

MEDIEVAL TEXTS IN TRANSLATION

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## HANDBOOK FOR CURATES

A Late Medieval Manual on Pastoral Ministry

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*Translated by Anne T. Thayer, with an introduction  
by Anne T. Thayer and Katharine J. Lualdi*

*The Catholic University of America Press  
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penance cannot contract marriage, but if he does contract it, it will hold; this is proved in D.50 c.65 and C.26 q.6 c.19.

The fourth thing to be noted is by whom solemn penance can be imposed. Know that solemn penance ought not to be imposed except by the bishop or, on his order, by a priest. And only the bishop, or, in case of necessity and on his order, a priest, can reconcile solemn penitents. And if they have repented well, they can be reconciled during Easter week and commune and have entry into the church. But if not, they should remain thus until the end of their lives, and this is given in C.26 q.6 c.14. And because this topic pertains more to the reverend and most holy bishops, whose servant and disciple I am, than to simple priests, I will say no more about this topic.

#### CHAPTER 3: On public penance

Public penance properly names that which is done in the presence of the church, but not with the aforementioned solemnity, as when pilgrimage through the world is enjoined, with a crutch to lean on or with certain clothing or with some other such thing. And this, as I believe, can be imposed by any confessor on the one confessing to him, because I find no prohibition, unless perhaps it would be contrary to the custom of the church or unless the bishop has reserved it for himself. And note that this penance ought not to be imposed on a cleric unless he is deposed, and it ought not to be imposed on a layperson except for a serious and flagrant crime. And because it belongs to the bishop to judge serious and flagrant crimes, I believe and advise that the one on whom such penance is to be imposed be remitted to the bishop. This is proved in D.6 de pen. c.2. And I believe that such penance can be repeated as many times as the sin for which it is imposed is repeated (D.3 de pen. c. 2, 23, 32).

#### CHAPTER 4: On private penance

Private penance is that which is done individually and privately when someone regularly confesses his sins secretly to the priest, and here attention is directed to this in particular. Concerning this, know that every complete penance has three parts, that is, contrition of heart, confession of mouth, and satisfaction of works, and this is the second definition of penance. Hence John Chrysostom, "Complete penance compels the sinner to suffer all things; indeed in his heart is contrition, in his mouth confession, in his works satisfaction and total humility, and this is fruitful penance" (D.1 de pen. c.40). Because indeed we offend God in three ways, namely, by thought of pleasure, uncleanness of speech, and pride of works, and according to the rule of physicians contraries are cured by contraries, it is necessary that we satisfy in three ways, namely, by contrition of heart, confession of mouth, and works of satisfaction. Hence such complete penance is that happy and beneficial three-day period for which the sons of Israel, that is, Christians seeing God through faith, asked in Egypt, that is, living in the darkness of sins, when they said, "The God of the Hebrews called us so that we may go three days' journey," namely, of contrition, confession, and satisfaction, "into the wilderness," of this world, "and that we should sacrifice," namely, the sacrifice of penance, "to the Lord our God; otherwise, a pestilence may befall us," that is, guilt in the present, "or the sword," that is, pain in the future.<sup>11</sup> And such complete penance is also that blessed ladder with these three steps which Jacob saw erected from earth to heaven, and the Lord leaning upon the ladder,<sup>12</sup> and this is on account of three things. First, so that the one ascending it might be strongly supported. Second, so that if necessary he might stretch out his hand to the one ascending it. Third, so that the one ascending it, when he got tired, might rest in him and put all his confidence in him. For [the Lord] is not so cruel, as Augustine said, that he would

11. Exodus 5:3

12. Genesis 28:12-13



permit him to fall.<sup>13</sup> In the first step there is sorrow, in the second shame, in the third work. Therefore something is to be said about these three parts of penance in order, and first about contrition.

## Tract 2 of the second principal part is on contrition and has 7 chapters.

Concerning contrition, seven things are to be considered in order. First, what contrition is; second, the quantity of contrition; third, its quality; fourth, its duration; fifth, the things for which one ought to be contrite; sixth, what the motives that lead to it are; seventh, its effect.

### CHAPTER 1: What contrition is

In order to see what contrition is, note that contrition here is compared with the contrition done to physical things. Hence know that a physical thing is said to be ground up [*conteri*] when it is broken into minute parts, as aromatic spices are ground in a mortar. There is a difference between contrition and breaking, because breaking is when something is broken into large parts and contrition is when it is broken or ground into minute parts. Therefore, the sorrow over sins is called "contrition" [grinding, *contritio*] and not "breaking" [*fractio*] to show that the penitent should not only be contrite over his sins in general, but over each one in particular. But more will be said about this in chapter 5 of this tract.

But why is it called "contrition" rather than "sorrow"? Know that according to what St. Bernard says on the Canticle, "It is therefore called contrition and not sorrow because, as healing ointment is made from many herbs ground in a mortar, so the ointment of compunction or contrition is made from the herbs of many sins born in the soul of the sinner (because as it says in Psalm 62, 'By a deserted land, inaccessible and waterless'),<sup>14</sup> ground in the mortar

13. Cf. C.23 q.5 c.28; D.45. c.16, n. 245

14. Psalm 62:3

of the conscience."<sup>15</sup> And although that is a true and holy saying, nevertheless it does not really answer the question, because according to this, the person is described as grinding rather than being ground, and sin is said to be ground up.

Therefore know that in contrition we should pay attention to three things. First, what is that which is ground up? Second, by whom is it ground up? Third, for what is it ground up, or what is the goal of contrition? What is ground up is the heart of the sinner which is like an earthen vessel full of the poison of sin. And therefore the prophet Joel, by the authority of God, indicating contrition, said, "Be converted to me with your whole heart, in fasting and weeping and mourning, and rend your hearts,"<sup>16</sup> namely, by contrition. That by which the heart of the sinner is ground up is a double millstone, of which one is upward, that is, raising up, and this is the hope of kindness coming from consideration of divine mercy. And the other millstone is downward, weighing down, and this is the fear of penalty coming from consideration of divine justice. And these two millstones ought always to hold the true penitent, and neither one ought to be taken away nor ought they to be handed over to the devil in pledge. As a sign of this, it says in Deuteronomy 3, "You shall not take an upper or lower millstone in pledge,"<sup>17</sup> that is, do not despair over the magnitude and enormity of your sins but always hope in the mercy of God, nor should you be presumptuous but fear the severity of the torments coming from the justice of God. The goal of contrition is that the heart of the sinner, hard as stone, might soften and melt like wax. Therefore it is written, "A hardened heart will have evil in the very end."<sup>18</sup> Therefore the truly contrite can say, "My heart has become like melting wax,"<sup>19</sup> and concerning such a heart it says in Psalm 50, "A contrite and humbled heart, O God, you will not spurn."<sup>20</sup>

15. Cf. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Super Cantica*, Sermon 10:4-5. For a modern English translation, see Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs*, trans. Kilian Walsh (Spencer, Mass.: Cistercian Publications, 1971), 1.61-68.

16. Joel 2:12-13

17. Deuteronomy 24:6

18. Ecclesiasticus [Sirach] 3:27

19. Psalm 21:15

20. Psalm 50:19

# MEDIEVAL POPULAR RELIGION

READINGS IN MEDIEVAL CIVILIZATIONS AND CULTURES: II  
series editor: Paul Edward Dutton



## 2. THE FOURTH LATERAN COUNCIL (1215)

In 1215 Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) gathered several hundred archbishops, bishops, abbots, and prelates from across Europe at Rome to discuss the state of the church. The decrees issued by this Fourth Lateran Council were a watershed in the pastoral history of the Middle Ages. In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that the Council created the Christian church of the high Middle Ages, for it defined the basic religious duties required of all Christians and established procedures for the administration of the church at the local levels of the diocese and parish. Canon 21, *Omnis utriusque sexus*, was especially important. It obliged all adult Christians to make confession and receive holy communion at least once a year. This obligation, in turn, required priests themselves to be more meticulous in their exercise of the *cura animarum*, or care of souls. In the decades following the Council a flurry of episcopal legislation and handbooks meant to better train the parish clergy for their pastoral duties circulated across Europe. Though the whole document repays study for students of popular religion, here are a few of the Council's canons especially concerned with everyday religious belief and conduct.

Source: trans. H. J. Schroeder in *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils* (London: Herder, 1937), pp. 237-239, 251-52, 255-57, 259-60, 280-81, 286-87, 290-91. Latin.

**Canon 1.** We firmly believe and openly confess that there is only one true God, eternal and immense, omnipotent, unchangeable, incomprehensible, and ineffable, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; three Persons indeed but one essence, substance, or nature, absolutely simple; the Father proceeding from no one, but the Son from the Father only, and the Holy Ghost equally from both, always without beginning and end. The Father begetting the Son, the Son begotten, and the Holy Spirit proceeding; consubstantial and coequal, co-omnipotent and coeternal, the one principle of the universe, Creator of all things visible and invisible, spiritual and corporeal, who from the beginning of time and by his omnipotent power made from nothing creatures both spiritual and corporeal, angelic, namely, and earthly, and then human, as it were, common, composed of spirit and body. The devil and the other demons were indeed created by God good by nature but they became bad through themselves; man, however, sinned at the suggestion of the devil. This holy Trinity in its common essence undivided and in personal properties divided, through Moses, the holy prophets, and other servants gave to the human race at the most opportune intervals of time the doctrine of salvation.

And finally, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God made flesh by the entire Trinity, conceived with the cooperation of the Holy Ghost of Mary ever Virgin, made true man, composed of a rational soul and human flesh,

one person in two natures, pointed out more clearly the way of life. Who according to his divinity is immortal and unable to suffer, according to his humanity was made able to suffer and mortal, suffered on the cross for the salvation of the human race, and being dead descended into hell, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven. But he descended in soul, arose in flesh, and ascended equally in both; he will come at the end of the world to judge the living and the dead and will render to the reprobate and to the elect according to their works. Who shall rise with their own bodies which they now have that they may receive according to their merits, whether good or bad, the latter eternal punishment with the devil, the former eternal glory with Christ.

There is one Universal Church of the faithful outside of which there is absolutely no salvation. In which there is the same priest and sacrifice, Jesus Christ, whose body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the forms of bread and wine; the bread being changed [*transsubstantiat*] by divine power into the body, and the wine into the blood, so that to realize the mystery of unity we may receive of him what he has received of us. And this sacrament no one can effect except the priest who has been duly ordained in accordance with the keys of the church, which Jesus Christ himself gave to the apostles and their successors.

But the sacrament of baptism, which by the invocation of each person of the Trinity, namely of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is effected in water, duly conferred on children and adults in the form prescribed by the church by anyone whatsoever, leads to salvation. And should anyone after the reception of baptism have fallen into sin, by true repentance he can always be restored. Not only virgins and those practicing chastity, but also those united in marriage, through the right faith and through works pleasing to God, can merit eternal salvation. . . .

