

RITUAL AND SOCIETY IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Thesis

If you are planning to get married, if you have been baptized, if your family has buried a dear one, if you have followed Queen Elizabeth, Prince Charles and Lady Dianne in the news, you may be curious about certain rituals we observe today. The origins of marriage, baptism, funeral rites, and coronation lie in the distant past, however, and our understanding of how they developed has been lost on us, even while we continue to participate in them.

Ritual has a central functional value in every society. It expresses the most fundamental human needs, both physical and spiritual. "Ritual forms the framework within which higher ethical and spiritual conceptions have developed" (E. O. James). If this is true, the study of ritual has value for understanding ourselves, our behavior, and our beliefs. It also has value for understanding people of other times and other civilizations. Medieval Society left a rich intellectual and cultural heritage. The thesis of this course is that one illuminating and previously neglected way to approach the study of the intellectual and social history of the Medieval period is through its ritual.

Description and Goal

During the first eight sessions of the course we will look in detail at medieval rites and ritual including: Christian Initiation, the Liturgy of the Mass, Holy Orders (clerical ordination), marriage, life in the cloister, and life in a mountain village. We will examine the words uttered, gestures performed, symbols used, regalia employed, and the time and place in which both formal and informal ritual occurs. These six topics have been chosen for a combination of reasons: the absolute centrality of some to medieval life; my desire to choose rituals that were done in public as the norm and where a community larger than the immediate family contributes to the ceremony in a necessary way; my purpose to show that ritual extends beyond the sacraments of the church.

In this seminar we wish to remain sensitive to the fact that patterns of ritual observation, especially "rites of passage," have universal application in the most primitive and advanced societies. At the same time, however, our goal is to immerse ourselves as thoroughly as possible in the setting, mood, language, and actions of medieval men and women in order to appropriate a mentality very different from our own.

In the last four sessions of the course, each student will present his or her study of another medieval rite, independently researched, of their own choosing. (More on this below). Some background information is necessary for the study of ritual in the Medieval West, and in the first weeks of the course I will be speaking on certain topics, such as Sources for the Study of Medieval Ritual (the patristic and medieval books and art); The Liturgical Calendar; and Medieval Use of Symbolism and Biblical Typology.

Materials and Requirements

Everyone in the class should purchase the following books (listed in the order in which they will be assigned):

Jungmann, J. A. The Early Liturgy to the Time of Gregory the Great
(U. of Notre Dame Press, 1959 ed., ISBN 0-268-00083-2)

Stevenson, K. Nuptial Blessing: A Study of Christian Marriage Rites
(Oxford U. Press, New York, 1983, ISBN 0-19-520419-0 pbk. \$9.95.

Meisel, A.C. & del Mastro, M.L., eds., The Rule of Saint Benedict
(Image Books, Garden City, N. J., 1975 ISBN 0-385-00948-8 pbk. \$2.95.

Ladurie, E. Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error
(Vintage Books, New York, 1979 ISBN 0-394-72964-1 pbk.

Other required reading for the course will be distributed in the form of xeroxed hand-outs from books that are out of print. This course is innovative, and there are few books in print in 1987 and at an affordable price that provide the primary sources for the study of medieval rituals in translation. The resources of the Harvard library are extensive, however, and weekly assignments will include library research. The requirements of the course include: 1) brief oral reports weekly on a research assignment pertaining to the required reading; 2) reading as assigned in the syllabus; 3) a research paper, 15-20 pages, typed, with outline and bibliography; 4) a one hour presentation and discussion of your research paper in class.

The research paper is the major requirement. You will have the opportunity to research a medieval rite of your own choosing, describing its ceremony, history, medieval interpretation and importance. The following are some suggested topics only:

- Death and Burial
- Confession and Penance
- Pilgrimage
- Taking the Cross (Crusade)
- Trial by Ordeal
- Dedication of a Church
- Consecration of Nuns, Virgins, and Widows
- Canonization of a Saint
- Homage (vassalage)
- Knighting
- Ritual Combat (the tournament, the duel)
- Oblation of Children to Monasteries
- Gathering of a Synod (Church Council)
- Extreme Unction (anointing of the sick and dying)
- Exorcism
- Processions (Rogations, Translation of Relics, Flagellants)
- Excommunication
- Various ritualistic patterns of medieval occupations, including:
Prostitution, Trade Fairs, Guild Practices, Student Life in a University; Court Etiquette.

Approach

It is not necessary that the student have any previous background in Medieval History, or a foreign language. However, if you do have some Latin, you will certainly have the opportunity to use it. We will approach the medieval world as a team, and will depend upon one another to acquire our information. Our approach to the subject matter will also be dramatic-interactive, a "you are there!" approach, through the showing of slides, displaying of objects, acting out of dialogue and gestures, and visiting of places (whether on film or foot). By the end of the course it is hoped that each participant will have had some fun, will have learned something about themselves, and will have gained an appreciation for a culture and mentality very different from our own.

*****For those who have had little or no Medieval History, I suggest any one of the following short and very readable introductions:

Hollister, C.W. Medieval Europe: A Short History (5th ed., New York, 1982)

Claster, J. N. The Medieval Experience: 300-1400 (New York U. Press, 1982)

Peters, E. Europe and the Middle Ages (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1983)

Also, an excellent pictorial view of medieval culture containing medieval iconography, architecture, and artifacts I recommend your browsing:

Delort, R. Life in the Middle Ages (Greenwich House, N. Y., 1983 ed.)

