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Some Ambiguities Of Late Medieval Religion In England

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The vibrancy of late medieval lay devotion has been powerfully advanced by some recent writers of a revisionist school, although some more cautious voices have been less distinctly heard.^[1] A great efflorescence of lay religious culture is suggested, in which all social groups participated, a single, dominant, homologous religious culture, which persisted right into the 1530s. That thesis now seems itself to becoming an orthodoxy, but there was an underside to this religious involvement which may have been obscured. The intention of this paper is to examine that underside of religious belief and observance in the late middle ages, to suggest that there was not indeed a single homologous religious culture, but a variety of religious experiences in late medieval England and that participation was variable. A second point emphasised is that the experiences were, to some extent, 'regional', with a contrast between poorer and wealthier regions in the late middle ages, although this difference is not explored in detail. The regional distinctions resulted partly from varying material circumstances of regions in the late middle ages, some declining, others developing, which affected the condition of the fabric and ornaments, but also to some different religious traditions.^[2] The proponents of the revisionist interpretation do not engage with Lollardy and nor does this article. Instead, it uses the same sources as the revisionists, but some more emphatically, to reveal an undercurrent of ambiguity in religious observance and devotional experience.

It can be fairly suggested that the most prominent sources of the revisionists are testamentary records, the fabric of churches, and the homilies and instructions produced by ecclesiastics.^[3] Without doubt, the use of the latter is tendentious, presenting an *ex parte* perspective, a self-fulfilling prophecy. Testamentary material is ambiguous, because it is impossible to discern how far bequests near death are matters of contrition for affairs in life. Perhaps that complication is exemplified by executors who failed to perform the wishes of the dead and were consequently impleaded in church courts.^[4] Those making wills in the 1530s, furthermore, were socialized in their religious belief in the mid or late fifteenth century, but cannot be representative of all generations in the 1530s. It is possible that some youth had divergent attitudes.^[5]

The evidence of the fabric for lay devotion is equally ambivalent, for it is perhaps not difficult to select examples of parish churches which exhibit the paraphernalia of donations by the laity. The corroboration of this evidence by churchwardens' accounts has recently been revealed to have problems, inherent in the nature of the survival of those accounts^[6]. What, however, about the small, unadorned churches which are excluded from this analysis? What may be required for a full representation of the significance of the fabric is to take the evidence of all churches on a comparative basis. That process is not performed here, but the evidence of visitations is incorporated as an initial stage. A second condition about the fabric is whether there was a shared culture about some aspects of its ornamentation or whether different meanings might have been exposed. Where the fabric was decorated by a personal benefaction, was the professed intention 'for the increase of divine service' merely a topos concealing social display and social honour? How did the other parishioners react to this personal adornment, with unreserved gratitude or resentment at the intrusion on their social space in the church? Langland had much earlier raised the prospect of resentment at the pride and simony involved in some gifts which were highly personalised.

Ac god to alle good folk suche grauyng
To writen on wyndows of eny wel dedes,
An auntur pruyde be paynted there and pomp of the world.
For god knoweth thi conscience and thy kynde wille,
Thi cost and here couetyse and no þe catel ouhte.
Forthy, leue lordes, leueth such wrytynge;
God in þe gospel suche grauyng nou3t alloueth.^[7]

Similarly, he disdained with irony the praise sought by ostentatious almsgivers and prayer-mongers.^[8] Nor was he enamoured of those too who sought to represent through ritual rank, hierarchy and precedence in the social order:

How lytel y louye Letyse at þe style;
For she had haly-bred ar y, my herte gan change.^[9]

In this respect, Langland shared the same concern as Chaucer, for the anxiety of the Wife of Bath to be first to the offertory was surely an ironic condemnation of this worldly representation of rank and hierarchy in 'devotion'.^[10] Should the possibility be admitted, therefore, that personalised benefactions - with donors' names - merely incited or inspired amongst some of the congregation a feeling of resentment for invasion of their space?^[11]

First, however, the disclosures of sessions of the peace are elicited to provide some refraction of the non-observance, perhaps even scepticism, of some individuals, however marginal.^[12] In the late fourteenth century, John Bakere of Oakham, perhaps a vagrant, stole from the church of Thornton by Horncastle, seven veils and a towel. From the articles stolen, it seems quite clear that there was not here an element of religious materialism or syncretism or magic.^[13] On the other hand, the offender must have had a fair degree of religious scepticism, for the veils were appropriated in the fourth week of Lent and so they were presumably the veils which concealed the cross and separated nave from chancel, secular from sacred space in the church, during Lent.^[14] The possibility of syncretism might have been allowed in the case of the theft of a pyx and relics valued at 100s. from the church of Yelding by Simon Harleys, except that he was also implicated in robberies from other lay places. He was, also, acquitted, but obviously the belief existed that he might have been capable of the deed.^[15] Materialism of another kind is represented in the theft of eight stone of lead, valued at 6d. per stone, in the church of Rouceby by John Osberne of that vill; as he was ultimately acquitted in King's Bench, however, confusion may have been involved.^[16] Since it involved a clergyman, the theft of a chalice worth 20s. from the church of Greatford might also have been informed by confusion. Nevertheless, the perpetrator, German Clerk of Barnack, was arrested at Careby, and, upon his plea of clergy, he was released to the Bishop of Lincoln. Interestingly, he stole the chalice on the Close of Easter.^[17] John Egell of Wrangle felt no compunction in stealing the accoutrement of lay piety, a psalter, along with a silk belt and two pairs of sheets.^[18] Two other laymen perpetrated a theft in the church of Chipping Norton, of four silver tassels, in 1391.^[19]