**Canon 10.** Among other things that pertain to the salvation of the Christian people, the food of the word of God is above all necessary, because as the body is nourished by material food, so is the soul nourished by spiritual food, since "not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God" [Matt. 4.4]. It often happens that bishops, on account of their manifold duties or bodily infirmities or because of hostile invasions or other reasons, to say nothing of lack of learning, which must be absolutely condemned in them and is not to be tolerated in the future, are themselves unable to minister the word of God to the people, especially in large and widespread dioceses. Wherefore we decree that bishops provide suitable men, powerful in work and word, to exercise with fruitful result the



office of preaching; who in place of the bishops, since these cannot do it, diligently visiting the people committed to them, may instruct them by word and example. And when they are in need, let them be supplied with the necessities, lest for want of these they may be compelled to abandon their work at the very beginning. Wherefore we command that in cathedral churches as well as in conventual churches suitable men be appointed whom the bishops may use as coadjutors and assistants, not only in the office of preaching but also in hearing confessions, imposing penances, and in other matters that pertain to the salvation of souls. If anyone neglect to comply with this, he shall be subject to severe punishment. . . .

*Canon 14.* That the morals and general conduct of clerics may be better reformed, let all strive to live chastely and virtuously, particularly those in sacred orders, guarding against every vice of desire, especially that on account of which the anger of God came from heaven upon the children of unbelief, so that in the sight of Almighty God they may perform their duties with a pure heart and chaste body. But lest the facility to obtain pardon be an incentive to do wrong, we decree that whoever shall be found to indulge in the vice of incontinence, shall, in proportion to the gravity of his sin, be punished in accordance with the canonical statutes, which we command to be strictly and rigorously observed, so that he whom divine fear does not restrain from evil, may at least be withheld from sin by a temporal penalty. If therefore anyone suspended for this reason shall presume to celebrate the divine mysteries, let him not only be deprived of his ecclesiastical benefices but for this twofold offense let him be forever deposed. Prelates who dare support such in their iniquities, especially in view of money or other temporal advantages, shall be subject to a like punishment. But if those, who according to the practice of their country [i.e., the Latin East] have not renounced the conjugal bond, fall by the vice of impurity, they are to be punished more severely, since they can use matrimony lawfully.

*Canon 15.* All clerics shall carefully abstain from drunkenness. Wherefore, let them accommodate the wine to themselves, and themselves to the wine. Nor shall anyone be encouraged to drink, for drunkenness banishes reason and incites to lust. We decree, therefore, that that abuse be absolutely abolished by which in some localities the drinkers bind themselves in their manner to an equal portion of drink and he in their judgment is the hero of the day who outdrinks the others. Should anyone be culpable in this matter, unless he heeds the warning of the superior and makes suitable satisfaction, let him be suspended from his benefice or office.

We forbid hunting and fowling to all clerics: wherefore, let them not presume to keep dogs and birds for these purposes.

*Canon 16.* Clerics shall not hold secular offices or engage in secular and, above all, dishonest pursuits. They shall not attend the performances of mimes or buffoons, or theatrical presentations. They shall not visit taverns except in case of necessity, namely when on a journey. They are forbidden to play games of chance or be present at them. They must have a becoming shaved crown and tonsure and apply themselves diligently to the study of the divine office and other useful subjects. Their garments must be worn clasped at the top and neither too short nor too long. They are not to use red or green [cloth] or [long sleeves, or embroidered or pointed] shoes or gilded bridles, saddles, breastplates for their horses, spurs, or anything else indicative of superfluity. At the divine office in the church they are not to wear cloaks with long sleeves, and priests and dignitaries may not wear them elsewhere except in case of danger when circumstances should require a change of outer garments. Buckles may under no condition be worn, nor [belts ornamented in] gold or silver, nor rings unless it be in keeping with the dignity of their office. All bishops must use in public and in the church outer garments made of linen, except those who were monks, in which case they must wear the habit of their order; in public they must not appear with open mantles, but these must be clasped either on the back of the neck or on the chest. . . .

*Canon 20.* We decree that in all churches the chrism and the eucharist be kept in properly protected places provided with locks and keys, so that they may not be reached by rash and indiscreet persons and used for impious and blasphemous purposes. But if he to whom such guardianship pertains should leave them unprotected, let him be suspended from office for a period of three months. And if through his negligence an execrable deed should result, let him be punished more severely.

*Canon 21.* All the faithful of both sexes shall after they have reached the age of discretion [i.e., fourteen] faithfully confess all their sins at least once a year to their own [parish] priest and perform to the best of their ability the penance imposed, receiving reverently at least at Easter the sacrament of the eucharist, unless perchance at the advice of their own priest they may for a good reason abstain for a time from its reception; otherwise they shall be [barred from entering] the church during life and deprived of Christian burial in death. Wherefore, let this salutary decree be published frequently in the



churches, that no one may find in the plea of ignorance a shadow of excuse. But if anyone for good reason should wish to confess his sins to another priest, let him first seek and obtain permission from his own priest, since otherwise the other priest cannot absolve or bind him.

Let the priest be discreet and cautious that he may pour wine and oil into the wounds of the one injured in the manner of a skillful physician, carefully inquiring into the circumstances of the sinner and the sin, from the nature of which he may understand what kind of advice to give and what kind of remedy to apply, making use of different means to heal the sick one. But let him exercise the greatest precaution that he does not in any degree by word, sign, or any other manner make known the sinner, but should he need more prudent counsel, let him seek it cautiously without any mention of the person. He who dares to reveal a sin confided to him in the tribunal of penance, we decree that he be not only deposed from the priestly office but also relegated to a monastery of strict observance to do penance for the remainder of his life. . . .

*Canon 27.* Since the direction of souls is the art of arts, we strictly command that bishops, either themselves or through other qualified men, diligently prepare and instruct those to be elevated to the priesthood in the divine offices and in the proper administration of the sacraments of the church. If in the future they presume to ordain ignorant and uninformed men (a defect that can be easily discovered), we decree that both those ordaining and those ordained be subject to severe punishment. In the ordination of priests especially, it is better to have a few good ministers than many who are no good, "for if the blind lead the blind both will fall into the pit" [Matt. 15.14]. . . .

*Canon 51.* Since the prohibition of the conjugal union in the three last degrees has been revoked, we wish that it be strictly observed in the other degrees. Whence, following in the footsteps of our predecessors, we absolutely forbid clandestine marriages; and we forbid also that a priest presume to witness such. Wherefore, extending to other localities generally the particular custom that prevails in some, we decree that when marriages are to be contracted they must be announced publicly in the churches by the priests during a suitable and fixed time, so that if legitimate impediments exist, they may be made known. Let the priests nevertheless investigate whether any impediments exist. But when there is ground for doubt concerning the contemplated union, let the marriage be expressly forbidden until it is evident from reliable sources what ought to be done in regard to it. But if anyone should presume to contract a clandestine or forbidden marriage of this kind

within a prohibited degree, even through ignorance, the children from such a union shall be considered illegitimate, nor shall the ignorance of the parents be pleaded as an extenuating circumstance in their behalf, since they by contracting such marriages appear not as wanting in knowledge but rather as affecting ignorance. In like manner the children shall be considered illegitimate if both parents, knowing that a legitimate impediment exists, presume to contract such a marriage in the witness of the church in disregard of every prohibition. The parochial priest who deliberately neglects to forbid such unions or any regular priest who presumes to witness them, let them be suspended from office for a period of three years and, if the nature of their offense demands it, let them be punished more severely. On those also who presume to contract such marriages in a lawful degree, a condign punishment is to be imposed. If anyone maliciously presents an impediment for the purpose of frustrating a legitimate marriage, let him not escape ecclesiastical punishment. . . .

*Canon 62.* From the fact that some expose for sale and exhibit promiscuously the relics of the saints, great injury is sustained by the Christian religion. That this may not occur hereafter, we ordain in the present decree that in the future old relics may not be exhibited outside of a vessel or exposed for sale. And let no one presume to venerate publicly new ones unless they have been approved by the Roman pontiff. In the future prelates shall not permit those who come to their churches [for the sake of venerating relics] to be deceived by worthless fabrications or false documents as has been done in many places for the sake of gain. We forbid also that seekers [*quaestores*] of alms, some of whom, misrepresenting themselves, preach certain abuses, be admitted, unless they exhibit genuine letters either of the Apostolic See or of the diocesan bishop, in which case they may not preach anything to the people but what is contained in those letters. We give herewith a form which the Apostolic See commonly uses in granting such letters, that the diocesan bishops may model their own upon it. [*The form letter is omitted here.*] . . .

Those who are assigned to collect alms must be upright and discreet, must not seek lodging for the night in taverns or in other unbecoming places, nor make useless and extravagant expenses, and must avoid absolutely the wearing of the habit of a false religious.

Since, through indiscreet and superfluous indulgences which some prelates of churches do not hesitate to grant, contempt is brought on the keys of the church, and the penitential discipline is weakened, we decree that on the occasion of the dedication of a church an indulgence of not more than one year may be granted, whether it be dedicated by one bishop only or by



many, and on the anniversary of the dedication the remission granted for penances enjoined is not to exceed forty days. We command also that in each case this number of days be made the rule in issuing letters of indulgences which are granted from time to time, since the Roman pontiff who possesses the plenitude of power customarily observes this rule in such matters. . . .

Canon 68. In some provinces a difference of dress distinguishes the Jews and Saracens from the Christians, but in others confusion has developed to such a degree that no difference is discernible. Whence it happens sometimes through error that Christians mingle with the women of Jews and Saracens, and, on the other hand, Jews and Saracens mingle with those of the Christians. Therefore, that such religious commingling through error of this kind may not serve as a refuge for further excuse for excesses, we decree that such people of both sexes (that is, Jews and Saracens) in every Christian province and at all times be distinguished in public from other people by a difference in dress, since this was also enjoined on them by Moses. On the days of the Lamentations and on Passion Sunday they may not appear in public, because some of them, as we understand, on those days are not ashamed to show themselves more ornately attired and do not fear to amuse themselves at the expense of Christians, who in memory of the sacred passion go about attired in robes of mourning. That we most strictly forbid, lest they should presume in some measure to burst forth in contempt of the Redeemer. And, since we ought not be ashamed of him who blotted out our offenses, we command that the secular princes restrain presumptuous persons of this kind by condign punishment, lest they presume to blaspheme in some degree the one crucified for us.

### 3. A SERMON ON THE ARTICLES OF FAITH (c. 1410)

*Sermons were the principal method the clergy used to instruct people in the rudiments of Christianity. The following outline of basic Christian belief comes from a book of sermons — some in Latin, some in Middle English, some model sermons, others transcriptions of actual sermons — assembled at Oxford, probably in the first decade of the fifteenth century. The twelve articles of faith, each attributed by medieval tradition to one of the apostles, could vary. Here, for example, there is no mention of the belief in the Holy Spirit as the Third Person.*

Source: modernized by J. Shinnars from Woodburn O. Ross, *Middle English Sermons*, Early English Text Society, Original Series, No. 209 (London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1940), pp. 12-15. Middle English.

"Attend, O my people, to my law" [Ps. 77.1].

