

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 149



Revival

The first thousand years

Did you know?

CAN WE USE THE WORD “REVIVAL” ABOUT MEDIEVAL MOVEMENTS FOR RENEWAL?



WAS THERE FAITHFUL PREACHING?

I also admonish and exhort the brothers that in their preaching their words be studied and chaste, useful and edifying to the people, telling them about vices and virtues, punishment and glory; and they ought to be brief, because the Lord kept his words brief when he was on earth.—*from the Franciscan Rule of 1223*

But tell me: what would become of this world, I mean of the Christian faith, if there were no preaching? Within a very little our faith would have perished, for we should believe nothing of that which we now believe. And because of this holy church has ordered that every Sunday there shall be preaching. . . .

And she has ordered you to go to hear Mass, and if of these two duties you can perform but one . . . you should rather lose Mass and hear the preaching . . . you do not so endanger your soul by not hearing Mass as by not listening to the preaching.—*from a sermon of Bernardino of Siena (1380–1444), translated by H. J. Robins*

[Margery] was excluded from the sermon, which was to her the highest comfort on earth when she could hear it, and

equally the greatest pain on earth, when she could not hear it.—*from the Book of Margery Kempe, c. 1430s, quoted in CH #127*

WAS THERE FERVENT PRAYER?

[Catherine's] first petition, therefore, was for herself. The second was for the reform of holy church. The third was for the whole world in general, and in particular for the peace of Christians who are rebelling against holy church with great disrespect and persecution. In her fourth petition she asked divine providence to supply in general and in particular.—*from the Dialogues of Catherine of Siena, c. 1377–1378, as translated in CH #30*

REFORMERS YOU'LL MEET Bernardino of Siena preaches in a 15th-c. triptych panel (above); a bishop blesses an anchoress similar to Julian of Norwich in a 15th-c. manual for bishops (right).

Jesus Lord, well of all goodness,
For thy great pity I thee pray:
Forgive me all my wickedness
Wherewith I have grieved thee today.

—*from a 15th-c. prayer in MS Ashmole 61 at the Bodleian Library, spelling modernized by the blog A Clerk of Oxford*

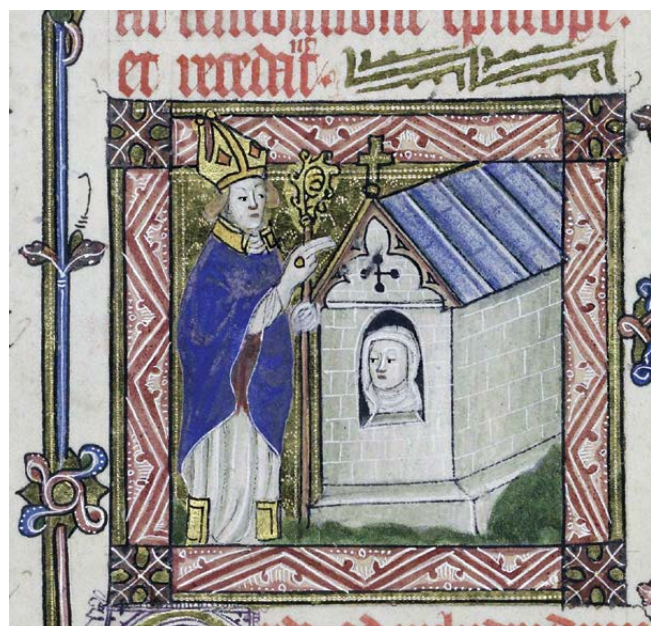
WAS THERE CONVICTION AND REPENTANCE?

It is, therefore, plain which faith is the foundation of the church—the faith with which the church is built upon the Rock, Christ Jesus, for it is that by which the church confesses that “Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God.”—*from De Ecclesia (1413–1414) by Jan Hus, translated by David Schaff*

The faithful . . . know how totally they need Jesus and him crucified. While they admire and embrace in him the charity that surpasses all knowledge, they are ashamed at failing to give what little they have in return for so great a love and honor.—*from On Loving God (1153) by Bernard of Clairvaux, translated in CH #49*

One day, however, when the gospel story of Christ sending his disciples to preach was read in the church, the holy man of God [Francis of Assisi] was present. . . . After mass he humbly asked the priest to explain the gospel to him. He heard that Christ's disciples were supposed to possess neither gold, nor silver, nor money; were to have neither bread nor staff; were to have neither shoes nor two tunics; but were to preach the kingdom of God and penance.

When the priest had finished, Francis, rejoicing in the spirit of God, said, “This is what I want! This is what I'm looking for! This is what I want to do from the bottom of my heart!”—*from The Life of Saint Francis (1228) by Thomas of Celano, translated by David Burr on the CHI website*





WAS THE LOVE OF GOD FELT?

