians of medieval Christian culture will always be dependent far more than their early modern colleagues on the texts and sophisticated writings produced by

¹⁰² Peter the Chanter *Summa de sacramentis et animae consiliis* 1.26–32.

¹⁰³ Gurevich wrote, "Therefore I tend to see both cultural traditions, scholarly and popular, at work together in the history of purgatory's 'birth'; the initiative belonged to the latter, and thinkers and theoreticians had to follow it." "Popular and Scholarly Medieval Cultural Traditions," 88.

literate clerics, and they must concede the realities of a gap between common prescriptions for all Europeans and the great diversity of local practice, as well as between public conformity and inner conviction. But, before despairing or treating medieval religious life as comprised of two cultures, they should also recognize and explore all the many elements, from above and below, that were shared. Our image of medieval Christian culture, embracing both commonality and real distinctions, must necessarily be complex, partly because of the complexities of Judeo-Christian religion itself, partly because of the variety of traditions that went into its successive medieval constructs, and not least because of the propensity of medieval religious culture to turn repeatedly on itself in critique and reform. This last element received support as well from Scripture where the prophets and Jesus himself are shown severely criticizing the inherited religious culture of the chosen people; in medieval religious culture a population of baptized Christians constantly needed correction.

Then, too, for all the broad compass of medieval Christian culture, the “world” was still very much there, taken for granted in the texts and yet all the more difficult to discern because nearly everyone was necessarily a part both of the “world” and of “Christian culture.” Insight into this duality may be gained from a late twelfth-century memoir. In one of the more personal passages of his *Courtier's Trifles*, Walter Map, an English cleric and also a courtier in the time of Henry II, described the terrible vices and vanities court life imposed on people and then urged his readers to maintain through it all a hidden devotion to the Trinity (in occulto colatur Trinitas). Elsewhere he spoke both of a holy hermit in the Welsh marchlands whose prayers, Map believed, had kept the hermit safe during a storm on the channel and of *succubi* (folkloric creatures) who plagued folks in that part of the world.¹⁰⁴ Here are all the elements present in medieval religious culture: worldliness and devotion, prayer and superstition. But the inner dynamic of it all, I would submit, sprang from a commitment to Christendom.

In sum, to study the Christianization of medieval religious culture, historians must take seriously medieval peoples' frequent use of that term in both Latin and the vernacular languages to describe their own loyal ties and civilization; the ritual, ecclesiastical, and legal mechanisms put in place to plant, foster, and sustain that religious culture at every social level; the dynamic inherent in acting on religious belief; the differing religious obligations and expectations established for a population of baptized Christians; the means and media used to communicate the teachings of written texts to an illiterate populace; and finally the inevitable synthesis of old and new in the resultant religious culture. Recent study of popular religious culture has forced historians to focus on its distinctive and sometimes non-Christian character and function. But any approach that denies the reality of Christianization as crucial to the formation and flowering of medieval religious culture will miss wholly its inner dynamic.

¹⁰⁴ Walter Map *De nugis curialium* D. 4.13, 2.2, 12.