Good men and women, our Lord God Jesus by his prophet commands all Christian people to understand and know his law, which all who shall come to heaven need in order to be saved, and by no other way. For Christ himself says in the Gospel, "He who believes in his law and follows it shall be saved, but he who will not believe shall be condemned" [see Mark 16.16]. This is God's own law, which we call Holy Writ; this law suffices to govern the people of God. In the Psalms, David writes of this law, "*Lex Domini immaculata*," etc. — "the law of our Lord," he says, "is without blemish, turning souls to good" [Ps. 18.8]. This law should "be more desired than gold" or silver or any other precious thing, for it is "sweeter than any honey or the honeycomb." "Truly," says David furthermore, "all your servants keep this law, for in keeping it there is great reward" [see Ps. 18.11-12]. This is the law that our Lord God, by the words of my theme, bids everyone to understand.

"Sir," perhaps you say, "it is forbidden by you priests and prelates of the holy church for any uneducated man to meddle in Holy Writ." No sir, I say; but it is forbidden for any uneducated man to *misuse* Holy Writ, for God himself bids his people to understand it. If his people are to understand it, they must concern themselves with it; and if God bids you to know or understand it, truly, I dare not forbid you to meddle in it. You are bound to meddle in this law on pain of everlasting damnation, for you must know the Our Father, which is in the Gospel; the Hail Mary; the Creed; the Ten Commandments; and to fulfill the seven works of mercy, corporal and spiritual, to the best of your ability according to the determination of holy church. God give us grace, then, to know and keep his law well. . . .



### 31. ST. CATHERINE AND ST. NICHOLAS FROM THE GOLDEN LEGEND (c. 1260)

The Golden Legend (*Legenda Aurea*) was the quintessential work of medieval hagiography. Containing brief lives of close to two hundred saints as well as stories about Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and all the major feasts of the Christian year, in the late Middle Ages its popularity was probably rivaled only by the Bible. Written in Latin around 1260 and soon translated into almost every Western European language, it survives in at least a thousand manuscripts — an astonishing number for a medieval book. It appeared in over 150 editions within the first century of printing; in fact, it was more frequently published than the Bible in the early years of printing. The Dominican Jacob de Voragine (Jacopo de Varazze; c. 1230-1298), who finished his life as archbishop of Genoa, compiled the work from over 100 different authorities stretching from the earliest Church Fathers to his own day. Though he probably intended it as a book of source material for preachers, it also struck a chord with clergy and literate lay people as a devotional aid since it served up almost all of Christian doctrine in stories that were both informative and typically very readable. Chaucer, for example, knew it well. It is an essential source for students of medieval popular religion, for there are few facets of the subject that Jacob does not touch upon somewhere in his enormous book, which runs close to 800 pages in its most recent English translation. At the least it encapsulates most of the nuances of the medieval concept of sainthood. Only the briefest representative excerpt can be offered here: the lives of two of the most popular saints of the Middle Ages, Catherine of Alexandria and Nicholas. There is no reliable historical record of St. Catherine, but the popularity of her story made her the patroness of, for instance, philosophers, lawyers, students, nurses, girls, and those who worked with wheels, spinning wheels, and millstones. Her martyrdom is the inspiration for the whirling firework called a Catherine Wheel. St. Nicholas, a fourth century bishop, is, of course, the inspiration for Santa Claus. He was the patron saint of, among others, dozens of cities, bankers and pawnbrokers, merchants, mariners, fishermen, brides, and, naturally, children.

Source: trans. William G. Ryan, *Jacobus de Voragine's Golden Legend, Readings on the Saints* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), v. 2, pp. 334-41; v. 1, pp. 21-27. Latin.

#### 1. Saint Catherine of Alexandria

Catherine comes from *catha*, which means total, and *ruina*, ruin; hence "total ruin." The devil's building was totally demolished in Saint Catherine: the edifice of pride by her humility, that of carnal concupiscence by the virginity

which she preserved, and that of worldly greed, because she despised all worldly goods. Or Catherine's name may be taken from *catemula*, a small chain, for by her good works she fashioned a chain for herself by which she climbed to heaven. This chain or ladder has four steps, which are innocence of action, cleanness of heart, contempt for vanity, and speaking of the truth. The prophet proposes these one by one: "Who shall ascend into the mountain of the Lord? . . . The innocent in hands, and clean of heart, who hath not taken his soul in vain, nor sworn deceitfully to his neighbor" [Ps. 23.3-4]. How these four steps were present in blessed Catherine's life will be clear as we read her story.

Catherine, the daughter of King Costus, was fully instructed in all the liberal studies. Emperor Maxentius had summoned all the people, rich and poor alike, to Alexandria to offer sacrifice to the idols, and was persecuting the Christians who refused to do so. When Catherine, then eighteen years old and living alone in a palace filled with treasure and servants, heard the bel-lowing of animals and the hurrahs of the singers, she quickly sent a messenger to find out what was going on. Learning the facts, she took some people from the palace with her and, arming herself with the sign of the cross, went out and saw many Christians about to offer sacrifice because they were afraid to die. Deeply grieved by what she saw, she boldly made her way into the emperor's presence and spoke as follows: "Both the dignity of your rank and the dictates of reason counseled me, Emperor, to present my greeting to you if you were to acknowledge the Creator of the heavens and renounce the worship of false gods." Standing at the temple entrance, she argued at length with the emperor by syllogistic reasoning as well as by allegory and metaphor, logical and mystical inference. Then she reverted to the common speech and said: "I have taken care to propose these thoughts to you as to a wise person, but now let me ask you why you have vainly gathered this crowd to worship the stupidity of idols. You wonder at this temple built by the hands of artisans. You admire the precious ornaments that in time will be like dust blown before the face of the wind. Marvel rather at the heavens and the earth, the land and the sea and all that is in them. Marvel at their ornaments, the sun and the moon and the stars, and at their service — how from the beginning of the world until its end, by night and by day, they run to the west and go back to the east and never grow weary. Take note of all these things, and then ask, and learn, who it is who is more powerful than they; and when by his gift you have come to know him and have been unable to find his equal, adore him, give him the glory, because he is the God of gods and the Lord of lords!" And she went on to discourse at length and with wisdom about the incarnation of the Lord.



The emperor was so amazed that he could make no reply to her, but recovered himself and said: "Please, O woman, please let us finish our sacrifice, and afterwards we will come back to this discussion." He then had her accompanied to the palace and guarded carefully. He was overwhelmed with admiration of her knowledge and the beauty of her person. She was indeed lovely to behold, of truly indescribable beauty, and was seen by all as admirable and gracious.

The emperor came to the palace and said to Catherine: "We have heard your eloquence and admire your knowledge, but were so intent upon worshipping the gods that we were unable to follow all you said. Now let us start by hearing about your ancestry." "It is written," Saint Catherine replied, "that one should neither speak too highly of oneself nor belittle oneself: foolish people do that, being teased by a taste for hollow glory. But I avow my parentage, not boastfully but for love of humility. I am Catherine, only daughter of King Costus. Though born to the purple and quite well instructed in the liberal disciplines, I have turned my back on all that and taken refuge in the Lord Jesus Christ. On the other hand, the gods you worship can help neither you nor anybody else. O unhappy devotees of idols that when called upon in need are not there, who offer no succor in tribulation, no defense in danger!"

"If things are as you say they are," the emperor answered, "then the whole world is in error and you alone speak the truth! However, since every word is confirmed in the mouth of two or three witnesses, no one would have to believe you even if you were an angel or a heavenly power, and all the less since obviously you are but a frail woman!" Catherine's reply was: "I implore you, Caesar, do not let yourself be carried away by anger, lest dire disturbance overturn a wise man's mind, for the poet says, 'If you are ruled by the mind you are king, if by the body you are slave.'" "I see now" said the emperor, "that you are bent on ensnaring us with your perfidious cunning, as you try to prolong this discussion by quoting the philosophers."

Maxentius was now aware that he could not compete with Catherine's learning, so he secretly sent letters to all the masters of logic and rhetoric, ordering them to come quickly to the court at Alexandria, and promising them huge rewards if they could best this female demagogue with their arguments. Fifty orators, who surpassed all mortal men in every branch of human knowledge, came together from various provinces. They asked the emperor why they had been summoned from so far away, and he told them: "We have a girl here who has no equal in understanding and prudence. She refutes all our wise men and declares that all our gods are demons. If you can get the better of her, you will go home rich and famous!"

At this, one of the orators broke out in a voice trembling with indignation: "O deep, deep thinking of the emperor, who on account of a trifling dispute with one girl has gathered men of learning from the ends of the earth, when any one of our pupils could have silenced her with the greatest of ease!" But the caesar retorted: "I could indeed have forced her to sacrifice or got rid of her with a round of torture, but I thought it better to have her refuted once and for all by your arguments." So the masters said: "Have this maiden brought before us! Let her be put to shame for her rashness, let her realize that she had never even seen wise men before!"

When Catherine was informed about the contest that awaited her, she commended herself totally to God, and at once an angel of the Lord stood beside her and admonished her to stand firm, assuring her that she could not be defeated by these people; and more than that, she would convert them and set them on the road to martyrdom. She was then brought into the presence of the orators. To the emperor she said: "Is it fair for you to array fifty orators against one girl, promising the orators rich returns for winning, and forcing me to fight without any hope of reward? Yet my reward will be the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the hope and crown of those who fight for him."

The debate began, and when the orators said that it was impossible for God to become man or to suffer, Catherine showed that this had been predicted even by pagans. Plato affirms a God beset and mutilated. The Sibyl, too, speaks as follows: "Happy that God who hangs from a high tree!" The virgin went on to contradict the orators with the utmost skill and refuted them with clear and cogent reasoning, to the point that they, dumbstruck, found nothing to respond and were reduced to silence. This drove the emperor to fresh outbursts of fury, and he began to rail at them for letting a young girl make fools of them. Then one, the dean of the others, spoke out: "You must know, Caesar, that no one has ever been able to stand up to us and not be put down forthwith; but this young woman, in whom the spirit of God speaks, has answered us so admirably that either we do not know what to say against Christ, or else we fear to say anything at all! Therefore, Emperor, we firmly declare that unless you can propose a more tenable opinion regarding the gods whom hitherto we have worshiped, we are all converted to Christ!"

Hearing this the emperor, beside himself with rage, gave orders to burn them all in the middle of the city. With words of encouragement the virgin strengthened their resolution in the face of martyrdom and diligently instructed them in the faith; and when they were troubled because they would die without being baptized, she told them: "Have no fear, the shedding of your blood will be counted for you as baptism and crown!" They



armed themselves with the sign of the cross and were thrown into the flames, thus rendering their souls to the Lord; and it happened that not a hair of their heads nor a shred of their garments was as much as singed by the fire. Then the Christians buried them.