The place which Jesus takes in our soul he will nevermore vacate, for in us is his home of homes, and it is the greatest delight for him to dwell there.—from the *Showings of Julian of Norwich*, c. 1373, translated in CH #30

Give Christ his place then, but deny entrance to all others. For when you have Christ you are rich and he is sufficient for you. He will provide for you and supply your every need.—from *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis, c. 1418–1427, translated on the CHI website

DID PEOPLE CRITICIZE RENEWAL MOVEMENTS?

For some time, indeed, between prelates and rectors, of priests and clerics of parish churches . . . and the brothers of

FURTHER REFORMATION Villagers go to church, c. 1550 (above); Jan Brueghel the Elder imagines Jesus delivering the Sermon on the Mount to 16th-c. citizens (below).

INEXTINGUISHABLE BLAZE This 1430 Bible illumination is our earliest image of the burning of Jan Hus (right).

the Dominican and Franciscan orders . . . a grave and perilous dispute has been stirred up about sermons given to the congregations of the faithful, about hearing their confessions and enjoining penances on them, and about burying the bodies of those of the dead who are known to prefer burial in the churches or places of the friars.—*Boniface VIII, Super Cathedram* (1300), translated by the Pontifical Committee for Historical Sciences

Christ gave his gospel to the clergy and the learned doctors of the church so that they might give it to the laity and to weaker persons. . . . But this Master John Wyclif translated the gospel from Latin into the English. . . . And Wyclif, by thus translating the Bible, made it the property of the masses and common to all and more open to the laity, and even to women who were able to read.—*Henry Knighton* (d. 1396), *Augustinian canon at St. Mary of the Meadows*, as quoted in CH #3 CH

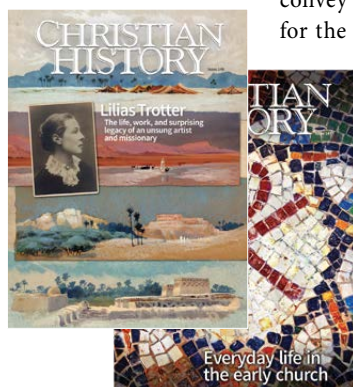


Letters to the editor

Readers respond to *Christian History*

LOOK TO THE EAST

In addition to expressing my very great appreciation for *Christian History* which I have been receiving for many years, if not almost back to its beginnings, I wish to convey to you my very great concern for the huge swathes of Christian history down through the last two millennia which you have largely, if not almost entirely ignored.



Due to your virtually exclusive focus upon Western Christianity (and Christendom), most readers will have no idea about the “Church of the East” which for many centuries was the largest church on earth with some 23 (?) Arch-bishoprics (or Archdioceses) stretching across Central Asia to Beijing and across the Arabian Sea to the Malabar Coast of India. Nor will they know about the Church in Ethiopia, in Egypt, and other parts of Africa. Missionary Christianity, after all, became central to Christian faith at great centers of learning in Alexandria, Antioch, Babylon (Seleucia-Ctesiphon), and especially Edessa and Nisibis....

It seems to me that you will do a great disservice to Christian history and Christianity if you do not pay more attention to these ignored histories—especially Thomas Christians of India, Christians of Tang (and Yuan/Mongol ruled) China, and in Japan (perhaps as early as 400 AD, and certainly in Nagasaki from circa 1549).—*Robert Erid Frykenberg, Madison, WI, professor emeritus of history & South Asian studies at the University of Wisconsin*

While we have done several issues on African and Asian Christianity (#79, #87, #98, #105), much more needs exploration, and we are taking all these suggestions to heart. Thanks!

STILL WALKING

Thank you for the Lenten devotional, *Walk Through the Wilderness*. It was a delight to read each day leading up to Easter Day and through the following Easter Week. It was thoroughly enjoyable and educational. Well done!—*Randy Miller, via email*

We've gotten a great response on this. Thanks, all of you, for writing in! Share the devotional with your friends and Christian community next Lent.

TAKE UP AND READ, BUT MAYBE LARGER

Your magazine contains very interesting articles, but the font size is so small that even with “readers,” I find it takes much longer than it should to read the fine print. Assuming that many of your readers are advanced in age, I strongly urge you to increase the size of the fonts used in preparing the manuscripts. Perhaps you could consider shortening some of the articles to make the entire magazine easier on the eyes. Thank you for keeping us informed of our precious Christian heritage.—*Ruth Anderson, Puyallup, WA*

We've had a few similar comments and are discussing whether we might need to make a few tweaks. Thanks!