Finally, the most important and widely read book of the Middle Ages was the Bible. If you do not own a Bible you will need to purchase one for this course. (I recommend the Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha.)

Calendar and Assignments

Week I

Introduction

Sources for the Study of Medieval Ritual

Investigation of Resources at Harvard (trip to library)

Assignment for next week: reading on the formation of the Christian calendar and intro to paschal baptism (140 pp. total):

1) Jungmann, pp. 19-28, 122-163, 253-277, (= Calendar)
pp. 74-96 (= Baptism)

2) Reserved reading in E.Yarnold, The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: Baptismal Homilies of the Fourth Century, pp. 65-83, 97-125 (= Cyril & Ambrose on Christian Initiation).

3) Oral Report: Select one of the following to identify and explain origin, history, and medieval importance: Michaelmas; Whitsuntide; Epiphany; Corpus Christi; St. Peter's Chair; Ash Wednesday; Maundy Thursday; Ember Days; Low Sunday; St. Martin's Day; Holy Cross Day; Feast of the Immaculate Conception; Feast of the Assumption; All Saints Day.

Week II Formation of the Christian Calendar/Liturgical Year
Baptism: origin and historical development (discussion of readings)

Assignment for next week:

- 1) Reserved reading on the ceremony of baptism in E. C. Whitaker, Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy: The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus, pp. 2-7; The Canons of Hippolytus, pp. 87-90; The Gelasian Sacramentary, pp. 166-196; Ordo Romanus XI, pp. 196-204.
- 2) Oral reports: choose one topic to research in detail: describe and bring in illustrations; look up biblical references with Concordance; explain its use, meaning, or effect in the rite of baptism: baptisteries; fonts; salt; exorcism; chrism; matrinae and patrini; scrutiny; catechumens; competents; water; white garments; sign of cross; imposition of hands.

Week III Baptism

- The Rite
- Iconography (slides)
- Significance for Medieval Society

Assignment for next week: readings on the mass (158 pp. total):

- 1) Jungmann, pp. 10-18, 29-49, 52-73, 288-307
- 2) Xeroxed hand-out, O. J. Reichel, Solemn Mass at Rome in the Ninth Century
- 3) Reserved reading from O. B. Hardison, Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages, pp. 35-77 (= Amalarius' 9th cen. interpretation of the mass).

Week IV The Mass (tentative planned trip to a High Mass at Cathedral)

- Origin & Development
- Ordo (slides of Drogo Sacramentary)
- Medieval Interpretation (the mass as drama)

Assignment for next week: reading for Holy Orders (clerical ordination) (196 pp. total):

- 1) Xeroxed handouts from Duchesne and Bingham
- 2) Oral reports: choose one of the following ecclesiastical grades to research in greater depth than is covered in the readings regarding election, function, requirements, role in medieval society: bishop, deacon, subdeacon, acolyte, exorcist, porter, lector, grave-digger, psalmist, widow, virgin. (Other clerical titles: cardinal, papal legate, archdeacon, metropolitan, etc.)

Week V Ordination (tentative planned attendance at at ordination ceremony)

- Biblical origin & Growth of Hierarchy
- Papacy

Assignment for next week: reading for marriage (94 pp. total)

- 1) Stevenson, pp. 1-94

2) **Bibliography for Research Paper due

- Week VI Marriage
- Origin & Development
 - Rite
 - Medieval complications (consanguinity, clandestine marriages)
 - Medieval theology (Hugh of St. Victor)

Assignment for next week: reading for monastic ritual/Divine Office (124 pp. total):

- 1) Rule of St. Benedict, entire
- 2) Jungmann, pp. 97-108
- 3) Choose one of the following to bring to class and explain:
Breviary; Book of Hours; Gregorian Chant tape; Plan of St. Gall;
Ancrene Riwe; pictures of medieval monastic houses

- Week VII Monastic Life/Divine Office (tentative visit to a monastery or guest monk)
- Discussion of The Rule of St. Benedict
 - Cloistered life in medieval society

Assignment for next week: reading for ritual in the life of a mountain village:

- 1) Ladurie, Montaillou (356 pp.)
- 2) Choose one of the following rituals in the life of the men and women of Montaillou to lead a 10-15 minute discussion: transhumance (shepherding cycle); cabal; domus; marriage (courtship and arranged marriages); death; the Inquisition; penance & confession; concubinage; Catharism; delousing.
- 3) Prepare to hand in finalized thesis statement, outline, and bibliography for your research paper.

- Week VIII Montaillou
- ** Finalized thesis statement, outline, and bibliography for research paper due today.

Weeks IX - XII Class Presentations of Research Papers

Each student will be given approximately one hour. You are encouraged to bring in visual or auditory aids in the form of slides, pictures, tapes, videotapes, artifacts, costumes, etc! Allow time for discussion. Other members of the class will be expected to take notes and ask questions. The final draft of your research paper will be due on the day of your presentation. (I will go over the format for a good class presentation. I will also discuss the writing of a research paper, but please read and follow the attached "Pointers on Writing a Good Research Paper!"