The most substantial case at sessions occurred when the churchwarden of Holywell church, John Pountfrayt, appealed five laymen and a chaplain, on the accusation that on the night of 29 October 1393 they broke into the church of Holy Cross there and stole a missal, valued at £10, two gold chalices, valued at four marks, a procession book, valued at half a mark, a psalter, at 3s 4d, a quire from a missal, worth 1s, two surplices, a bed cover (1s 8d), two blankets (1s

two altar towels (half a mark), six quires from a cartulary (half a mark), a linen altar cloth and an ancient altar towel (1s 8d), a towel for the high altar, the name of the donor in blue beading (6s), a pair of sheets (1s 8d) and other belongings of the church valued at £100. The same six were also accused of domestic robberies. The six were found guilty, but five proved clergy, the other sentenced to be hanged. None had any chattels, which may reflect on the desperation which led them to appropriate these sacred objects.[20] At the very least, religious conviction was overwhelmed by need, although the extent of their theft is perhaps inconsistent with any profound religious observance at all.[21]

One of the *topoi* of late medieval religion is the fear of sudden death; the good death required preparation and proper ritual observance. Concomitantly, the sight of the elevated host was supposed to prevent death on that day. What do we make then of those of the laity not infrequently presented at visitations for not observing Sundays and feast days or divine service? Was their presentment simply vexatious? If not, their absence from church was conspicuous, especially as seating was installed, yet they defied 'community' pressure. Or what of Bartholomew Edmund presented because he refused to remove his cap in the church at Leverington at the elevation of the host or Henry, the servant of John Laurence, who played and disturbed divine service at Whittlesea on Sundays and festivals?[22] At Wisbech, John Selby ground malt during vespers on the vigil of the feast of the Relics, whilst William Browne worked at a wagon on the sabbath, and John Custard frequently sold meat during services.[23] Non-observance of the sabbath was a persistent problem, but so too was non-attendance at divine service.

For this sort of evidence, reliance must be placed on churchwardens' presentments at visitations. Problematically, the most complete visitations, those for Buckinghamshire and Kent, have inherent difficulty, since these two areas retained a Lollard or reforming presence.[24] In the cases cited here, however, no accusation of Lollardy was made in the presentment and, indeed, a considerable number of the cases involved commercial transactions rather than directly religious belief.

One Stephen Witney was presented for not hearing divine service in church on feast days.[25] At Bicester, Joan wife of Hugh Carpenter opened her tavern during divine service.[26] At Worminghall, John Warmyngton failed to observe the sabbath, as also Sutton, a shoemaker who sold shoes on Sunday.[27] At Langley, three of the laity were presented for not observing the sabbath, Joan and Thomas Mason and John Burgess. More seriously, Thomas Cooke of Iver did not take communion at Easter, the canonical time, in 1493.[28] John Whiche had to perform penance since he worked during divine service on the feast of the Parasceves (Good Friday) and Lady Day, whilst at Chesham, Henry Cooke did not attend church on Sundays or feast days to hear divine service in 1496.[29] John Jurdan of Denham had not heard divine office in the parish church for three months, whilst at Iver John Ylster and William Browne did not attend the parish church on feast days and had not for a long interval, and Henry Ball and John Whitt, as well as withholding oblations, were also presented for their *absencio* from the parish church.[30] Concern about sudden or ill-prepared death may have assumed second place to the other considerations, for these absentees ignored the sight of the host each day.[31]

Some of the presentments might have been vexatious, but the proclamation of sentence confirms that some instances actually involved non-observance or non-attendance. It is possible too that some of the absentees might have been Lollards, although none of the presentments made that allegation.[32] It is equally possible that the presentments were instigated by a feeling of failure to conform to 'community' solidarity, reflected in the mass, particularly on Sundays when reconciliation was particularly expressed through divine office.[33] However, should the coercion of the community in the imposition of its norms be necessarily regarded as an attractive feature?[34] Nor were these instances of exclusion from mass or communion for being out of charity with neighbours, for those cases are quite distinctly reported in the visitations.[35]

The Kentish visitations of the early sixteenth century provide much the same pattern of occasional non-observance and non-attendance.[36] No effort has been made here to make a quantitative analysis of the problem nor a comprehensive reporting of the presentments. Only illustrative examples are advanced. The butchers of the parish of St Mary Magdalene were ordered not to keep their shops open for sale on Sundays and other holy days and they were required to attend their parish church for divine service on those days.[37] At Temple Ewell William Milford and John More, butchers, were corrected for selling meat on Sundays and feast days, and there too Thomas Townelee, miller, was ordered not to grind corn on those days.[38] It was the barbers at Lydd as well as the butchers there who continued their commercial activities on Sundays.[39] These are merely examples of non-attendance and non-observance which are ostensibly related entirely to the pursuit of commercial enterprise.[40] Leisure was also a problem at Lydd where 'it is usid much hauntyng of ale houses at divine service tyme' and apparently there were many commercial transactions in the churchyard at the same time ('many byares and sellers').[41] These Kentish presentments involved not merely the actions of an individual or two offending the 'solidarity' of the community, but assemblies of people defecting.