GOING BACK TO ANCIENT ROME

Let me commend you on your perfect timing on the delivery of #148. I have just finished my second reading (even with dyslexia and old age tremors) of the very enjoyable #147! In all my almost 30 years of reading *CH*, this one issue has given me the most occasions of looking up the primary and secondary source references, and even purchasing (for my Kindle) James Papandrea's book *A Week in the Life of Rome*. A most fascinating read! Thank you.—*Fr. Jim Sproat, Spring, TX*

NEW FANS OF LILIAS

I was very impressed with this issue on Lilius Trotter. Her love of beauty and her mystic single-mindedness was entrancing. Also, that selfless dedication to her work as a missionary was deeply noticed and appreciated despite offers for greatness in another field! This reminded me of another stalwart missionary in China, Margaret Barber, who was a mentor and encourager of the great Watchman Nee. Perhaps a future issue can highlight them. . . . May our loving Father guide your ministry there, and keep you also “focused” as Lilius taught us.—*Michael Carlascio, Sault Ste Marie, ON*

Today I received your latest issue and was intrigued by your coverage of Trotter. I had never heard of her before. I thought it was interesting that she was a missionary, painter, and author. So I began reading the issue. I cannot put it down! What an amazing individual. Her art is breathtaking, her life and mission amazing, but her spiritual writings have me in tears. . . . I had to write down some of the quotes from the excerpts you printed of hers. Thank you so very much for making this issue. Now I've got to get her books. I love her message and how she viewed the world and saw God within it all.—*Joseph Peter Mills, Defuniak Springs, FL*

I've been meaning to send a note like this for a long time, and receiving the recent issue on Lilius Trotter has finally prompted me to do it! I've been receiving *Christian History* for many years and I've always been so impressed with the aesthetic quality of the issues, in addition to the high-caliber scholarship of the articles. Thank you for all of the effort you've invested in these publications. What a pleasure to read!—Jennifer Jesse, Kirksville, MO

Lilius's life and work enchanted our team during production of the issue, and we're delighted to hear from so many of you that her dedication to Christ impacted you too.

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD

At the end of 2022, we conducted a reader survey to help us in planning for future issues. Here are a few of the encouraging comments we received.

- Your coverage on the Christian part in the past plague times [#135] helped us through the 2020 Covid-19 crisis.—Roy and Benetta Myers, New Castle, PA
- Love the magazine! Healing issue [#142] was excellent! Keep up the good work!—Ken Tuttle, Little Rock, AR
- Incredible magazine. Every issue is like a devotional. Thank you so much!—Jerry Salvatore, Centereach, NY
- A note to tell you how much I like your magazine and like meeting the staff. Excited to get each issue and so pleased you are printing again.—Scott Swisher, Obetz, OH
- Please keep up the great work on enlightening church history.—Warren L. Smith, Monroeville, PA
- This is the BEST publication I subscribe to—well done every issue!—William Nye, Orlando, FL
- I teach church history for ninth-grade students. Your magazine is a rich resource for me to use in class and for student research material.—Carla Courtney, Moscow, ID
- You have been an invaluable resource over the years as part of our homeschool curriculum. Thank you.—Amy Smiley Lawson, Carthage, TX
- *Christian History* is our favorite reading and we often use it for Bible study group.—Carol Hamrin, Ashburn, VA
- Will be happy if you continue as you are. You produce a beautiful, fascinating publication.—Susan Bridwell, Columbia, SC

GETTING IT RIGHT: TRANSLATIONS AND DATES

Our issue #143, p. 40, mistakenly stated that Bible.org and the New English Translation (NET) are two separate translations. Bible.org actually uses the NET as the basis for its study tools. Neither are to be confused with the New English Bible (NEB), published jointly by the University Presses of Oxford and Cambridge.

In issue #148, on p. 10, we stated that Lilius Trotter died at age 74; she was 75. And on p. 13, the letter from John Ruskin pictured is from 1883, not 1879.

A few years ago, one of our team members happened to read a 2018 tweet by Tahra Seplowin (@calixofcoffee) which said "Shout-out to the typos that make it through three rounds of content edits, copyedits, and two rounds of proofreading. I am inspired by your dedication and tenacity." That's kind of the way we feel around here too sometimes. Rest assured we are always trying to weed out errors, and we will tell you when we find them!



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MEET THE TEAM: BILL CURTIS

How long have you been at CHI, and what is your role?

I have been working with CHI almost since its founding in 1982 and have played an active role in administration and operations since 1986. I assumed the role of executive editor for *CH* in 2011, after the passing of my dad, Kenneth Curtis, who founded *Christian History* magazine.



What is your favorite part of the job?

Talking with enthusiastic readers and reading letters from subscribers. I also enjoy thanking donors who support *CH*. As an amateur historian, I enjoy learning so much about the topics we cover and occasionally getting to select topics of my special interest.

What do you most wish readers knew?

I most wish readers knew the complexity of putting each issue together and the care our team takes to present articles that are intriguing and written in an engaging manner; the efforts taken to get facts correct; the extensive coordination among our mostly part-time team; and the deep satisfaction with the completion of each issue as it is sent off to press. Furthermore I wish the readers could glimpse our occasional in-person team meetings when we gather from different parts of the country and collaborate and brainstorm on future issues. The conversations that ensue are inspiring.

What do you do in your spare time?

I enjoy spending time with my family and reading. Before some recent health challenges, I also enjoyed biking, hiking, walking, swimming, and traveling. **CH**

Editor's note



What does a revival look like? The *Christian History* (CH) team was actually thinking about this question long before the entire country began asking it in earnest in February 2023, when a religious outpouring that many called a revival occurred on the campus of Asbury University in Wilmore, Kentucky. (As an alumna of Asbury Theological Seminary, which is across the street, I found it strange to see places I'd visited all my life suddenly appearing on CNN!)