The tyrant now addressed the virgin: "O damsel nobly born, take thought to your youth! In my palace you will be called second only to the queen. Your image will be erected in the center of the city, and you will be adored by all as a goddess!" "Stop saying such things," Catherine answered, "it is a crime even to think them! I have given myself as his bride to Christ, and he is my glory, he my love, he my sweetness and my delight. Neither blandishments nor torture will draw me away from his love!" The emperor's anger surged back in full, and he ordered her to be shut up for twelve days in a dark cell and left to suffer the pangs of hunger. He then left the city to attend to affairs of state.

Then the queen, afire with love, hastened at nightfall to the virgin's cell accompanied by the captain of the guard, whose name was Porphyrius. When the queen entered, she saw the cell filled with an indescribable brilliance, and angels ministering to the virgin's wounds. Catherine began at once to preach to her about the joys of heaven, converted her to the faith, and predicted a martyr's crown for her. Thus they went on talking until past midnight. Porphyrius, having heard all this, threw himself at the saint's feet and along with two hundred soldiers, acknowledged the faith of Christ. Moreover, since the tyrant had ordered that Catherine be left for twelve days without food, Christ sent a shining dove from heaven and refreshed her with celestial viands during those days. Then the Lord appeared to her with a multitude of angels and virgins, and said: "O daughter, recognize your Creator, for whose name you have undergone a toilsome conflict. Be constant, because I am with you!"

Upon his return the emperor had Catherine brought before him. He expected to find her worn out by the long fast but instead saw her more radiant than ever. He thought someone had fed her in the prison, and this made him so angry that he ordered the guards to be tortured. The virgin, however, said to him: "I received food from no man, but Christ fed me by an angel." The emperor: "Take to heart, I beg of you, the warning I am giving you, and give me no more of your dubious answers. We have no wish to own you as a mere servant. You will be a powerful queen in my realm, chosen, honored, triumphant!" Catherine: "Now you yourself pay attention, I pray you, and, after judicious consideration of my question, give an honest decision: whom should I choose — one who is powerful, eternal, glorious, and honored, or one who is weak, mortal, ignoble, and ugly?" Indignantly Max-

entius retorted: "Now you choose one or the other for yourself: offer sacrifice and live, or submit to exquisite torture and die!" Catherine: "Whatever torments you have in mind, don't waste time! My one desire is to offer my flesh and blood to Christ as he offered himself for me. He is my God, my lover, my shepherd, and my one and only spouse."

Now a certain prefect urged the furious ruler to have prepared, within three days, four wheels studded with iron saws and sharp-pointed nails, and to have the virgin torn to pieces with these horrible instruments, thus terrorizing the rest of the Christians with the example of so awful a death. It was further ordered that two of the wheels should revolve in one direction and the other two turn in the opposite direction, so that the maiden would be mangled and torn by the two wheels coming down on her, and chewed up by the other two coming against her from below. But the holy virgin prayed the Lord to destroy the machine for the glory of his name and the conversion of the people standing around; and instantly an angel of the Lord struck that engine such a blow that it was shattered and four thousand pagans were killed.

The queen, who until then had not shown herself and had watched what was going on from above, now came down and berated the emperor severely for his cruelty. The monarch was enraged and, when the queen refused to offer sacrifice, commanded that she first have her breasts torn off and then be beheaded. As she was led away to her martyrdom, she begged Catherine to pray God for her. "Fear not, O queen beloved of God," the saint answered, "for today you will gain an eternal kingdom in place of a transitory one, and an immortal spouse for a mortal." The queen, thus strengthened in her resolve, exhorted the executioners not to tarry but to carry out their orders. They therefore led her out of the city, tore off her breasts with iron pikes, and then cut off her head. Porphyrius snatched up her body and buried it.

The following day, when an unsuccessful search was made for the queen's body and the tyrant for that reason ordered many to be questioned under torture, Porphyrius burst in and declared: "I am the one who buried the servant of Christ, and I have accepted the Christian faith!" At this Maxentius, out of his wits, uttered a terrible roar and exclaimed: "O me, wretched as I am and to be pitied by all, now even Porphyrius, sole guardian of my soul and my solace in all my toil, even he has been duped!" And when he turned to his soldiers, they promptly responded: "We too are Christians and are ready to die!" The emperor, drunk with rage, ordered them all to be beheaded with Porphyrius and their bodies to be thrown to the dogs. Next he summoned Catherine and told her: "Even though you used your magical arts to bring the queen to death, if you have now come to your senses, you shall be



first lady in my palace. Today therefore you shall either offer sacrifice to the gods or lose your head." Her answer was: "Do anything you have a mind to do! You will find me prepared to bear whatever it is!"

She was thereupon sentenced to death by beheading. When she was led to the place of execution, she raised her eyes to heaven and prayed: "O hope and glory of virgins, Jesus, good King, I beg of you that anyone who honors the memory of my passion, or who invokes me at the moment of death or in any need, may receive the benefit of your kindness." A voice was heard saying to her: "Come, my beloved, my spouse, see! Heaven's gates are opened to you and to those who will celebrate your passion with devout minds. I promise the help from heaven for which you have prayed."

When the saint had been beheaded, milk flowed from her body instead of blood, and angels took up the body and carried it from that place a twenty-days' journey to Mount Sinai, where they gave it honorable burial. (An oil still issues continuously from her bones and mends the limbs of all who are weak.) She suffered under the tyrant Maxentius or Maximinus, whose reign began about A. D. 310. How Maxentius was punished for this and other crimes is told in the legend of the Finding of the Holy Cross.

It is said that a certain monk from Rouen journeyed to Mount Sinai and stayed there for seven years, devoting himself to the service of Saint Catherine. He prayed insistently that he might be worthy to have a relic from her body, and suddenly one of the fingers broke off from her hand. The monk joyfully accepted God's gift and carried it back to his monastery.

It is also told that a man who had been devoted to Saint Catherine and often called upon her for help became careless in the course of time, lost his devotion, and no longer prayed to her. Then one time when he was at prayer, he saw in a vision a procession of virgins going by, and among them one who seemed more resplendent than the rest. As this virgin came closer to him, she covered her face and so passed in front of him with her face veiled. Being deeply impressed by her beauty he asked who she was, and one of the virgins answered: "That is Catherine, whom you used to know, but now, when you do not seem to know her, she has passed you by with her face veiled as one unknown to you."

It is worthy of note that Catherine is admirable in five respects: first in wisdom, second in eloquence, third in constancy, fourth in the cleanness of chastity, fifth in her privileged dignity.

Firstly, she is seen to be admirable in her wisdom, for she possessed every kind of philosophy. Philosophy, or wisdom, is divided into theoretical, practical, and logical. The theoretical is divided, according to some thinkers, into three parts — the intellectual, the natural, and the mathematical. Saint

Catherine had the theoretical in her knowledge of the divine mysteries, which knowledge she put to use especially in her argument against the rhetoricians, to whom she proved that there is only one true God and whom she convinced that all other gods are false. She possessed natural philosophy in her knowledge of all beings below God, and this she used in her differences with the emperor, as we have seen. The mathematical she displayed in her contempt for worldly things, because, according to Boethius, this science is concerned with abstract, immaterial forms. Saint Catherine had this knowledge when she turned her mind away from every material love. She showed that she had it when in answer to the emperor's question she said: "I am Catherine, daughter of King Costus. Though born to the purple . . ." and so on; and she used it principally with the queen, when she encouraged her to despise the world, to think little of herself, and to desire the kingdom of heaven.

The practical philosophy is divided into three parts, namely, the ethical, the economic, and the public or political. The first teaches how to strengthen moral behavior and adorn oneself with virtues, and it applies to people as individuals; the second teaches how to put good order into the life of the family, and applies to the father as head of the family; the third teaches how to rule well over the city, the people, and the commonwealth, and applies to governors of cities. Saint Catherine possessed this threefold knowledge; the first since she organized her life in accordance with all right moral standards, the second when she ruled in a praiseworthy manner the large household that was left to her, the third when she instructed the emperor wisely.

The logical philosophy also is divided into three parts, the demonstrative, the probable, and the sophistic. The first pertains to philosophers, the second to rhetoricians and dialecticians, the third to sophists. Clearly Catherine possessed this threefold knowledge, since it is written of her that she argued many matters with the emperor through a variety of syllogistic conclusions, allegorical, metaphorical, dialectical, and mystical.

Secondly, Catherine's eloquence was admirable: it was abundant when she preached, as we have seen in her preaching, and extremely convincing in her reasoning, as appeared when she said to the emperor: "You wonder at this temple built by the hands of artisans." Her speech had the power to attract the hearer, as is clear in the instances of Porphyrius and the queen, whom the sweetness of her eloquence drew to the faith. She was skillful in convincing, as we see in her winning over the orators.

Thirdly, consider her constancy. She was constant in the face of threats, meeting them with disdain, as, when the emperor threatened her, she replied:



"Whatever torments you have in mind, don't waste time. . ."; or again, "Do anything you have a mind to do, you will find me prepared . . ." She was firm in dealing with offers of gifts, which she scorned, as when the emperor promised to make her second only to the queen in his palace and she retorted: "Stop saying such things! It is a crime even to think them!" And she was constant under tortures, overcoming them, as we saw when she was put in a dungeon or on the wheel. Fourthly, Catherine was admirable in her chastity, which she preserved even amidst conditions that ordinarily put chastity at risk. There are five such conditions: abundant wealth, which softens resistance, opportunity, which invites indulgence, youth, which leans toward licentiousness, freedom, which shakes off restraint, and beauty, which allures. Catherine lived with all these conditions yet preserved her chastity. She had a huge abundance of wealth, which she inherited from her very rich parents. She had opportunity, being the mistress surrounded all day long by serving-people. She had youth and freedom, living in her palace alone and free. Of these four conditions it was said above that Catherine, when she was eighteen years old, lived alone in a palace filled with treasure and servants. She had beauty, as was noted: "She was lovely to behold, indeed of incredible beauty."

Lastly, she was admirable by reason of her privileged dignity. Some saints have received special privileges at the time of death — for instance, a visitation by Christ (Saint John the Evangelist), an outflow of oil (Saint Nicholas), an effusion of milk (Saint Paul), the preparation of a sepulcher (Saint Clement), and the hearing of petitions (Saint Margaret of Antioch, when she prayed for those who would honor her memory). Saint Catherine's legend shows that all these privileges were hers.

Doubts have been raised by some as to whether it was under Maxentius or under Maximinus that Catherine's martyrdom took place. At that time there were three emperors, namely, Constantine, who succeeded his father as emperor, Maxentius the son of Maximianus, named emperor by the praetorian guard at Rome, and Maximinus, who was made caesar in parts of the East. According to the chronicles Maxentius tyrannized the Christians in Rome, Maximinus in the East. It seems therefore, as some authors hold, that a scribe's error may have put Maxentius in place of Maximinus.

## 2. Saint Nicholas

The name Nicholas comes from *nicos*, which means victory, and *laos*, people; so Nicholas may be interpreted as meaning victory over a people, i.e., either victory over vices, which are many and mean, or as victory in the full sense, because Nicholas, by his way of life and his doctrine, taught the peoples to conquer sin and vice. Or the name is formed from *nicos*, victory, and *laus*, praise — so, victorious praise — or from *nitor*, shining whiteness, and *laos*, people, as meaning the bright cleanness of the people. Nicholas had in him that which makes for shining cleanness, since, according to Ambrose, "the word of God makes clean, as do true confession, holy thoughts, and good works."