Late medieval Norwich remained an urban centre not strongly affected by heretical belief, but where non-attendance was presented. In the visitation of 1492, three lay folk were presented for keeping taverns during divine service.[42] Richard Palys sat and drank with his servants during the office.[43] Amongst those presented for non-attendance during divine service or on holy days and Sundays were enumerated Henry Spark, Robert Brewyn, John Andrews, William Bloker, William Qwiney, Thomas Newhaw, John Herner, Joan Clerk and one Vyncent and his wife.[44]

Perhaps the most explicit explanation of refusal to attend was the retort of the manorial officer of the Bishop of Winchester, who when threatened with excommunication by the rector of Harwell c.1310, responded that he would continue to cart hay regardless of holy days. He had indeed been cited in the first place because he summoned the other customary tenants to work on those days.[45] Ambivalence may again surround the problem, however, for there was a gradation of work allowed on holy days, from *fešta ferianda* when no work was to be performed to 'light' holy days, with intermediate variations as to the quantity and quality of work.[46] It is thus possible that confusion existed as to the nature of the holy day, whether it was one of the 40-50 full holy days. Some holy days occurred at awkward times, in the middle of harvest, although Bromyard was quite categorical about work on such days.[47] It seems unlikely, however, that the local clergy would be ignorant of the distinctions to the degree of threatening excommunication. In the material cited below about working on holy days and Sundays, the churchwardens, unless presenting vexatiously, must have been concerned to enforce acknowledged local 'community' norms about working, holy days and religious observance. Motives are further complicated by the survival of some Sunday markets.[48] Again, however, the churchwardens would have been fully cognisant of local customs and local markets and their mind was that those whom they presented had not conformed.[49] Another less reticent example involved the response in the consistory court of London of John Cornelys, a cobbler, who persisted in selling shoes on Sundays and who retorted that he intended to continue opening his shop as long as the vicar collected tithes.[50] Reluctance to furnish the normal parochial dues might thus have been concealed behind some presentments.[51] At Amberley in West Sussex, non-attendance was attributed in a series of presentments in 1527-30 to playing of games during the time of divine service, at coits, bowls and tennis, and in the alehouse at games and dice on holy days and Sundays.[52]

In the visitations of the diocese of Hereford, moreover, the most common cause of non-attendance was the urgency of work, so that recalcitrants were presented for being a *communis operarius* or *operatrix*. At *Burghill* alone six males were presented for being *communes operarii* on holy days and Sundays, but a further five females were also brought for correction for non-attendance on those days.[53] At Monmouth, at least six of the laity were presented for trading on holy days and Sundays, at least one of whom omitted divine service.[54] Non-attendance in these instances was related directly to economic behaviour. For others, no specific reason is attributed, but several neglected to take communion. Neither John Robyns nor Jak Dakyns received communion at Easter, it was alleged, not in their parish church nor elsewhere; John Alayn, who was corrected, had not participated in communion at Easter for three years; it was complained of Henry Merekote of Minsterworth that he did not take communion at Easter, did not perform annual confession, and did not provide the holy loaf in his turn, although he purged himself; John Hert and William Cappe consistently failed to attend on holy days and Sundays and *vix* at Easter; and William Thomkyns had not taken the sacrament at Easter for three years, neither in his parish church nor elsewhere.[55]

Different attitudes of parishioners are also visible in visitations, again reflecting an alternative undercurrent. Without doubt, the laity engaged deeply in

vision for the parish church when flexibility of devotion was allowed - when the laity assumed the initiative, not least at the approach of death - and when laity decided the precise use of the benefaction. At times, however, it was obviously quite different when the regular parochial obligations and dues were exacted. Some of the laity thus had an ambiguous attitude to parochial provision, reluctant to provide the prescribed oblations as against their own devotions. Tithes apart, since these might be a matter between impropiator and parishioner, a multitude of cases was initiated in the ecclesiastical courts about detinue of the regular dues and oblations owed to the church, most frequently initiated by the churchwardens, but extending to mortuaries and Easter oblations.[56]