A few months before worship in Wilmore caught everyone's attention, we had already concluded it would be interesting to do a multi-issue series on revivals in Christian history. Past issues have covered various revivals over the years, such as the Wesleys and the Evangelical Revival, the Great Awakenings in the United States, and twentieth-century renewal—I even wrote an unconsciously prophetic sidebar for our issue #139 about why so many revivals have occurred on college campuses—but not as part of a unified narrative.

And so this issue is the first in a three-part series that will look at the big picture of renewal in church history. But it doesn't start where you might expect. We talked for some time in our planning meetings about the marks of a revival, and here are the main four we came up with:

- **Popular** (widespread)
- **Transformative** (asking for conversion)
- **Institutionally unsatisfied and critical** (institution-questioning, reforming, institution-renewing)
- **Devotional** (emotionally charged)

A MEDIEVAL AWAKENING

While we're most used to thinking about movements from the eighteenth century onward in those terms, there's no reason not to go back further. From very early on, Christians sought renewal. They did so by looking back to study early church models and forward to imagine

a church and society transformed by a reinvigorated faith and a reinvigorated people. When we remove the unspoken assumption that revivals could only happen *after* the Reformation and look at our four marks as criteria for identifying as revivals renewal movements before 1500, we discover quite a few that fit the bill.

So, in this issue, we briefly look at Christianity's first thousand years and then take a more in-depth look at revival in the high and late Middle Ages. If you've read the issues of CH that I've edited over the past 11 years about the Protestant Reformation (#115, #118, #120, #122, #131), as well as our issue on vocation (#110), you'll remember that I think the Reformation is best viewed as the culmination of centuries of demands for reform—and indeed, that's where you'll find it in this issue, at the end. It serves as a springboard to help us think about revivals more familiar to us in upcoming issues.

I won't be editing those installments. This is my last issue as managing editor of CH (although not my last editor's note—you will hear from me one more time in #150). It is my forty-sixth issue as editor (plus two devotional guides) over 11 years, and I've thoroughly enjoyed and been transformed by every topic, era, and biography as I've explored them with you.

I plan to continue to write for CH—as I've done since 2003, long before I became editor—and to be around in an advisory capacity, but I am handing over the reins to Kaylena Radcliff, who will be an excellent guide along the paths of the church's past. As you walk down those paths,

I hope you'll remember to look for revival and renewal where you might least expect it and prepare to be transformed. **CH**

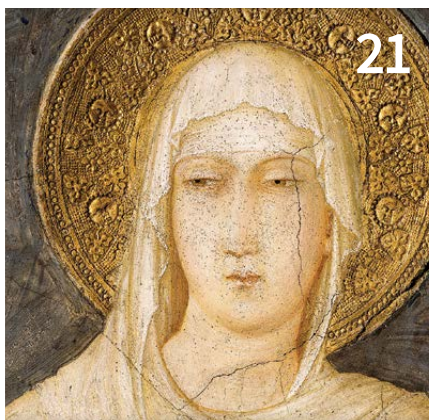


Jennifer Woodruff Tait
Managing editor

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Edwin Woodruff Tait

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Founder
A. K. Curtis

Senior Editor
Chris R. Armstrong

Managing Editor
Jennifer Woodruff Tait

Advisory Editor, CH 149
Edwin Woodruff Tait

Publisher
Christian History Institute

Executive Editor
Bill Curtis

Director of Editorial Staff
Kaylena Radcliff

Design Editor
Doug Johnson

Proofreader
Meg Moss

Layout
Dan Graves

Image Researcher
Max Pointner

Editorial Assistant
Grace Bert

Circulation
Sara Campbell

Print Coordinator
Deb Landis

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LUIGI LOPRETE, THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT, OIL ON CANVAS, 1991—TRENTO, MUSEO DIOCESANO TRIDENTINO, INVENTARIO DIOCESANO

Always reviving

THE CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT HAS GONE THROUGH CONTINUAL CYCLES OF REVIVAL AND RENEWAL

Jennifer Woodruff Tait

A *revival preacher with a new message* appeared—or at least it seemed new to some who felt, whether rightly or wrongly, that their religious practice had become more routine than renewing. His sermons were colloquial and thought-provoking, with dramatic, striking illustrations.

He called his listeners to repentance, and he told them that a closer relationship with God was possible; he criticized religious and sometimes secular leadership. That leadership often responded by condemning him, though some of them were intrigued by his message. Crowds of all kinds gathered to hear his preaching, which cut across social classes, but resonated most with the poor and needy.

Those he had ministered to responded to him with affection, even devotion. He encouraged them to speak and serve even though they were not religious professionals, and they spread the message they had heard to their friends and neighbors. Eventually—for perhaps you will have gathered by now who that revival preacher was—they spread it to most of the known Mediterranean world and eastward in the first century AD.

