



St. Francis Virtual House of Studies

**Readings In
Medieval Christianity**



1. Scholarly Literature

Thomas Cahill, *Mysteries of the Middle Ages: And the Beginning of the Modern World*. New York: Random House, 2006.

Cahill draws together insights on Eleanor of Aquitaine, Francis of Assisi, Abelard, Aquinas, Dante, Giotto, Bacon, and the rise of the cult of the Virgin Mary into a rich tapestry of the contributions of the High Middle Ages to Modern sensibilities. It is good to reflect on the overwhelmingly religious origins of what many have dismissively called secular culture.

Cambridge History of Christianity: Volume 3, Early Medieval Christianities, c.600-c.1100, Edited by Thomas F. X. Nobel and Julia M. H. Smith. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

and

The Cambridge History of Christianity: Volume 4, Christianity in Western Europe, c.1100-c.1500, Edited by Miri Rubin and Walter Simons. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

These are for the reader looking for great detail. The 1500 pages of these two volumes contain original scholarly articles on a wide variety of topics indicating the remarkable diversity of the era.

Jerrilynn D. Dodds, María Rosa Menocal, and Abigail Krasner Balbale, *The Arts of Intimacy: Christians, Jews, and Muslims in the Making of Castilian Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.

This excellent study of a specific local instance of inter-religious cooperation and indeed exploration of ideas is a glimpse of a world that did exist and then disappeared as the result of retrenchment of political and religious authority threatened by freedom of inquiry and conscience.

Marilyn Dunn, *Emergence of Monasticism: From the Desert Fathers to the Early Middle Ages*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003.

This is a useful and detailed introduction to the early evolution of Christian Monasticism.

Edward Grant, ***God and Reason in the Middle Ages***. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

This is a carefully argued and complex study of the relationship between religious orders and the rise of the University.

Tom Holland, ***The Forge of Christendom: The End of Days and the Epic Rise of the West***. New York: Doubleday, 2008.

This is a well crafted book based on equally well conceived and executed research. I think it is an important book. Ironically, I come to a radically different conclusion than does the author. Holland sees the end of the first Millennium as a time of intense fusion between the political and social order of an emergent Europe and the missionary zeal of Christianity that would conquer and transform the world. I read his book as a cautionary tale about a Church that is too much of this world and a political culture that assumes that it has God on its side. However one reads this, it is an instructive piece of writing about some of the nuanced contradictions in Medieval Christianity.

Henry Kamen, ***The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision***. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

From early historical treatments down through the famous Monty Python sketch, the term "Spanish Inquisition" conjures fear and revulsion. Kamen is no defender of the Inquisition, much less an apologist, but he makes a good case for its having been more bark than bite and more bluster than brutality. Of greater importance, he places the inquisition in the context of and in many ways caused by the political and intellectual dynamics of the late Middle Ages.

Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie, ***Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error***. New York: George Braziller, 1978.

Ladurie's thick description of social and religious dynamics in this small Pyrenees village is based on the inquisitorial records of a reforming bishop. The author clearly demonstrates that actual religious practice was remarkably different from the uniformity of the life of faith often posited by scholars of the Middle Ages from Henry Adams on down.

Christopher Nugent Lawrence, ***The Age of the Cloister: The Story of Monastic Life in the Middle Ages***. Mahwah, NJ: HiddenSpring, 2003.

Lawrence uses three quite different monastic houses to illustrate the diversity in styles of monastic life, the ways in which they articulated with the larger society (or refrained from doing so) and their significance in the life of the Late Medieval Church.

Joseph H. Lynch, ***The Medieval Church: A Brief History***. New York: Longman Press, 1995.

This is an excellent introduction for those with little or no background in the subject matter.

Lauro Martines, *Fire in the City: Savonarola and the Struggle for the Soul of Renaissance Florence*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

The Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498) is often cast in the role of a fanatical reformer. Martines argues that he was a visionary gifted with significant insight into the human experience who sought to reform both the civil and religious life of 15th-century Florence.

Medieval Christianity: A People's History of Christianity, Edited by Daniel Ethan Bornstein and Denise R. Janz. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.

The scholarly articles written for this volume are an excellent introduction to the rich tapestry of great diversity in Medieval Christianity.

Edward Mullins, *The Popes of Avignon: A Century in Exile*. New York: BlueBridge, 2008.

Although lacking in primary source documentation, this is a very good introductory study of the secularizing tendencies in the papacy during the 14th century. The book does contain a useful bibliography.

Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Vol. 3: The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

This is the most comprehensive treatment of the subject available.

Richard E. Rubenstein, *Aristotle's Children: How Christians, Muslims, and Jews Rediscovered Ancient Wisdom and Illuminated the Dark Ages*. Orlando: Harcourt, 2003,

*The unfortunate use of the term "Dark Ages" in the subtitle notwithstanding, this is a good study of the inter-religious possibilities of the High Middle Ages, on a larger scale and without as much subtlety as **The Arts of Intimacy**.*

René Weis, *The Yellow Cross: The Story of the Last Cathars: 1290-1329*. New York: Knopf, 2000.

*LeRoy Ladurie's **Montaillou** offers an ethnography of the Cathars based on inquisitorial records. Weis offers an analysis of the Inquisition itself and its impact on the community.*

2. Primary Source Material

The Coventry Corpus Christi Plays, Edited by Pamela M. King and Clifford Davidson. Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications / Western Michigan University, 2000.

From the 14th through the 16th centuries one can find documentary evidence that these Miracle Plays were well known throughout the British Isles. Performed outside the Church and evidently free from Church censorship, these plays give us a rare glimpse of something approaching

popular culture in their time. Along with the material from inquisitions, these sources raise questions about the uniformity of faith and practice in the Middle Ages.

Fordham University maintains an excellent on-line collection of Medieval documents at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook.html>.

Medieval Christianity in Practice, Edited by Miri Rubin. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

This remarkable source book brings together a wide array of genres (liturgical texts, sermons, popular devotional material, and much more) from all regions of Medieval Europe.