Even lights were at issue. In some instances, the provision of lights had become attached to holdings, so that tenants were responsible. It was presented at Thornborough that William Atkyn should find two wax candles on Sundays and feast days before the image of our Lady in the chancel, but that he withheld them, and similarly John Monke. It is possible that there was confusion about the obligation, but that explanation seems unlikely since the villagers would have maintained a social memory of such an important obligation.[57] Clemence Fremley did not provide the two lamps in church as she ought in the same year.[58] At Newton in Cambridgeshire, Thomas Rudhall the younger did not maintain a lamp as he should and John Sue occupied a piece of land belonging to the rood without the churchwardens' agreement. There, in another year, John Derby and John White refused to provide the lamp before the rood as they were obliged and John Rand disdained to furnish a lamp before the image of our Lady.[59] At Iver, the light of All Saints was no longer maintained.[60] Such negligence, forgetfulness or dishonesty was evident in the diocese of Hereford, where, for example, Margaret Baylyf held a toft the rent of which she had withheld for fifteen years, to the detriment of the maintenance of the Lady light.[61] Three tenants at Warchurch subtracted their rents from the lamp before the high altar.[62] At Pencoet, the lamp before the rood suffered because David Wille had held back nine years of rent at 4d per annum, whilst at Ross the important torches for the elevation of the host should have been financed by an annual rent of 2d., but John Huges had not contributed the rent for seven years.[63]

At Datchett, Alexander Hill was presented to compel him to supply the Holy Loaf when it was his turn, under pain of suspension, in 1496.[64] Non-provision of the *eulogia* was not unusual in the diocese of Hereford: Walter Catell of Monmouth withheld it when it was his turn; Isabel Preston also refused to acknowledge her turn; and Henry Merebote offended in the same way.[65]

Visitations reveal too the state of disrepair of some parochial churches, although in almost all cases the chancel is the problem. Since the chancel was the responsibility of the rector, often an impropiator, it might appear that this issue reflects little on lay piety. It does, nonetheless, have importance for the religious experience of the laity, for the chancel was the most sacred location in the church, where divine office was commemorated. In many instances, the complaint is simply that the chancel was in disrepair or the roof and windows of the chancel were defective.[66] In a single deanery in Buckinghamshire, three parish churches had defective chancels, mainly as to the roof and five had problems with the chancel windows.[67] Virtually all the churches in Hereford diocese in 1397 had the same problem, amongst others.[68] In some cases, the problem was more serious, with extreme effects on lay devotion in the parish church. At Wisbech, the chancel windows were so defective that the candelabra and other ornaments were damaged and there too the great window in the chancel was described as 'ruinous'.[69] At Quinton, the chancel was in such disrepair that the priest could not celebrate mass.[70] In two churches in Buckinghamshire, the defective part of the roof was located over the high altar, whilst at Hillesdon, not only was the chancel ruinous as to the roof and windows, but the altar was broken so that the priest could not celebrate there.[71] At Dymmock, the chancel was so insufficiently repaired in 1397 that, when it rained, the vicar could not celebrate divine office.[72]

It is quite possible that these ruinous chancels were in parishes in regions which had been depopulated in the later middle ages. Nevertheless, the churches evidently were still in service and the congregation participated in a different type of religious experience from that in the magisterial parish church of Heckington.[73] Where the laity had been investing in the nave, however, churchwardens might understandably be critical of the failings of the rector in the chancel.[74] Nevertheless, the defects to the chancel reduced the religious experience of the laity, regardless of whose was the responsibility and what was happening in the nave. The most important sacramental event happened in the chancel, the mass, and the chancel was the focus of ritual activities at special times of the year, such as Easter.[75] The point is then that the devotional experience of the laity in some parishes in some regions was diminished because the chancel was inadequately maintained, sometimes to the extent of the suspension of divine office.

Kentish visitations reveal, moreover, that it was not simply the chancel which remained an issue. The *comperta* for Hoath revealed that the chapelry needed a pyx, a chrismatory, repair of the bell and the porch.[76] At Ham, tiles had fallen off the porch, the steeple was defective so that it rained on the bells, and the rain penetrated also into many other parts of the church; ironically, 'the font wille hold no water'; and the church needed processions and surplices.[77] The church at Little Mongham had no pyx for the sacrament nor a surplice or lantern.[78] The churchwardens of Lydden were ordered to repair the rood loft, whilst those of Westcliffe to provide a missal containing the new feasts and a legible *portiforium*. [79] It should be noted here that it was the churchwardens who were derelict in their duty of making provision for the celebration of the new feasts. The disrepair of the chancel at Alkham was so dire that rain affected the stalls and books, but that was not the only issue. The parish needed a chrismatory, an antiphonal, a corporal cloth, and 'a purse to bere yn the sacrament atte visitacions'. The 'body' of the church was defective so that rain entered and 'hurtithe the aulters and the clothes of the same'. [80] Not quite startlingly, the church of Lydd was without an image of the Holy Trinity to which the church was dedicated. [81] Most damningly, the church of Ivychurch was reported as 'sorely decayd and lykely to fall downe'. [82] At Brook, the churchwardens were ordered to undertake repair of the nave. [83] At Stodmarsh, there was no chalice or alb. [84] Moreover, a number of churches contained disrepair in the nave or 'body' of the church, such as Kenardington, Snargate, Woodchurch, Ickham, Milton and Barham, which the churchwardens were enjoined to rectify. [85] At Challock, the rood loft was in disrepair. [86] Again, it is possible that all these churches - which are simply illustrative material here, not a comprehensive catalogue of failings - were located in poorer regions, but it is quite clear that all were still in use and that the parishioners had a less satisfactory devotional experience.