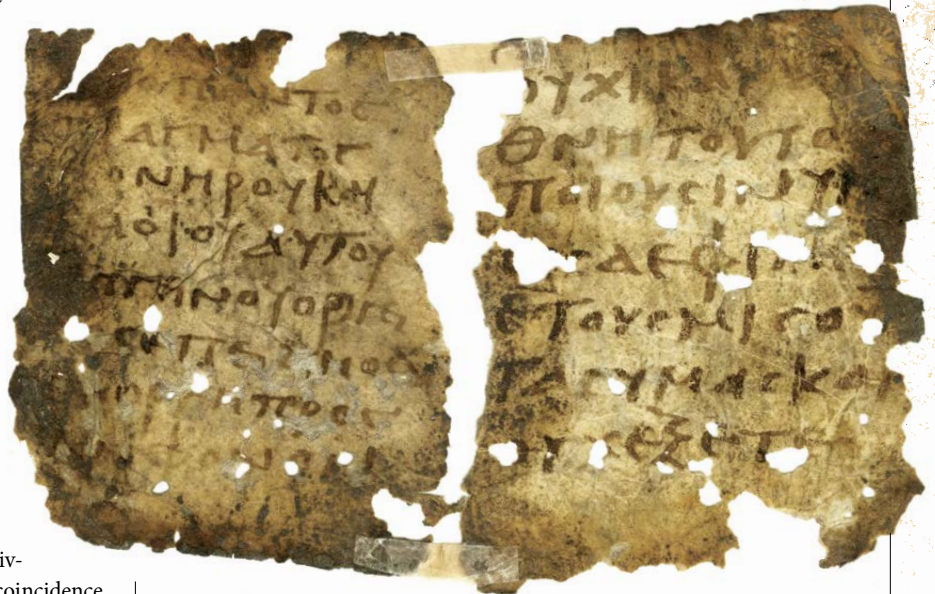
RULES AND THE SPIRIT

But the fact that this description of the earthly ministry of Jesus also describes other, later revivals in the history of the Christian church is no coincidence. From the beginning Christianity presented itself as a reform and a renewal rather than a reinforcement of the status quo.

It was **popular** and populist—spreading quickly through the Roman and Persian Empires and appealing particularly to less honored groups in both cultures, including women and enslaved people. (*Past issues of CH such as #124 and #147 go into more detail about how this happened.*—Editors) It was **transformative**, calling forth conversions from the very first moment Jesus continued the message his cousin John the Baptist was preaching and proclaimed “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matt. 4:17). While whole books spell out the complex relationship between the followers of the Way

FOUR MARKS OF REVIVAL

- **Popular** (widespread)
- **Transformative** (asking for conversion)
- **Institutionally unsatisfied and critical** (institution-questioning, reforming, institution-renewing)
- **Devotional** (emotionally charged)



RULES FOR A NEW CHURCH The *Didache* (a 4th-c. manuscript of it is *above*) is one of the earliest attempts to order the Christian movement, including rules for taking the Eucharist and handling wandering prophets.

and first-century Judaism (see CH #134), Jesus’s message certainly called out some ways in which that institution stood in need of **reform**. And the call of the Way was **devotional**, changing hearts as well as minds, calling forth relationships of love not only between believers and their Lord but between believers and each other.

Of course this is only half the story: the early Christian church soon became an institution as well as a movement. Even before the practice of Christianity was legal, it had leaders, it had common worship practices, it had organizational rules, and it had requirements for joining—intended

THERE MAY BE A QUIZ The Sermon on the Mount remains a popular subject for painters; this modern painting (left) is in Saint Zeno Church in Pelugo, Italy.



FROM THE TOP Early medieval leaders such as Benedict of Nursia (*far left* in a 12th-c. Gospel book) and Pope Gregory the Great (*left* in a 12th-c. sacramentary) built monasticism and extended the church's institutional reach.

POPULAR SAINTS Early medieval Christians venerated both monastic leaders and Christian rulers such as Alfred the Great (*below*).

Reformers arose to call newly wealthy Benedictines back to the simplicity of the early church. And so the cycle continued.

Monasticism as a marker of true spiritual transformation served as the primary distinguishing feature of the early Middle Ages. Certainly many lay Christians and the parish priests who led them were trying to live Christian lives as best as they knew how.

But from the time that the monastic movement arose, those truly serious about living the Christian life—praying, studying the Scriptures and the lives and writings of earlier saints, repenting, seeking closeness to Christ, serving the community—felt the implicit pressure to become a monk or a nun. Only there, it seemed, could a believer fully follow the “evangelical counsels,” the teachings of Jesus at their most rigorous.

As monasteries grew in wealth and influence, joining one could be a path to power, but it could also be a path to deep faith. And, because the world is complex, sometimes it could be both, as in the career of Pope Gregory I (540–604), whom we most often call Gregory the Great.