The life of Saint Nicholas was written by learned men of Argos, called Argolics, Argos being, according to Isidore, a town in Greece, so the Greeks are also called Argolics. Elsewhere we read that his legend was written in Greek by the patriarch Methodius and translated into Latin by John the Deacon, who added much to it.

Nicholas, a citizen of Patera, was born of rich and pious parents. His father was named Epiphanes, his mother, Johanna. When, in the flower of their youth, they had brought him into the world, they adopted the celibate life thenceforth. While the infant was being bathed on the first day of his life, he stood straight up in the bath. From then on he took the breast only once on Wednesdays and Fridays. As a youth he avoided the dissolute pleasures of his peers, preferring to spend time in churches; and whatever he could understand of the Holy Scriptures he committed to memory.

After the death of his parents he began to consider how he might make use of his great wealth, not in order to win men's praise but to give glory to God. At the time a certain fellow townsman of his, a man of noble origin but very poor, was thinking of prostituting his three virgin daughters in order to make a living out of this vile transaction. When the saint learned of this, abhorring the crime he wrapped a quantity of gold in a cloth and, under cover of darkness, threw it through a window of the other man's house and withdrew unseen. Rising in the morning, the man found the gold, gave thanks to God, and celebrated the wedding of his eldest daughter. Not long thereafter the servant of God did the same thing again. This time the man, finding the gold and bursting into loud praises, determined to be on the watch so as to find out who had come to the relief of his penury. Some little time later Nicholas threw a double sum of gold into the house. The noise awakened the man and he pursued the fleeing figure, calling out, "Stop! Stop! Don't hide from me!" and ran faster and faster until he saw that it was



### 32. RELICS AT DURHAM CATHEDRAL (1383)

Every church had a least one saint's relic embedded in its altar stone; but larger churches — especially cathedrals — amassed collections of dozens, sometimes hundreds, of relics. Where a church boasted the relics of a particularly famous or powerful saint, pilgrims were sure to throng (though typically the spiritual and material fortunes of even famed shrines waxed and waned). The monastic cathedral at Durham housed the shrine of the tireless Northumbrian missionary and bishop St. Cuthbert (d. 687). Venerated in the Chapel of the Nine Altars built to display it along with the cathedral's other treasured relics, it became the focus of one of the major pilgrim shrines of England, though never as famous as Canterbury or Walsingham. The abundance and variety of relics at Durham suggest how much grander these two more famous shrines must have been, but even Durham's shrine attracted enough pilgrims to require stewards standing guard for crowd control. This excerpt from a late fourteenth-century inventory conveys a fairly vivid picture of a medieval shrine with dozens of reliquaries arrayed around the steps to the saint's tomb. Its mix of local saints (in this case figures from Anglo-Saxon Northumbria), early Christian saints, and biblical notables is typical of the kinds of relics found in larger churches throughout Europe. The excerpt from the account book of the shrine's monk custodian both indicates the kinds of pious offerings left by pilgrims seeking favors or offering thanks for ones granted, and suggests the wealth that could accumulate at popular shrines. By the later Middle Ages most relics had indulgences attached to them which increased their allure even more. Though the cult of relics may seem a quintessentially medieval preoccupation, it is worth remembering its enduring appeal. Martin Luther's staunch patron Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony kept a treasure trove of relics in his castle at Wittenberg. Three years into the German Reformation, a 1520 inventory of his collection listed 19,013 relics — including a wisp of Jesus's beard and bread from the Last Supper — with a total of 1,902,202 years and 270 days of indulgences attached to them! Modern readers bothered by some of the obviously spurious objects in Durham's collection might consider the degree to which medieval piety was driven by a different standard of what was genuine.

Source: trans. J. Shinnars from *Extracts from the Account Rolls of the Abbey of Durham*, ed. J. T. Fowler, Surtees Society v. 100 (Durham: Andrews & Co, 1898), v. II, pp. 425-430, 450-452. Latin.

A. D. 1383. This book is an account of the relics at the shrine of St. Cuthbert, compiled by Dom Richard de Segbruck, then custodian of the shrine, to describe what kind of relics there are and on what step of the shrine they are kept.

To begin, on the first or highest step at the south there is a gilded silver statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Next, a gilded silver statue of St. Oswald with one of his ribs contained in the statue's breast. Next there is one black



Pilgrims at a shrine

Three pilgrims seek cures at St. Edward the Confessor's shrine in Westminster Abbey. Two have squeezed into the niches often cut into the sides of shrines to allow pilgrims to get closer to the relics. On the floor are two "trindles" — thin wax tapers measured to the length of the petitioners' bodies, rolled into a coil, and offered to the saint in exchange for a miracle. A custodian monk rests before a book, perhaps a record of miracles wrought at the tomb. A nineteenth-century copy of a thirteenth-century drawing from a French translation of Aelred of Rievaulx's *Life of St. Edward*; reproduced in Daniel Rock's *Church of Our Fathers* (London: C. Dolman, 1852) v. 3, pt. 1, p. 418 after University of Cambridge Library MS Ee. iii, 59, fol. 65r.



cross called the Black Rood of Scotland. Next, another crystal cross (in the custody of the sacrist). Next there is a gold cross with jewels and gilded silver feet. Next there is another cross called the cross of St. Margaret, Queen of Scots. Next, one gilded silver cup donated by the Countess of Kent, with the banner of St. Cuthbert. Next, one silver arm-shaped reliquary containing a bone of St. Lucy the virgin. Next, a silver statue of St. Cuthbert donated by the Lord Bishop William. Next, one cross with a stand donated by Thomas Langley, bishop of Durham.

Next, on the step below the first there is one Gospel book decorated with gold and silver with an image of the Trinity on one side of it. Next, one gilded silver stag with a garment of St. John the Baptist enclosed in it. Next, another crystal cross of St. John the Baptist with an image of Christ crucified. Next, an indigo and grey box in a small green chest which sat on the coffin of St. Cuthbert inside his tomb for two hundred years or more.

Next, on the third step, in a small enameled chest, the cope of St. Cuthbert in which he laid in the earth for eleven years. Next, an ivory box with a garment of St. John the Baptist. Next, the book of St. Boisil, St. Cuthbert's teacher. Next, a small ivory chest with a fringed garment of St. Cuthbert. Next, St. Cuthbert's ivory scepter. Next, two griffin's claws. Next, five handkerchiefs for carrying the relics.

Next, one [blank space] decorated with gold and silver with bones and other relics of the apostles. Next, one crystal vial containing blood of the blessed man St. Thomas, the martyr of Canterbury.

Next, one silver reliquary with a silver chain containing various relics of the blessed Mary Magdalene. Next, one crystal vial with the hair and veil of St. Mary Magdalene. Next, one crystal vial with the rib and scorched bones of St. Lawrence. Next, one purse of cloth-of-gold with a crystal lens and various unlabeled fragments of relics. Next, one white cameo head with a crucifix carved on the back. Next, a tooth of St. Margaret, Queen of Scots, and one eagle-stone and some hair of St. Mary Magdalene, and one piece of the rod of Moses, and one pair of beads of St. Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, contained in two purses of patterned white velvet.

Next, one crystal vial decorated with gilded silver containing a garment of St. John the Baptist and a piece of his salver, a piece from the head of the blessed John Chrysostom, and a piece from the rib of the martyr St. Margaret. Next, one silk purse with a coat of arms containing the garment, some of the hair-shirt, and fingernails of St. Malachy the bishop, and some dust from St. Amphibalus the martyr, and a bone of St. Petronilla the virgin. Next, a bone of St. Martin the virgin [sic] and martyr, and a piece of St. Edward the Confessor's cape, and a bone of St. Andrew, and a piece of cloth from St.

Barbara the virgin, and from the hair of the abbot St. Bernard in a purse with a shield in various colors as above. Next, a small silver enameled chest with a skull bone of St. Benedict, and one tooth and an arm bone of St. Giles.

Next, one red purse with relics of St. Peter. Next, a bone of St. Caesarius [of Arles?], confessor. Next, one bone of St. Giles in a silver reliquary. Next, from the garment and dust from St. Denis, and hair from St. Bartholomew, the hermit of Farne and monk of Durham, in a crystal vial. Next, in a framework housing, a piece of the cloth that St. Ebba gave to St. Cuthbert on which he laid for 418 years and five months, and part of the chasuble in which he laid for eleven years.

Next, three griffin's [i.e., ostrich] eggs. Next, a red velvet purse embroidered with the Lamb of God. Next, two boxes with the hair and hair-shirt of the venerable Robert de Stanhope, and some bones of St. Columba the abbot with other relics. Next, one red box with the banner of St. Oswald, some bones of St. Patrick, relics of St. Julian the martyr, of Sebastian the martyr, of Eugenia the virgin, and some of St. Godric's beard.

Next, one small gilded and jeweled silver cross containing a piece of the Lord's Cross. Next, a piece from the Lord's manger in a blue silk purse. Next, four saints' bones in a small silver cross. Next, a piece of St. Godric's beard. Next, a little wooden box with some of the wood with which St. Lawrence was beaten and some tiny bones from the martyr St. Concordius, and pieces from St. Bernard the abbot's rib and from his hair, and a joint of St. Lawrence, partly burned by fire, in a crystal vial decorated with silver. Also bones from the holy martyrs Nereus and Achilleus and a bone of St. Felix the martyr, and one bone of St. Germanus the bishop, and a piece of the bishop St. Acca's chasuble, and one bone of St. Balbina in a silk purse with four pockets with white castles on it.

Next, a crystal pyx containing milk of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Next, a piece from the Blessed Virgin Mary's tomb and from her dress, and from the tomb and wimple of her mother Anne in a crystal vial with silver feet. Next, a black vial with the tooth of St. Stephen and pieces of his skull and bones. Next, in a purse with red piping, a stone from the Lord's sepulcher, a stone from the church of Bethlehem, a stone from the sepulcher on Mount Sinai, and from the rock on which St. Mary, Mother of God spilled her milk, and some of the oil of St. Mary of Sardinia. . . .

Next, an ivory statue of the Virgin Mary. Next, a piece of a bone of St. Sebastian, and of a bone of St. Fabian, and the tooth of St. Cecilia the virgin, and relics of the apostles Philip and Andrew, and a piece of St. Christina's garment in a white purse decorated with red tassels. Next, a crystal vial decorated with gilded silver containing manna from St. Mary's tomb and some



bone of St. Christopher, the finger joint of St. Stephen, some of the bread that the Lord blessed, some of St. Peter's skull bone, some of St. Helena's and St. Lawrence's bones, and from the tunic of St. Gregory, and from the Lord's Cross, and a bone from St. Giles. Next, a small gilded silver reliquary with the finger bone of St. Firmin the martyr.