This catalogue of incidents illustrating the reverse side of religious experience has not considered whether the clergy attained the standards expected by the laity. [87] Little too has been included about the despoliation of churches, but some were profaned, as when Robert Mabson the elder of Braceby entered the church of Hacey with two knives and there assaulted the chaplain during divine service, so that in this case the miracle of the mass was scarcely a social one. [88] In another incident, in the church of Ingoldsby, Richard de Longesby of Somerby attacked Richard Spryng with a knife on the Close of Easter, hardly leading to reconciliation, for it resulted in a siege of the church. [89] Complicit in another attack in a church, at Skellingthorpe, was Robert de Kelstern, chaplain, who, assisted by some armed laymen, evicted the rector from the church. [90] In an altercation between two laymen, Robert Raglyn punched John Stywart in front of the high altar. [91] These events are hardly the stuff of reverence and devotion and certainly not of reconciliation.

It is, nevertheless, important to take the perspective that lay folk 'whilst experiencing and understanding certain aspects of faith and practice differently from their clerical mentors, might nonetheless remain within the framework of orthodoxy and regard themselves as stolid conformists'. [92] In much of this evidence presented above, however, the accusation derived from the laity and was directed at recalcitrant laity. It is possible that what was at issue, particularly in the case of taverns, was really social control and regulation through the medium of religious observance and communal responsibility to the parish, especially if churchwardens were selected from the upper levels of parish or village society, from amongst the 'middling sort'. [93] The withholding of rents and legacies might have resulted from confusion or misunderstanding, although that explanation seems less reasonable in the case of rents detained over many years, since social memory would have retained details of the contributions required. That detinue of legacies might have resulted from poverty is reflected in the failure of the executors of William Harryes to acquit the £6 13s 4d (ten marks) which he bequeathed for a chalice for the church of Biddenden, for it was discovered that they were too poor to pay; or was it that the legacy itself was too ambitious for the resources of the testator and how frequent was such a well-intended miscalculation? [94] Is that also the reason why Richard Nedersowle detained a legacy of £10 for the purchase of a gradual, an antiphonar, surplice and rochet? [95] Do wills therefore only reveal aspirations rather than constant fulfilment?

possible that, in their search for flexibility of religious expression, some of the laity regarded the payment of the regular dues as a mild sin compensated by their contributions towards their own personal devotions. Jak Nychole, presented at Bicknor for absence from divine service on holy days and Sundays, for refusing to contribute to the repair of the church, the bells and cemetery, and all other dues, may yet have, in his own mind, compensated through other more personal means, although it seems unlikely.^[96] On the other hand, the cases of recalcitrance are sufficiently numerous, not only of individuals but of groups of people, to suggest a real diversity of experience and meaning. Whilst they may not have considered themselves heretical or irreligious, some of the laity constrained within poorer social groups needed to continue with their daily material life as a priority over regular attendance or acquitting of dues and oblations. Although not a considerable number, as far as the presentments reveal, these people constituted the underside of lay religious experience or the opportunity for it. In some cases, these lay folk were also condemned to more poorly endowed material conditions in which to celebrate, in defective churches with a deficiency of liturgical ornaments. Late medieval lay religion was not always experienced in a church like Heckington or in the style of the Pastons.^[97]