Gregory was a Roman aristocrat with the advantages of education and skill who became prefect of Rome in his thirties, yet he also built a monastery on his family estate and joined it. His clear administrative gifts brought him first ordination, then an ambassadorship, then the papacy, all while he kept protesting he would rather be let alone to pray and contemplate. *If only we were back in first-century Palestine; if only we could recover the Spirit and the power of those first disciples.*

INSPIRED BY THE GREATS

In the early Middle Ages, the saints venerated by the average lay Christian would have been largely monastics (monks and nuns), clergy, and those rulers who were seen as pious and whose acts were seen as society-renewing—such as Charlemagne (747–814) and Alfred the Great (c. 848–899). Such leaders encouraged better education

to weed out both frivolous seekers and possible spies. The *Didache*, dating from the first century, was only the first among a set of church orders—as they came to be called—that helped give structure to the movement of the Spirit.

Legalization in the fourth century hastened this practice of institutionalization, of course—and called forth revival and renewal in response. As the church became more powerful and wealthier, critics of that power and wealth arose, and their messages hearkened back to the early days of the movement. *If only we were back in first-century Palestine, reformers thought; if only we could recover the Spirit and the power of those first disciples.*

RIGHTEOUSNESS OR RICHES?

That critique and that reform expressed itself first and foremost in what came to be known as monasticism. The earliest monks were hermits seeking to transform and question and love in solitude. But almost in spite of themselves, they became popular. People sought them out for advice and prayer. Disciples gathered around them. Communal monasticism came into being.

Once again a renewal movement became an institution. And when people live together—even people who love Jesus very much and are devoted to following him—rules still help. Basil of Caesarea was among the first of those who developed such a rule in Eastern Christianity in the late fourth century; in the West, Benedict of Nursia's *Rule* in 529 codified how Christian monastics should live together.

All Benedictine monasteries followed the *Rule*. In doing so, and in all the small ways in which those monasteries became part of the fabric of life in the towns and villages that grew up around them, they often became rather wealthy, and their abbots and other leaders became powerful advisors to secular rulers and church leaders.





BUT WHAT IF YOU'RE NOT A MONK . . . These monks (above) at the Abbaye Saint-Martin-du-Canigou are sculpted attending the funeral of an abbot.

. . . OR A KING? This statue of Charlemagne (left) dates from the 8th c., though it was restored in the 18th.

among their subjects—meaning, among other things, that clergy had a better idea of the faith they taught to the laity—and defended Christianity in some way against paganism, heresy, or violence. Sometimes they were even seen as messianic figures (pp. 17–19).

Several things around the turn of the first millennium AD helped transform this bifurcated society—with its clear tension between active and contemplative, secular and sacred, the unrevived and the revived—into one where large numbers of laypeople believed they were called to exercise their baptismal vows, to grow closer to Christ, to be themselves transformed, and to transform the society around them.

The first, which should not be overestimated, came simply from the increasing stability of society in the West in the eleventh and twelfth centuries; the growth of cities, agricultural innovations, a booming economy, more political stability, and more widespread literacy (heir to those earlier educational reforms). It is easier to critique and renew when you are not merely struggling to survive.

Both a cause and an effect of this greater stability, a movement called the Peace and Truce of God soon attempted to limit violence and war. The Peace of God was proclaimed at the Council of Charroux in 987 and the Truce of God at the Council of Toulouges in 1027, but the two movements soon were seen as one.

They attempted to prohibit violence against noncombatants and to limit war and violence only to certain days and seasons. Significantly laypeople led these movements, though clergy were involved. Nobles all the way down to peasants swore to uphold the rules of the Peace of God, not merely as a political move, but as their Christian duty.

CALLING OUT CORRUPTION

Onto this stage stepped another Gregory, Gregory VII (c.

1015–1085), born Hildebrand of Sovana and elected pope in 1073. The sweeping church reforms he enacted—called the Gregorian reforms—have often been seen as mainly aimed at strengthening the papacy, which they did (pp. 12–15). Certainly for Protestants looking back across the centuries, his actions seemed the opposite of those that commonly cause revival.

Yet Gregory VII deeply desired to return to the perceived purity of the early church. He called for ridding the church of corruption, and he wanted clergy who took their vows seriously. For Gregory VII this meant above all that they were celibate, did not purchase their offices or take bribes, and were not subject to the whims of (probably) sinful secular leaders. These desires became part of a larger protest against what the church had become. Gregory would not have been happy with the lay movements that arose in his wake claiming that laypeople too could preach and teach, but they were in many ways his heirs. *If only we were back in first-century Palestine; if only we could recover the Spirit and the power of those first disciples.*

A LIVING SACRIFICE?

It would be Gregory VII's next substantive successor, Urban II (1035–1099), assuming the office in 1088 after the short papacy of Victor III, who would spark one of the High Middle Ages' most significant movements for social transformation and also one of its most controversial and complex—the Crusades.

When Urban responded to Byzantine emperor Alexios I Komnenos's request for military help against Turkish armies of the Seljuk Empire in 1095, his preaching of what became known as the First Crusade invoked not only political but religious transformation. At least one version of Urban's speech at the Council of Clermont instigating the First Crusade ends this way:



Whoever, therefore, shall determine upon this holy pilgrimage and shall make his vow to God to that effect and shall offer himself to Him as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, shall wear the sign of the cross of the Lord on his forehead or on his breast.