Next, a crystal vial with the vestment of St. John the Evangelist and the rib of St. Edward the king. Next, teeth and bones from the martyr St. Cyriac in a white samite purse. Next, one pyx embellished with crystal stones containing flesh and fat from St. Thomas the martyr, and some of the clothes in which he was buried.

Next, the hauberk of St. Oswald the king . . . [gap in the ms] and from the cross that he erected in battle in one reliquary. Next, one black crystal pyx containing the sponge from Good Friday [i.e., the sponge dipped in gall and vinegar offered to Jesus on the cross] and some of the Lord's sepulcher, and a piece of the stone on which Jesus sat in Herod's palace. Next, some of the tree under which the three angels sat with Abraham. Next, a marvelously big, white, carved pearl.

Next, a silver cross with wood from the Cross inside. Next, some of St. Barbara the virgin's skirt in an ivory pyx. Next, three of St. Aidan the bishop's teeth with some other relics in a red muslin purse. Next, some of St. Nicholas's jawbone, hair shirt, and vestment, and some of his oil, bones, and tomb in a small silver enameled box. . . .

Next, a piece from the rock on which Christ stood when he ascended into heaven, and pieces from his manger and crib, and from Mount Calvary, from the rock on which Christ was born, from the place where he was crucified, and from the Lord's manger, and from his tunic, and from rocks from across the Jordan, and from his handkerchief [i.e., Veronica's veil imprinted with Jesus' face], with other relics of our Lord Jesus Christ in a crystal vial with four feet trimmed with copper. Next, the same sort of relics in a small red purse with a large label. Next, St. Dunstan's ivory comb in a multicolored silk purse.

Next, pieces from St. Godric's beard and hauberk, and from the bones of Saints Paula and Eustochium, her daughter, in a gilded silver reliquary. Next, one gilded silver cross with a crystal between the cross and its stand and with other precious stones of various colors. Next, some of the wood from the Lord's Cross and from his sepulcher, and from the stone that laid at the Lord's head in the sepulcher, and some wood from the tree in the Garden of Paradise, and from Mount Calvary in a crystal pyx. Next, one thorn from the crown of our Lord Jesus Christ donated by Lord Thomas Hatfield, Bishop of Durham, in a golden vial encased in a leather cover. . . .

*Dom Thomas de Lythe took up his duties as feretrarius, or custodian of the shrine, in 1398. The account below records items left at the shrine over the course of his three-year term as custodian. In addition to these items, pilgrims left money offerings of about £30 a year in a collection box near the shrine.*

Account of the custodian of the shrine rendered by Dom Thomas de Lythe on the feast of St. Edmund the Archbishop A.D. 1401.

....First, on the western gable of the shrine is attached that precious stone called "le Emeraud" (which the custodian had previously kept among the relics), estimated value: £3,000. Next, two good brooches donated by the reigning King Henry [IV], estimated value [blank space]. Next, two good brooches donated Duke Mowbray, estimated value: [blank space]. Next, one good brooch donated by the Earl of Rutland, value [blank space]. Next one good brooch donated by Lord Neville and another good brooch donated by his wife, the Countess Neville, estimated value: 20 marks. Next, one good brooch donated by Lord Henry Percy, estimated value: £10. Next, one good brooch donated by the Countess of Kent, estimated value: [blank space] marks. Next, one good brooch donated by the Earl of Salisbury, estimated value: 100s. Next, one brooch donated by Dom John of Charteron, monk, value 20s. Next, one brooch donated by one of the squires of Bishop John Fordham, value: 40s. Next, five brooches and six gilded silver buttons bought by the said Thomas de Lythe, value: 40s. Next, one gold pair of beads with a gold pendant donated by the wife of John de Killingall, value; 100s. Next, two good gold rings with diamonds donated by the knight, Sir Ralph Ferrers, estimated value: 40s. Next, two old lockets with two rings donated by Richard Redworth, value: 20s. Next, one old pendant donated by some woman, value 6s. 8p. Next, hanging there is a silver [model] boat which was gilded in the time of Thomas, value: 13s. 4p. Next, hanging there are various rings offered by anonymous pilgrims, value 40s. Next, one small pendant purchased by Thomas from William Cawood, value 6s. 8p. Next, one small gilded cross, value: 6s. 8p.. Next, hanging there are five small gold rings with gemstones and silver chains which were previously in the keeping of the shrine's custodian, value: 5 marks. Next, one gold cross with various gemstones, value: 40s.

Sum of the estimates value of the offerings attached to the shrine's west gable during the term of office of Thomas de Lythe, custodian: £3,463 10s.

Next on the south side there is a gold statue of the Blessed Virgin with the coat of arms of the Bishop of Durham which the bishop acquired through the mediation of Thomas de Lythe in exchange for a precious jewel offered at the shrine of St. Cuthbert during the term of office of the said



Thomas by the knight William Scrope for a certain transgression he made against the liberty of Durham, estimated value: £500. Next, on the same side of the shrine, one leg bone of the earl Warenne which was gilded during the term of office of the same Thomas, value: 13s. 4p. Next, attached there is one jewel shaped like a lancet donated by the smithy William Prentice, value 10s. Next, two pendants with two rings donated by two pilgrims, value: 13s. 4p. Next, one pendant donated by William Pencher, value 6s 8p. Next, one pendant donated by the sister of John Todd, value: 10s. Next, two pendants donated by two women pilgrims, value 10s.

Sum of the estimated value of offerings attached to the shrine's south side during the term of office of Thomas de Lythe, custodian: £503 3s. 4d.

Next during the term of office of the aforesaid Thomas there were attached to the north side of the shrine on the left side one gold noble donated by the wife of Henry Hastiler. And one gold noble with a gold half-penny donated by a certain citizen of Berwick. Next, one quarter of a gold noble donated by Lord Henry Percy. Next on the same northern side two rings donated by the chaplain Thomas de Lomley, value: 10s. Next one gilded silver tabernacle with a picture of the Blessed Virgin donated by the Lady of Ross, value: 5 marks. Next, one gilded silver statue donated by the Countess Douglas, value: 5 marks. next, one gilded silver scallop shell and one model boat donated by some pilgrim, value: 5s. Next, one gold half-penny donated by the knight Robert Conyers. Next, one gold half-penny donated by some pilgrim. Next, one pair of white beads with a silver locket donated by the wife of Henry Hastiler, value: 10s. Next, one pair of amber beads donated by an anonymous woman, value: 6s 8p. Excluding these things, various other things were offered and attached to the shrine during the term of office of Dom Thomas, which do not come to memory at the moment. Moreover, the ironwork with lights around the shrine with making and painting a room for the custodian, and the work on the pavement, doors, and other things around the shrine beyond the value of 20 marks, were done at the urging and the personal expense of the said Dom Thomas.

Sum of the estimated value of the offerings made and attached to the north side of the shrine during the term of office of Thomas de Lythe, custodian: £23 20p.

### 33. THOMAS MORE'S DIALOGUE ON SAINTS AND THEIR SHRINES (1529)

*Though he perched on the cusp of the English Reformation and was imbued with the ideals of the Northern Renaissance humanists, Thomas More's (1478-1535) basic religious instincts were still deeply embedded in the late medieval world. As chancellor of England, for instance, he was a tireless prosecutor of heretics; and the last works he wrote while imprisoned in the Tower before his execution — including his treatises on Christ's passion and sadness, several prayers, and his famous Dialogue on Comfort — were essentially medieval in thought and tone. In his Dialogue Concerning Heresies (1529), undertaken at the request of the bishop of London to combat the rising tide of Lutheranism in England, More holds a fictional conversation with a young schoolmaster of Protestant sympathies called "the Messenger," grappling with him over a range of issues at the heart of the Reformation. Justification by faith, the nature of the church, translating the Bible, and saints and their shrines are some of the subjects covered in the four-book treatise, written in English to make it more accessible. Though late in date, it is an excellent summary of the salient features of medieval devotion to saints. In its critique of the abuses surrounding popular veneration of saints, it mirrors More's good friend Erasmus's lampooning colloquy called "A Pilgrimage for Religion's Sake." Yet despite the devotional excesses to which the cult of saints was prone, More argued that the abuse of it did not mean it was itself evil.*

Source: modernized by J. Shinnars from *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies in The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, ed. T. N. C. Lawler, G. Marc'hadour, R. C. Marius (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), v. 6, pt. 1, pp. 226-234. English.

#### Book II, Chapter 10

*The messenger raises many objections against pilgrimages, relics, and the worshipping of saints because of many superstitious practices they use, unlawful petitions asked of them, and the harm growing therefrom.*

"Sir," [the Messenger] said, "you have to my mind very nicely treated the matter that it is not in vain to pray to saints or to worship them and hold their relics in some reverence. But sir, all this misses the main abuse, for though saints may hear us and help us too, and are glad and willing to do so, and God is contented also that they and their relics and images are held in honor, yet neither he nor they can be content with the manner of the worship. First, because it takes away worship from him since we offer them the



## 56. A SPIRITUAL REGIMEN FOR A FIFTEENTH-CENTURY GENTLEMAN

*These instructions for an anonymous married English layman of the early to mid-fifteenth century were written in Latin by his spiritual director. The word "welawey" (or "wellaway") scattered throughout the text is an expression of sorrow. St. Godric of Finchale (c. 1065-1170) was a renowned English hermit who, according to one legend, was once attacked in bed by the devil before he had a chance to sign himself with the cross.*

Source: trans. W. A. Pantin, "Instructions for a Devout and Literate Layman" in *Medieval Learning and Literature, Essays Presented to Richard William Hunt*, ed. J. J. G. Alexander and M. T. Gibson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), pp. 398-400. Latin.

Always carry this about in your purse.

Remember to take holy water every day.

You should get up out of bed with all swiftness.

Make the sign of the cross at the head, at the feet, at the hands, and at the side.

"In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost may we be delivered from pains and sins, Amen."

Concerning Saint Godric, who did not at once sign himself.

Say: "Into thy hands, Lord Jesus Christ"; Our Father; Hail Mary; I believe in God; immediately afterwards: "Thou who hast made me, have mercy upon us and upon me."

At the door when you go out say: "All the men of this city or town from the greater [or the mayor?] to the less are pleasing to God, and only I am worthy of hell. Woe is me. Welawey"; let this be said from all your heart so that the tears run; you need not always say it with your mouth; it is sufficient to say it with a groan.

As far as the church, say no other word except: "Thou hast made me [etc.]. Yet sometimes if you meet a dog or other beast, you may say: "Lord, let it bite me, let it kill me; this beast is much better than I; it has never sinned. I after so much grace have provoked you; I have turned my back to you and not my face, and I have done nothing good, but all ill. Woe is me. Welawey."

On entering the church say: "Lord, it is as a dog and not as a man that I presume to enter your sanctuary. Woe is me. Welawey."

Then, plucking up some confidence, with Mary Magdalene throw yourself at the feet of the most sweet Jesus, and wash them with your tears and

anoint them and kiss them; and if not with your eyes and mouth, at least do this in your heart. Do not climb up to the cross, but in your heart say with the publican: "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner."