Endnotes

1. For the most recent revisionist statement, E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars. Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven and London, 1992): for more circumspect discussions, R.N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe c. 1215-c. 1515* (Cambridge, 1995) and A. Brown, *Popular Piety in Late Medieval England. The Diocese of Salisbury 1250-1550* (Oxford, 1995), who importantly suggests regional dimensions of religious participation and a contrast between (new cloth) town(s) and rural parishes. My debt to Swanson and Brown is obvious, although my interpretation does not represent their position.
2. J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford, 1984), p.6, referred to the Lollard tradition and the 'upland semi-paganism' of Buckinghamshire to explain problems in the visitation material.
3. In particular, Scarisbrick, *Reformation and the English People*, pp. 2-12, which is perhaps the most systematic analysis by one of the revisionists, suggesting that wills extended to 'quite humble folk' (p.10) and are thus fully representative of late medieval social groups. Scarisbrick also has an overview of the fabric at pp.12-15.
4. Thus John Richard detained from Whittlesea church a bequest of 2s 6d: A. Gibbons, *Ely Episcopal Records* (Lincoln, 1891), p. 72; John Maunde failed to provide a lamp in the chancel of Kirtlington church under the will of a certain Pouelle: A.H. Thompson, ed., *Visitations in the Diocese of Lincoln 1517-1531*, volume 2 (Lincoln Record Society 35 1944), p.37. Numerous parishioners were presented in the Kentish visitations of 1511-12 for withholding bequests, such as Simon Fanyng who 'withdrawithe' 26s 8d bequeathed by Richard Fanyng and 10s by William Bury: K.L. Wood-Legh, ed., *The Kentish Visitations of Archbishop William Warham 1511-1512* (Kent Archaeological Society, Kent Records, 24, 1984), p.77; in the same parish at the same time Robert Hunt withheld a legacy of 3s 4d. Whether through a misunderstanding or not, John Hornys deprived the church of Little Mongham of the proceeds of sale of wood, the offerings of Hock Monday, a legacy of a bushel of wheat and a legacy of malt: *ibid.*, p.101; four men of Alkham withdrew money from the church: *ibid.*, p.120. Another example is *ibid.*, p.148 (10 owed by the executors of Thomas Grove). Perhaps they were temporary delays, but the churchwardens were minded to present the default. The visitations of Hereford diocese in 1397 are littered with rents and legacies for lights and lamps which were withdrawn by tenants or executors for several years: A.T. Bannister, 'Visitation returns of the diocese of Hereford in 1397', *English Historical Review* 44 (1929), pp.279-89, 444-53 [hereafter Hereford I], 45 (1930), pp.92-101, 444-463 [hereafter Hereford II]: for example, John Montgomery withheld a legacy of 25s. under the will of Alson Skyner for a chalice for celebrating mass, which was proven: Hereford II, p.459. For executors found negligent and compelled to pay legacies which they had detained: Wood-Legh, *Kentish Visitations*, pp.226 (excommunicated, then reconciled), 228, 234, 237, 238, 243, 246, 248, 256, 257, 265. For the seeming buoyancy of churchwardens' accounts, however, B.A. Kumin, *The Rise and Reformation of the English Parish c. 1400-1560* (Aldershot, 1996): it must be suggested, however, that visitation returns provide a rather different picture.
5. S. Brigden, 'Youth and the English Reformation' in P. Marshall, ed., *The Impact of the English Reformation 1500-1640* (London, 1997), pp.55-85.
6. A. Foster, 'Churchwardens' accounts of early modern England and Wales: some problems to note, but much to be gained' in K. French, G.G. Gibbs and B.A. Kumin, *The Parish in English Life 1400-1600* (Manchester, 1997), pp. 76-84.
7. D. Pearsall, ed., 'Piers Plowman the C-Text' (Exeter, 1994), *Passus III*, ll. 68-76.
8. *Piers Plowman*, *Passus III*, ll. 310-11.
9. *Piers Plowman*, *Passus VI*, ll. 145-6.
10. The passage is cited by Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p.12.
11. For discord caused by hierarchy Kmin, *Shaping of a Community*, pp.232-3, 237-40: order in kissing the Pax; order in pew allocations; select vestries; dissent by a minority of parishioners; for further discussion of the pre- and post-Reformation disharmony caused by pew allocations, Amanda Flather, 'The politics of place. A study of church seating in Essex, c.1580-1640', unpublished MA thesis, University of Essex.
12. Compare the didactic and apocryphal illustration in a chronicle about the theft of pyxes from churches in London, led by a Lollard leader who did not repent, but the other participants in the theft, not Lollards, repented once they discovered the Lollard intentions: Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp.101-2. Note that in the cases below there is no explicit reference to Lollardy in the trial proceedings.
13. R.W. Scribner, 'The Reformation, popular magic, and the "Disenchantment of the World"', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* xxiii (1993), pp.475-94; Scribner, 'Ritual and popular religion in catholic Germany at the time of the Reformation' in Scribner, ed., *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London, 1987), pp.17-47.
14. R. Sillem, ed., *Some Sessions of the Peace in Lincolnshire 1360-1375* (Lincoln Record Society 30 1937), pp. 90-1 (406); for the veils in the sanctuary area during Lent, Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p.111.
15. E.G. Kimball, *Sessions of the Peace for Bedfordshire 1355-1359, 1363-1364* (Historical Manuscripts Commission JP 16 1969), pp. 81-2 (134).
16. Kimball, *Some Sessions of the Peace in Lincolnshire 1381-1396* volume 1 (Lincoln Record Society 49 1955), p.20 (77).
17. Kimball, *Sessions of the Peace in Lincs 1381-1396*, pp.26-7 (101).
18. Kimball, *Sessions of the Peace in Lincs 1381-1396*, p. 59 (63); see also the theft of an amber rosary: *ibid.*, p. 27 (104).
19. Kimball, *Sessions of the Peace in Oxfordshire in the Reign of Richard II* (Oxfordshire Record Society 53 1983 for 1979-80), p. 128 (39).
20. Kimball, *Sessions of the Peace in Oxfordshire*, pp. 133-6.
21. See too the theft of the chalices, books and ornaments so that nuns did not have the means to perform divine offices: Gibbons, *Ely Episcopal Records*, p. 406 (1408).

M.M. Palmer, 'Fifteenth century [sic] visitation records of the deanery of Wisbech', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society* 39 (1940), pp.73-4.