Vast numbers of Western Christians of all social classes, moved by devotional fervor and intent on conversion as well as conquest, responded, and the history of the West—and of the East—was forever changed.

Even as the Crusades raged on—*dragged on* is probably a better phrase as centuries passed—other movements engulfed numbers of lay Christians seeking a more intense and disciplined spiritual life. The lay saints of twelfth-century Italy, the mendicant movements of the thirteenth century (pp. 28–33), the growth in both mysticism (pp. 34–38—also see CH issue #127) and fervent preaching (pp. 39–42)—all attempted to call people both back to a simpler time and forward to a society-transforming moment that would come if only those revived and renewed could stay the course.

The church hierarchy looked more kindly on some of these lay movements than others, but from the Waldensians (p. 20) to Third Orders that grew up around the mendicant movements to the Beguines to the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life to the Lollards, laypeople who sought revival were no longer limited to either the choice of a second-class life outside a monastery or departing “the world” to keep the evangelical counsels fully. *If only we were back in first-century Palestine; if only we could recover the Spirit and the power of those first disciples.*



WANTING SOMETHING MORE Beguines (the image at left is from a Beguine house) and mystical writers such as Thomas à Kempis (above) sought new avenues for reform and holy life.

REVIVE US AGAIN

Many centuries and many revivals later, twentieth-century theologians would popularize the phrase *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*—“the church reformed, always reforming,” now a motto of various Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Those who promoted it always claimed it as a more ancient formulation dating back to the time of the Protestant Reformation and perhaps even as far back as Augustine in the fourth century.

Whatever its origins it captures something about not just the Reformed tradition, but the whole Christian story. Over and over again the cycle repeats. The church seems to be growing distant from its vibrant beginning, the last moment of vibrant transformation fading from memory.

Then a new revival preacher appears, or a group of them. Lives are changed, society is altered, and the promise is held out that perhaps this time the kingdom will be ushered in. This time. *If only we were back in first-century Palestine; if only we could recover the Spirit and the power of those first disciples. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.* **GH**

Jennifer Woodruff Tait is managing editor of Christian History and author of several books on church history including *Christian History in Seven Sentences*. In January 2024 she will become senior editor of CH.

“Mighty acts”

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER WHEN ENCOUNTERING REVIVAL

The Holy Scripture and every age of the church report countless instances of dramatic encounters with God. . . . The initial response to God’s presence almost always involves repentance. This is often followed by a sense of happiness or joy. Frequently the people involved report some kind of interruption of bearings, such as losing track of time. The encounters are often disorienting. For instance, when Isaiah encountered God, he fell to the ground and exclaimed, “Woe is me” (Isa. 6:5). Likewise, when the disciples experienced the divine light on the Mount of Transfiguration, they immediately fell to ground, terrified (Matt. 17:6). Equally common is an emphasis on the suddenness or unpredictability of the encounter. In the book of Acts, the disciples were gathered in a room for prayer when “suddenly, there was the sound of a mighty rushing wind” (Acts 2:2)....

Some people who identify as Christians are functionally cessationist when it comes to the manifest presence and power of God. They admit that God may have been discernibly present in the Bible, which is to say, during the age of God’s “mighty acts” in history, but they doubt that God is present in similar ways today....

[For other believers], nothing about the basic concept of outpourings or revivals is incompatible with either Holy Scripture or classical Christian doctrine and theology. At the heart of the concept of outpourings is the idea that, from time to time and in ways that are unscripted and beyond human control, God makes God’s presence and power manifest in a manner that is readily discernible, that leads to repentance and deep joy, and that conveys life-changing forgiveness and grace....

REVIVAL AND EVERYDAY PRAYER

If we are seeking to welcome revivals, but not manufacture them, how should we think and live? First we should appreciate and celebrate the presence and action of God in the “ordinary” means of grace. Stretching all the way back into the priestly tradition in the Old Testament, God works through prescribed rituals and activities. God often, indeed usually, works through means that he has ordained and established.

God works steadily and regularly through the sacraments of the church. God is active in ... patterns of mentoring, discipleship, and accountability. God is present and active in personal Bible study and prayer, and God meets with his people wherever “two or three are gathered” in Christ’s name (Matt. 18:20). God is working in the lives of God’s people in the ordinary rhythms of life ... to form Christ-like attitudes in hearts and minds and



SPEAK OF THE SPIRIT In the Middle Ages, those seeking a deeper work of God often entered monasteries; here Benedict addresses his monks.

affections as practices and habits form godly character and as virtues are planted and nurtured....

Second we should understand and appreciate—and indeed receive and celebrate—the extraordinary activity of God. Just as it is true that God most often works in ordinary ways, so also it is true that God sometimes works in extraordinary events. Stretching all the way back into the prophetic traditions of the Old Testament, God sometimes works in unscripted and unanticipated ways. When God does this, the result is often not only unexpected but indeed surprising and sometimes even disruptive....