Afterwards say the matins of the Blessed Virgin, reverently and not too fast.

When you hear mass, do not by any means engage in talk with other people; but while the clerks are singing, look at the books of the church; and on every feast day, look at the Gospel and the exposition of it and at the Epistle. There is a certain *Legenda Sanctorum* which is very old; look at that and especially at the Common of Saints at the end of the book.

I do not counsel you to go up to the altars, as we used to do; but be afraid, and say what you have to say in a side chapel with the Lord Jesus.

On weekdays, after the others have gone, say one fifty of the Psalter of the Blessed Virgin [i.e., five decades of the rosary]; and then going back to your house have nothing else in your heart or your mouth except "Hail Mary full of grace the Lord is with thee"; sometimes the whole of it, sometimes only "Hail Mary." When you sit at table, ruminate in your mind those two words, or as far as the middle, or sometimes to the end. And every time when you drink at table, say in your heart: "In the name of the Father," as above; make the sign [of the cross] with your hand outside the table.

If dinner is not ready when you get home, go to that room and say another fifty of Our Lady.

When you dine, and also after dinner, say grace standing.

And lest the tongue speak vain or hurtful things, let there be reading, now by one, now by another, and by your children as soon as they can read; and think of the wicked Dives, tormented in hell in his tongue more than in any other members.

Let the family be silent at table, and always, as far as is possible.

Expound something in the vernacular which may edify your wife and others.

When there is no reading have your meditations; and let there be these three at least this year [?], that is to say: "Hail Mary," "Thou who hast made me, have mercy upon us and upon me," "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost may we be delivered, Amen."

You can make a cross on the table out of five bread crumbs; but do not let anyone see this, except your wife; and the more silent and virtuous she is, the more heartily you should love her in Christ.

After grace, said standing, go to that private place, and send for William Bonet or Sir William Trimenel or others as you please, and confer with them there until vespers.



Drink once, or twice at most, and that in summer. By no means let anyone spend anything, not even one farthing, but let all be done for God's sake.

I forbid you forever all spectacles, that is to say, dances, buckler-play [i.e., fencing], dicing, wrestling, and the like.

Look back, like blessed Anselm, and see how your whole life has been barren or wicked.

Let your supper be brief, lest you ingurgitate, and let all be done as above at dinner.

After supper or before, sometimes before as well, go up into your cell and pray.

As the determiners at Oxford do: When you are in bed, go back to the beginning of the day, and look diligently in your heart: if you have done any evil, and there be sorry; if any good, and there give thanks to God, always in fear and trembling, and do not think it certain that you will survive till the morrow.

# 57. A FIFTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLISH YEOMAN'S COMMONPLACE BOOK (1470s)

*Robert Reynes seems to have been the reeve, or local overseer, of the village and manor of Acle in Norfolk held by Tintern Abbey. Born and raised in the village, he also held other important village offices such as churchwarden, alderman of the local guild, and perhaps village scribe. What little we know of his property holdings suggests that he was a fairly prosperous peasant, what his contemporaries would have called a yeoman. His commonplace book, which he undoubtedly wrote himself mostly between 1470-75, is a random gathering of things that interested him professionally and personally. It offers a very rare and invaluable glimpse into the private devotional life of a fairly ordinary, if fairly well-educated, man. For scattered among the manorial and legal records, financial tallies, notarial contracts, royal edicts, local history, family genealogy, notes on weights and measures, and even travel tips, are dozens of entries in English and Latin touching his religious preoccupations, both orthodox and not so orthodox. He culled almost all of this material from the popular moral writing of his day, though we do not know how he gained access to this literature. Most of the entries touching on religion are included here. Those marked with an \* were written in Latin; the others were in English. In modernizing the verse, the rhymes and meters of the Middle English are preserved as much as sense allows. Numbers and titles in brackets are modern designations.*

Source: trans. J. Shinnars from Cameron Louis, *The Commonplace Book of Robert Reynes of Acle* (New York & London: Garland, 1980), passim. Middle English and Latin.

## [15. The drops of Christ's Blood]

The number of these drops all  
I will rehearse in general:  
500 thousand for to tell,  
Plus 47,000 as well  
500 also great and small  
Here is the number of them all.

[That is, 547,500 drops shed during the Passion.]

## 59. INDULGENCES (1216-1520)

An indulgence was a remission of the punishment — or penance — imposed on someone confessing a sin; it did not cancel either the sinner's duty to confess the sin or the guilt due to it. The first significant and widely regarded indulgence was the plenary indulgence that Urban II granted in 1098 to all Christians who joined the First Crusade to recapture the Holy Land. But plenary indulgences, which deleted all the punishment earned for sins, were rare. The more common partial indulgences erased some shorter term of punishment, typically the "quarantine" of 40 days. Certificates of indulgence almost always demanded that those wishing to receive them first had to be contrite and confessed before the indulgence took effect. But people frequently misunderstood or ignored this proviso, and the popular conception tended to be that indulgences could substitute for confession, a misconception churchmen worked to undo fairly fruitlessly. Indulgences could be granted for almost any pious act, large or small: for building or repairing churches, monasteries, hospitals, public roads or bridges, for giving alms to the poor, for visiting holy sites like Jerusalem, Rome, saints' shrines or important churches, for praying certain cycles of prayers or saying special devotions, and for crusading against enemies of the church. As grants of indulgences increased beginning in the thirteenth century, an inflationary spiral set in; people collected more and more indulgences for ever-growing terms of remission so that by the fifteenth century indulgences were typically measured in thousands of years instead of days.

### 1. The Jubilee indulgence of 1300

The indulgence that Boniface VIII issued for the Jubilee Year of 1300 was the first widely recognized plenary indulgence granted for purposes other than a crusade. Though Boniface could find no written proof in the papal archives of plenary indulgences issued in jubilee years past, one chronicler reports the story of a 107-year-old man whose father had impressed upon him the rewards granted in the last jubilee. Carried to the pope by two of his sons, this centenarian keeper of the oral tradition helped convince him to issue the indulgence. Boniface's Jubilee was, by all contemporary accounts, an unqualified success. Several hundred thousand pilgrims poured into Rome during the year. In fact, the indulgence caused such excitement that in 1342 a Roman delegation traveled to Avignon imploring Clement VI to cut the interval between jubilees in half since human life was brief. Convinced by their pleas — or perhaps by a sonnet Petrarch addressed to him on the same subject — Clement set the next Jubilee for 1350. His bull of 1343, *Unigenitus dei filius*, officially declared the theory of Christ's "treasury of merits" as the foundation for indulgences. It argued that one drop of the sacred blood was enough to redeem the world; thus, the great effusion Jesus

shed on the cross plus the merits of Mary and the saints served as a reservoir on which the church could draw to wash away the penance due for confessed sins.

Source: trans. J. Shinnars from Pope John XXII's *Extravagantes* 5.9.1. in E. Friedberg, *Corpus Juris Canonici*, (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1881), cc. 1303-04. Latin.

The faithful account of our ancestors holds that great remissions of sins and indulgences are granted to those going to the honorable basilica of [Peter], the Prince of the Apostles in the city [of Rome]. We, therefore, who by virtue of the duty of our office most willingly strive for and attend to the salvation of everyone, by apostolic authority confirm, approve, and also renew and, by this present document, fortify with our patronage these kinds of remissions and indulgences, holding them each and every one valid and pleasing. But, for the most blessed apostles Peter and Paul to be more fully honored as the faithful visit their basilicas in the city more devoutly, and for the faithful to consider themselves even more sated with the largess of spiritual favors through frequent visits of this kind, we — through the mercy of Almighty God, the merits of his same apostles, the authority granted by the counsel of our brothers, and the plenitude of apostolic power — in the current year 1300 (dating from last Christmas) and each centennial to follow do grant and will grant not just full and generous but the fullest possible pardon of all their sins to all who, truly contrite and confessed, reverently visit and will visit these basilicas in this present year and in each centennial to follow. We order that whoever wishes to share in this indulgence granted by us must go to these basilicas at least once a day for at least thirty days successively or at intervals if they are Romans; if they are pilgrims or outsiders, for fifteen days in a similar way. A more effective indulgence will result and someone will be more rewarded who will visit these basilicas more frequently and devoutly. May no act of men in general infringe on this record of our confirmation, approval, renewal, concession, and decree, etc. Given at Rome at Saint Peter's, February 22 in the sixth year of our pontificate [1300].



### 2. A model indulgence (1300)

Bishops as well as popes could grant indulgences, though the Fourth Lateran Council limited their length to between 40 days to a year (a limit often later ignored). This exemplar from a legal formulary of 1300 is unusual in that it grants an indulgence for prayers on behalf of the members of an apparently ordinary private family as opposed to members of a royal or noble house. The *see* of Nicastro was in Calabria.

Source: trans. J. Shinnars from J. E. Thorold Rogers, "Roll of the Thirteenth Century Containing Various Legal Forms," *Archaeological Journal* 22 (1865) p. 62. Latin.



To all the faithful of Christ who shall examine these present letters, we, A., B., and C., by divine mercy bishops of Nicastro, etc., give greetings in the everlasting Lord. Because it is pious to pray on behalf of the living and the dead that they may be absolved from the bonds of their sins, we think that grateful and pious service is paid to God as often as we stir the minds of the faithful to works of piety and charity. For this reason, to all those who are truly contrite and confessed who shall say an Our Father and a Hail Mary with devout mind for the souls of R., H., and H., the children of [J. and his wife, A.], whose bodies rest in the cemetery of Blessed Mary of T. in the diocese of Chichester, and Nicholas whose body is buried in the church of T., and however many times or whenever they shall pray for the state of the health of J. and his wife A., and for H., the mother of J. while they are alive and for their souls after they have died, from the mercy of Almighty God and by the authority conceded to his apostles Peter and Paul, each of us mercifully grants in the Lord to each of them indulgences of forty days from the penance enjoined on them, provided it is the local bishop's wish to agree and consent to this. In witness of this matter we have ordered our seals to be attached to this document. Given at Rome in the year of the Lord 1300, thirteenth indiction, in the sixth year of the pontificate of the Lord Pope Boniface VIII.

Sum of the days [of indulgences]: *blank*

The lord G[ilbert of St. Leofard], bishop of Chichester has approved these indulgences and has ratified them as authentic strengthened by his seal.

### 3. The Portiuncula indulgence (1216)



*The plenary indulgence attached to the tiny church of Santa Maria Portiuncula, which St. Francis had rebuilt with his own hands, made it one of the most popular pilgrim centers of the later Middle Ages. But the indulgence caused controversy almost from the moment it appeared, for there is no official document demonstrating that it was ever formally issued. Bishop Teobald of Assisi wrote the following account in 1310, almost a century after the event it purports to record, to certify the legitimacy of the indulgence. According to him, in 1216 Pope Honorius III granted Francis a plenary indulgence for anyone visiting the church at Portiuncula; but it was valid only once a year from early evening August 1 to sunset (later midnight) August 2. Teobald reports that Honorius's cardinals feared that the Portiuncula indulgence, granted for a comparatively minor pilgrimage, would undermine the only other plenary indulgence then available: the one granted for crusaders fighting in the Holy Land.*

Source: trans. E. Guernsey Salter in Raphael M. Huber, *The Portiuncula Indulgence*, Franciscan Studies XIX (New York: Joseph W. Wagner, 1938), pp. 6-7; revised and corrected. Latin.