23. Palmer, 'Fifteenth century visitation records', p. 75; for comments on non-attendance, Swanson, *Religion and Devotion*, pp.335, 338-9; Brown, *Popular Piety*, pp.81-2, although the numbers in this diocese were small, but possibly higher in the new cloth towns.
24. See above, n.2; N. Evans, 'The descent of dissenters in the Chiltern Hundred' in M. Spufford, ed., *The World of Rural Dissenters 1520-1725* (Cambridge, 1995), p.296; M.K. McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehavior in England, 1370-1600* (Cambridge, 1998), p.201 (presentments in manorial courts in Buckinghamshire for Lollard sympathies, 1532-5); J.F. Davis, 'Lollardy and the Reformation in England' in P. Marshall, ed., *The Impact of the English Reformation 1500-1640* (London, 1997), pp.37-54, esp. 41-2; J.A.F. Thomson, *The Later Lollards 1414-1520* (London, 1965).
25. A.H. Thompson, *Visitations in the Diocese of Lincoln 1517-1531* volume 2 (Lincoln Record Society 35 1944), p.12. For a positive perception of religious devotion in late medieval Lincolnshire, J.R. Ketteringham, 'Secular piety and religious life in Lincolnshire between 1480 and 1536: practical manifestations of religious piety, the Reformation and early Tudor government', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Leicester, 1994.
26. Thompson, *Visitations ... Lincoln*, p. 33.
27. E.M. Elvey, ed., *The Courts of the Archdeaconery of Buckingham 1483-1523* (Buckinghamshire Record Society 19 1975) [hereafter *Bucks*], pp. 5, 7.
28. *Bucks*, pp. 76, 128.
29. *Bucks*, pp.161, 175.
30. *Bucks*, pp.267, 269, 288, 289.
31. For the importance of witnessing the elevation each day, Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp.99-100; for sight of the host warding off death on that day, C. Daniell, *Death and Burial in Medieval England 1066-1550* (London, 1997), p.7; Swanson, *Religion and Devotion*, p.141. The notion was propounded by Mirk.
32. Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p.126.
33. Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p.126.
34. For the inherent coercion in community, G. Crow and G. Allan, *Community Life. An Introduction to Local Social Relations* (Hemel Hempstead, 1994).
35. McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehaviour*, pp.188-9.
36. For the background, P. Clark, *English Provincial Society from the Reformation to the Revolution: Religion, Politics and Society in Kent 1500-1640* (Sussex, 1977); despite the progress of reform in Kent, none of the cases elicited the term Lollard.
37. Wood-Legh, *Kentish Visitations*, p.73.
38. Wood-Legh, *Kentish Visitations*, p.118.
39. Wood-Legh, *Kentish Visitations*, p.148.
40. See also the injunction to eleven named people in another parish to attend their parish church on Sundays and holy days and the enjoinder in that same parish to John Foker and James Jasper to expel from their houses those who played illicit games during divine service: Wood-Legh, *Kentish Visitations*, p.75. For social regulation of these games in manorial courts, McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehavior*, pp.96-107.
41. Wood-Legh, *Kentish Visitations*, p.147.
42. N. Tanner, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich 1370-1532* (Toronto, 1984), pp. 9-10, 180, 185: two were women.
43. Tanner, *Church in Late Medieval Norwich*, p.186.
44. Tanner, *Church in Late Medieval Norwich*, pp.180, 183, 185, 187.
45. Brown, *Popular Piety*, p.81.
46. B.F. Harvey, 'Work and *festa ferianda* in medieval England', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 23 (1972), pp.289-308, especially p.291: the term 'light' is Mirk's and therefore later than this example at Harwell.
47. Harvey, 'Work and *festa ferianda*', pp.304, 306.
48. Harvey, 'Work and *festa ferianda*', pp.303-4 for persistence of some Sunday markets and carrying on Sundays. Professor Charles Phythian-Adams also pointed out to me the survival of some Sunday markets.
49. The ecclesiastical counsel of perfection was to maintain the whole day as sacred, as represented, for example, by Langland: 'And hold wel in haliday heye til euen': *Piers Plowman*, *Passus VII*, l.226.
50. R. Wunderli, *London Church Courts and Society on the Eve of the Reformation* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), p.123. In this court, there were numerous presentments also for opening taverns on Sundays. The number of presentments for non-observance was eleven in 1471, eighteen in 1485 and eighteen in 1493, but declined in the early sixteenth century. Few cases went to a sentence. The decline might have resulted from a change in the mode of admonition, from court to parish priest.
51. J.A.F. Thomson, 'Tithe disputes in later medieval London', *English Historical Review* 78 (1963), pp.1-17 (personal tithes).
52. McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehavior*, pp.104-5. Although manorial courts more usually deferred to the ecclesiastical forum in such matters, these presentments were made in the manorial court, as were similar cases in Devon and Cornwall: *Ibid.*, p.104 n.154. I am grateful to Professor McIntosh for confirming these aspects to me by e-mail.
53. *Hereford I*, p.281. For the background, including problems of clerical recruitment, W. Dohar, *The Black Death and Pastoral Leadership. The Diocese of Hereford in the Fourteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1995).
54. *Hereford I*, p.445.
55. *Hereford I*, pp.281, 481, II, 452, 458.

Bucks, pp.53, 88, 170, 183, 202, 203, 208: *causa iuris ecclesiastici*.

