

understanding of regional ethnography and corroborates this African presence as part of Britain's early modern history.

Onyeka Nubia 
University of Nottingham
Onyeka.Nubia@nottingham.ac.uk

NICHOLAS ORME. *Going to Church in Medieval England*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021. Pp.483. \$35.00 (cloth).
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[*Editors' Note: This review was Clive Burgess's final review before his untimely death in August 2023. His service to the academic community will be missed.*]

In the millennium preceding the Reformation, the Catholic Church in England had developed into a remarkable institution: it was extraordinary both in the range of establishment and experience that it encompassed and in its geographical penetration throughout the realm. Not only might one find both large and prestigious abbeys around which towns had grown and single cell chapels in the depths of woodland, both sizable collegiate communities and hermits and anchorites, but its institutions and believers permeated each county and every locality. In *Going to Church in Medieval England*, Nicholas Orme attempts the breathtaking by making at least nodding acquaintance with almost every organizational expression of the church and, if only in passing, cites varying examples from all corners of England. But he concentrates on the parish, of which there were more than nine thousand in the country by the later Middle Ages.

In the early part of the book, Orme outlines the development of the parish from the later Anglo-Saxon period, but he hardly stops to consider architectural achievements, save from emphasizing the variation in forms that had come to exist in the disposition and development of chancel, nave, and tower. For what Orme is mainly concerned to discuss is the question of who went to church and, more importantly, what this involved once the faithful were there. Those wishing to know more about how the pre-Reformation parish fit into the broader institutional scheme of the church, its possible spiritual potential, or, for instance, the way in which the laity managed the increasingly ambitious financial underpinning to parish life in many localities should look elsewhere. Orme concentrates on what parish churches offered to the faithful by way of liturgy, building up a detailed impression of the daily and seasonal services that the clergy provided.

Ordinarily, incumbents were obliged to adapt and down-scale the services that had developed in the secular cathedrals and collegiate churches in the realm; but this process structured the lived experience of the faithful as they moved through this life hoping for the next. True to his book's title, Orme explores the experience of everyday churchgoing in Catholic England in some detail, ably assisted by a selection of full-color plates interspersing the text to illustrate contemporary practice; as such, its exposition is invaluable.

Church historians more generally have often found larger institutions more intriguing, and the few looking at parish concerns have tended to concentrate on questions of finance or on motivation and commemoration. As a result, Orme's focus on the daily and seasonal round of services and on the sacraments and on their administration is exceptional. Not only were such concerns central to both the clergy's duties and the laity's experience but, from historians' point of view, gaining an understanding of the medieval liturgy presents a challenge. The

evidence is scattered, and fathoming liturgical texts to decode what was provided in local churches and when can be daunting. In essence, Orme offers a thorough and judicious filtration of a plethora of authorities and situations. Moreover, Orme's own experience and interests as a priest in Anglican orders enables him to navigate and interpret liturgical texts and traditions—such as the Sarum Use, as expressed through various service books—with both poise and reassuring expertise. His long experience as a historian also enables him to seize on and address pertinent questions such as—to take only one example that might not be clear from Service books—the growing use of English before the Reformation during the weekly high mass, when clergy would make announcements (such as reading banns or alerting the faithful of the arrival of a bishop or suffragan to hold confirmations or to issue excommunications, offer bidding prayers, or even invite and conduct prayers for the dead [237–42]); it was, understandably, vital to keep the laity informed, and the clergy would use the vernacular to do this. Moreover, toward the end of the volume, Orme offers astute observations on the course and impact of the Reformation, again particularly bringing out liturgical change within the underlying context of what might be termed structural continuity within parish churches. While he does not go into particular detail, on, for instance, the growing use of polyphony to embellish services or the aesthetics of the liturgical spectacle increasingly mounted in some churches, Orme instead offers some salutary comments on the complexity of congregations that we historians would do well to keep in mind. If anything, we tend to see parish life through the lens of the wealthier sort and the male onlooker; Orme reminds us at various points of the experience either of the poorer element or of women and of the ways in which different groupings, either in fraternities or craft guilds, might meld within or differ from the greater whole. He also raises the question of non-belief and its repercussions, if (understandably) leaving the interested reader to pursue this in more detail in reading alluded to in the notes.

Orme offers somewhat unusual fare: he is not much concerned with debate or even with more nuanced questions of applicability, although he is certainly aware of the latter. What is on offer is an accumulation of detail and a clear exposition of what all this meant for the experience of churchgoing, which, after all, affected the great majority of the population. Orme is not much concerned with questions of how the parish evolved, how the faithful tended to rely on the saints or on intercession to offer some means of control, or of how kings might rely on the responses of the faithful to affect the conduct of wars. Indeed, preaching has a lower profile than might have been expected—reflecting the fact that it tended to take a back seat in parish life compared to the daily celebration of office and rite. But for the interested reader in a profoundly different age, who can nevertheless see the remnants of the achievements of their forebears in so many parish churches throughout England, both in older town centers and in the countryside, *Going to Church in Medieval England* is an extraordinarily useful guide enabling historians of the period to chart and comprehend the structures of observance and worship that determined Christian belief and behavior and that ineluctably shaped the life of the great majority of English men and women some six or seven hundred years ago. Orme reveals with unerring clarity what the clergy were meant to provide and what the laity should have experienced in the localities. The book seems to be the distillation of a life's observations and of Orme's extraordinarily wide range of reading and thought. Anyone interested in the lived experience of their medieval forebears will be much the richer intellectually and certainly better informed as to the experience of the ordinary sort, as a result of reading this book.

Clive Burgess

Royal Holloway, University of London