When the blessed Francis was staying at Santa Maria Portiuncula, it was revealed to him one night by the Lord that he should go to Pope Honorius, who then was at Perugia, to seek an indulgence for the church of Santa Maria Portiuncula, then being repaired by him. Rising at early morning, he called for Brother Masseo of Marignano as his companion, and going with him to the Lord Pope Honorius, said to him, "Holy Father, lately I repaired a church to the honor of the glorious Virgin. I beseech Your Holiness to give it an indulgence to be granted without any obligations." He answered, "This may not be conveniently done, for whoever seeks an indulgence should rightly offer a helping hand to deserve it. But show me for how many years you desire it, and how large an indulgence I should grant it." St. Francis said, "Holy Father, may it please Your Holiness to give me not years, but souls." The lord pope said, "What do you mean by souls?" Blessed Francis said, "Holy Father, if it please Your Holiness, I wish that all those who come to that church contrite and confessed, and duly absolved by a priest, shall be absolved from punishment and blame in heaven and on earth, from the day of their baptism to the day and hour of their entrance into the aforesaid church." The lord pope answered, "This is a considerable thing you seek, Francis, for it is not the Roman Curia's custom to grant such an indulgence." The Blessed Francis said, "My lord, what I seek, I seek not on my own behalf, but on behalf of him who sent me, the Lord Jesus Christ." The lord pope instantly conferred the same, saying three times, "It is my pleasure that you should have it." Then the lords cardinal that were present said, "Consider, lord, that if you grant this man such an indulgence, you are ruining the one granted to them who go across the seas [on crusade] and reducing the indulgence of the apostles Peter and Paul to nothing so that it will be reckoned worthless." The lord pope answered, "We have given and granted it to him, and we cannot and should not undo what we have done. But let us restrict it so that it shall last for one natural day." Then calling Brother Francis, he said to him, "Look, from now on we grant that any who shall come and enter the said church truly contrite and confessed, shall be absolved from punishment and blame. And we wish that this shall be valid each year forever, but for one day only; namely, from the first vespers through the night to vespers the following day." The Blessed Francis, bowing his head, started to leave the palace. The lord pope, seeing him go out, called him, saying, "O simpleton, where are you going? What proof do you carry away with you concerning this indulgence?" The Blessed Francis answered, "Your word alone suffices. If it is God's work, it is for him to manifest his own work. Concerning this I desire no other document, but let the Blessed Virgin Mary alone be my charter, Christ my notary, and the angels my witnesses."

# 74. LAST WILLS AND TESTAMENTS (1377-1383)

*Medieval last wills were usually drawn up by testators on their death beds. Since scribes and notaries followed legal formulas in composing them, since those attending the dying urged them not to omit certain standard (and often obligatory) pious bequests, since pious undertakings could be limited by income, and since imminent death tends to focus the mind on the hereafter and how to get there, wills cannot be taken as ironclad indicators of a testator's routine religious leanings. Still, when their bequests veer even slightly from standard formulas, they can throw some useful light on what devotions preoccupied a Christian in life and especially near death. For instance, the pilgrimages that Katherine Rokelond posthumously launched on her behalf to some of the major shrines of England (Canterbury, Walsingham, Bromholm, Bury St. Edmund's) suggest that they held a valuable place in her devotional life. Katherine and the two other testators below were all fairly prosperous, allowing them freer rein with their pious bequests.*

Source: trans. J. Shinnars from Norwich, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich Consistory Court Register Heydon, fols. 144r, 211r, 213v. Latin.

1. In the name of God. Amen. I, Katherine Rokelond, living at Heigham near Norwich, on the fifteenth before the kalends of September [Aug. 18], the year of the Lord 1377, establish my testament in this manner: First, I bequeath my soul to God Almighty, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and all the saints; and my body to be buried at the parish church of Heigham. Also I bequeath twenty pounds of wax to burn around my body on the day of my burial. Also I bequeath 40 pence to the main altar of the aforesaid church [for unpaid tithes]. Also I bequeath 30 pence to the rector of the aforesaid church for celebrating [my funeral]. Also I bequeath 12 pence to the parish clerk of the aforesaid church for his labor. Also I bequeath 6 shillings 8 pence for making repairs to the aforesaid church. Also I bequeath 2 shillings to Dom Geoffrey Canyard, chaplain. Also I bequeath 2 shillings to Dom Adam, chaplain. Also I bequeath to Benedict Barber one folding table with a cutting spade and other implements from my garden. Also I bequeath to the wife of the aforesaid Benedict ten pounds of wool, a spinning-wheel, wool card, poke, and other things needed for wool-working. Also I bequeath two silver spoons to the daughter of the said Benedict. Also I bequeath one plain pair of red clogs to Emma Geye of Heigham. Also I bequeath one plain pair of blue clogs to the wife of John Horn. Also I bequeath one cart made of cypress to Margery Messenger. Also to my three godsons I bequeath 3 shillings to be divided in equal portions. Also I bequeath one pair of silver [rosary] beads

with a gold brooch to the cathedral church of the Holy Trinity at Norwich. Also I bequeath one gold ring to the chapel of the Blessed Mary of Walsingham. Also I bequeath one ring with a stone called a sapphire to the chapel of the Blessed Mary of Arnelingham in Yarmouth. Also I bequeath a silver ring to the church of Bromholm. Also I bequeath and wish that at my expense one man should go on pilgrimage to St. Thomas at Canterbury, offering there one penny at his shrine and one penny at the head of St. Thomas; also one penny at [the shrine of] St. Augustine of Canterbury. Also one penny at [Mary's shrine] at Walsingham and one penny at Kelling. Also one penny at [the shrine of] St. Edmund at Bury. Also I bequeath for making repairs to the church of St. James at Norwich one copper pot, and Bartholomew Barker is to be delivered of the same. Also I bequeath for making repairs to the parish church of St. Margaret in Norwich one copper pot with a ring, and Gilbert Gronge is to be delivered of the same. Also I bequeath 13 shillings 4 pence to all my executors for their labor. Also I bequeath to Francis Horner of Holt one lined fur coat with a hood and two silver spoons. Also I bequeath five marks to Dom Thomas to celebrate one annual mass at Christmas in the year to come. Also I bequeath 20 shillings to each of the mendicant orders of friars of the city of Norwich. Also I bequeath 6 pence to each bed of the hospital of St. Giles and the Norman's Hospital. Also I bequeath to Robert Popy of Westwick one long trestle table and a copper bowl closed with a lock. Also I bequeath twopence to each sick person at the gates of the city of Norwich. Also I bequeath and wish that from the money received from my tenement called "Cornerplace" in the parish of St. Benedict of Westwick in Norwich one suitable chaplain should celebrate mass for three years ongoing in the parish church of Heigham for my soul and the souls of all the faithful departed. And to carry out this testament and pay my debts, I bequeath all my tenements existing within the franchise of the city of Norwich and its suburbs to be sold by my executors named below whom I make, ordain, and appoint: Robert Kenton, rector of the church of Heigham; Robert Botcher; and John Medilton of the same place, so that they should dispose and ordain from all my goods movable and immovable as well as houses, gardens, and other things belonging to me inside and outside the city of Norwich as it will seem to them to please God and profit my soul. Dated the day and year given above.

2. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. I, Roger de Wylasham, knight, being of sound mind and good memory, on Sunday, the feast of the Finding of the Holy Cross [May 3] in the year of the Lord 1383 establish my testament in this manner: First, I bequeath my soul to



God Almighty, to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and to all the saints; and my body to be buried in the church of Thourston under the arch between the said church and the chapel of St. James. Also I bequeath 3 shillings 4 pence to the main altar of the same church [for unpaid tithes]. Also I bequeath 3 shillings 4 pence to the main altar of the church of Runhall and 46 shillings 8 pence for the repair of that same church. Also I bequeath 6 shillings 8 pence to the main altar of the church of Mattishall and five marks for the repair of that church's bell tower. Also I bequeath 20 shillings for the repair of the church and the bell tower of the church of Wylasham. Also I bequeath 6 shillings 8 pence to the Prioress of Carrow. Also 3 shillings 4 pence to each professed nun and 2 shillings to each nun not yet professed of that aforesaid convent. Also I wish that within a month after my death, my executors have one thousand masses celebrated for me and for all the souls to whom I am bound. And the rest of all my goods, except those bequeathed above, I give and assign to my wife, Katherine, to Robert de Kenton, Walter de Gilderford, and the chaplain Roger Cristion, the which Katherine, Robert, Walter, and Roger, I in fact appoint as executors of this my testament, whom I ask that they keep it in mind to pay my debts and fulfill my will to the best of their ability as it seems best to expedite my soul. Dated the day and year given above.

3. In the name of God. Amen. I, Anabella Maloyse, once the wife of John de Holveston, establish my testament on the Tuesday [July 16] immediately before the feast of St. Margaret the virgin in the year of the Lord 1383 in this manner: I bequeath my soul to God, to Blessed Mary, and to all the saints, and my body to be buried among the friars of the convent of St. Augustine, Norwich, next to the aforesaid John, once my husband. Also I bequeath 20 shillings to be spent for my funeral on the day of my burial. Also 20 shillings to the same brothers. Also 20 shillings for relief of the poor on the day of my burial. Also I bequeath 13 shillings 4 pence to the [cathedral] church of the Holy Trinity, Norwich. Also 6 shillings 4 pence for the repair of the church of St. Peter Haveringland. Also I bequeath 3 shillings 4 pence to William, parish chaplain of the church of the Holy Cross. Also I bequeath one dosser and my best bench-cover with six cushions to William Doff of Holveston, my godson. Also to the same William six silver spoons. Also to the same William one complete set of priest's vestments with an alb made of fustian. Also to Dom Giles, my son, one silver cup with a lid. Also to the same person, my red psalter. Also I bequeath to Margery, my goddaughter, my one best bed with a tapestry. Also my two best gowns with hoods to the said Margery. Also one white psalter with one pair of amber [rosary] beads to

Petronilla de Henstede. Also one russet tunic to Alice Jugg. Also my pewter vase to Margery de Enges, my sister. Also I give and bequeath the rest of all my goods to my executors to carry out faithfully this my testament; and I appoint these as my executors, namely Richard Spicer of Orford; William de Worsted, citizen of Norwich; William de Holveston, my son; and the chaplain Giles de Holveston, my son. Also I bequeath one gold ring with one stone called a diamond to the image of St. Mary of Walsingham. Also 3 shillings, 4 pence to the Friars Preachers of Norwich; also 3 shillings, 4 pence to the Friars Minor of the same city; also 3 shillings, 4 pence to the Friars Carmelites of the same city.