57. Bucks, p.87.

58. Bucks, p.176.

59. Palmer, 'Fifteenth century visitations', pp.71-3.

60. Bucks, p.288.

61. Hereford I, p.281.

62. Hereford I, p.283.

63. Hereford I, p.447.

64. Bucks, p.175.

65. Hereford I, pp. 281, 445, II, 452.

66. Bucks, pp.3, 4, 8, 111, 127; Palmer, 'Fifteenth century visitations', pp.72-3 (four churches); Thompson, *Visitations...Lincoln*, pp.26, 29.

67. Bucks, pp. 222-4; the other seven had defective churchyards, the responsibility of the parishioners, which should not be glossed over if medieval religion was truly the service of the dead by the living; indeed, an injunction was made for the parishioners of Wexham that they should enclose their churchyard by the Nativity of the BVM on pain of 20s. and, if they failed to do so, the rector was ordered to suspend the celebration of divine service in the church, so that the parishioners were complicit in the possibility of derogation of their services as well as disrespectful to their dead. The point might be here that parishioners had their own priorities about devotion. Presentments about the parishioners' failure to maintain the churchyard were profuse in the Kentish visitations.

68. Hereford I and II.

69. Palmer, 'Fifteenth century visitations', pp.73-4.

70. Thompson, *Visitations...Lincoln*, p.26.

71. Bucks, pp.4, 8, 127.

72. Hereford II, p.453 (not the only example).

73. Heckington is used by Duffy; see, however, V. Sekules, 'The sculpture and liturgical furnishings of Heckington church and related monuments: masons and benefactors in early fourteenth-century Lincolnshire', unpub. Ph.D. thesis, London, 1990, for a different perception of the remodelling of the fabric and furnishings.

74. This point was made to me by Professor Charles Phythian-Adams.

75. Note, however, that there is no evidence of *widespread* adoption of some ritual customs such as Easter Sepulchres until very late: R. Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England. The Ritual Year 1400-1700* (Oxford, 1994), pp.52-3.

76. Wood-Legh, *Kentish Visitations*, p.77.

77. Wood-Legh, *Kentish Visitations*, p.95.

78. Wood-Legh, *Kentish Visitations*, p.101.

79. Wood-Legh, *Kentish Visitations*, p.117; presumably the new feasts are those described by Richard Pfaff, *New Liturgical Feasts in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 1970), some of which, like the Name of Jesus, were of considerable significance for lay devotion.

80. Wood-Legh, *Kentish Visitations*, p.120.

81. Wood-Legh, *Kentish Visitations*, p.147. For a general neglect of patronal saints as revealed at visitation, Brown, *Popular Piety*, p69 (1394). The disregard simply reflects the flexibility of devotion required by the laity, but failure to have an image seems slightly more neglectful.

82. Wood-Legh, *Kentish Visitations*, p.148.

83. Wood-Legh, *Kentish Visitations*, p.167.

84. Wood-Legh, *Kentish Visitations*, p.179.

85. Wood-Legh, *Kentish Visitations*, pp.152, 155, 160-1, 178, 186, 269: at Milton, the cross also needed repair (p.269).

86. Wood-Legh, *Kentish Visitations*, pp.174-5.

87. As much as anything here is intended the social behaviour of some of the clergy; a perusal of any volume of *Chancery Miscellanea* (List and Index Society) will divulge cases of rape by clergy which must have had a profound impact on local society; for legal changes in the purport of rape and its relationship to the clergy, J.B. Post, 'Ravishment of women and the statutes of Westminster' in J.H. Baker, ed., *Legal Records and the Historian* (London, 1978), pp.150-64. Not at issue here are the matters considered by M. Bowker, *The Secular Clergy in the Diocese of Lincoln 1495-1520* (Cambridge, 1968) and others.

88. Sillem, *Some Sessions ...Lincs*, p.160 (29); J. Bossy, 'The mass as a social institution 1200-1700', *Past and Present* 100 (1983), pp.29-61.

89. Sillem, *Some Sessions...Lincs*, pp.154-5 (2).

90. Sillem, *Some Session...Lincs*, p.160 (30).

91. Hereford II, p.449.

92. M. Ingram, 'From Reformation to Toleration: popular religious cultures in England, 1540-1690' in T. Harris, ed., *Popular Culture in England c.1500-1850* (London, 1995), p.96.

This interpretation might fit with McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehavior*, since some of these 'offences' or perceived unsocial behaviour in presentments to ations were not presented in the manorial or secular local courts examined by McIntosh (pp.54-107); social regulation may thus have been prosecuted through a diversity of *fora* according to accepted divisions of competence of which the 'middling sort' of the laity was well aware.

94. Wood-Legh, *Kentish Visitations*, pp.200-1.

95. Wood-Legh, *Kentish Visitations*, p.187.

96. *Hereford II*, p.448.

97. For discussion of the religion of the gentry - whether the gentry had retreated into private, personal devotions and how far its contribution to parochial religion was informed by social honour and display - see most recently C. Richmond, 'The English gentry and religion c.1500' in C. Harper-Bill, ed., *Religious Belief and Ecclesiastical Careers in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 1991), pp.121-50, which recites the previous suggestions by himself and Christine Carpenter; a principal observation of Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, is that all levels of society shared the same religious values, if not experience: p.2.

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