Beginning in the Old Testament, moving through the New Testament, and at various points in the history of the Christian church around the world, we see that divine action is not—and cannot be—limited to what we have come to expect. What should our response be when we are surprised by such events (and it is important to keep in mind that they are, by their very nature, surprising)? Should it not be like the response of Mary to the ultimate surprising work of the Holy Spirit? Should we not, like her, say “let it be with me according to your word” (Luke 1:38)?

Adapted from Outpouring by Jason E. Vickers and Thomas H. McCall. Reprinted with permission. Jason E. Vickers is professor of Christian theology and William J. Abraham Chair of Wesleyan Studies at Truett Seminary. Thomas H. McCall is Timothy C. and Julie M. Tennent Professor of Theology at Asbury Theological Seminary.



Countering insult and shame

POPE GREGORY VII AND THE CISTERCIANS TRIED TO REFORM THE CHURCH FROM BOTH ABOVE AND BELOW

Greg Peters

Sometime around 1015 in Tuscany, a man named Hildebrand was born. Educated by monks in Rome, he quickly entered church service, especially serving John Gratian (d. 1047, the future Pope Gregory VI) and Bruno of Toul (1002–1054, later Pope Leo IX). By the middle of the eleventh century, the church had been humiliated by a century of scandals and rival claims to the papacy. In Rome a group of reform-minded men formed to call the church back to her pure roots. Hildebrand took a leading role in the group, especially after he was appointed archdeacon (chief financial officer) of the church in 1059. In 1073, upon the death of Pope Alexander II, Hildebrand was elected pope, taking the name Gregory VII.

FOR A PRICE

As pope, Gregory VII continued to strive for reform, believing that the spiritual would triumph over the material and that the Roman Church would provide leadership as the head of all other churches. This series of changes became known as the “Gregorian reform,” though Gregory did not initiate all elements. He particularly tried to fight two corrupt practices he held responsible for the church’s recent failings: simony and lay investiture.

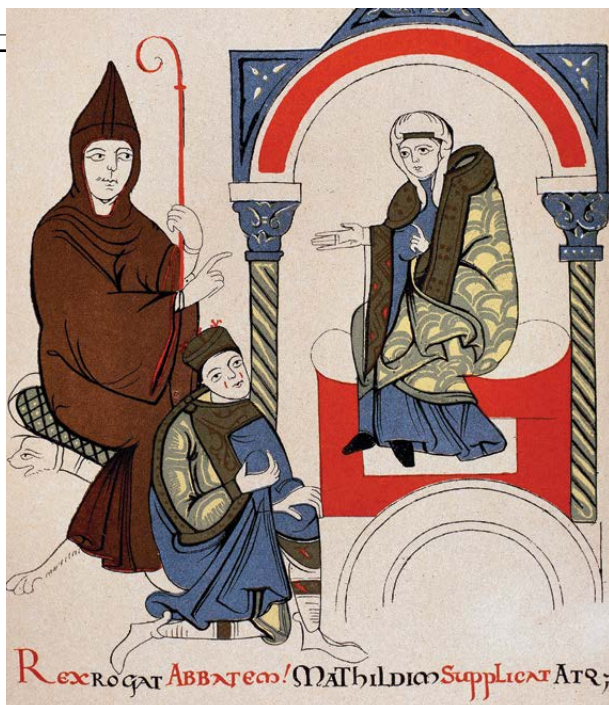
Simony was a particularly prevalent practice during the High Middle Ages. Named after Simon Magus’s

SENT PACKING Gregory VII’s struggles with secular rulers set the stage for later reforms—here he is shown being kicked out of Rome by Emperor Henry IV and Henry’s handpicked antipope, Clement.

attempt to buy apostolic power from the apostle Peter in Acts 8:18–24, it denotes the practice of purchasing or selling spiritual things (such as ecclesiastical offices) instead of earning or being given such roles. For the right price, a priest who wanted to become a bishop could simply purchase the office either from a secular ruler who had the right of appointment or else from the church itself. Even the papacy trafficked in simony.

Some had already tried—and failed—to wipe out this practice. In 451 the Council of Chalcedon had forbidden ordination in exchange for money, and Pope Gregory the Great had continued to denounce the practice during his papacy from 590 to 604. The Third Lateran Council of 1179, nearly a century after the pontificate of Gregory VII, would continue to speak against it. As late as the Council of Trent in the 1560s, the church’s leadership would still be worried about it.

Gregory’s reform attempted, unsuccessfully, to eradicate simony. It did this by admonishing laypeople to reject the ministry of any clergyman known to have bought his



TAKE THIS In an instance of lay investiture, Bishop Adalbert of Prague receives the symbols of his office from Emperor Otto II c. 956 (above).

office. Gregory believed that though laypeople could reject the work of a “simoniac,” they had no authority by God to elect or appoint clergy; only other clerics reserved that right. Consequently Gregory attacked not only simony itself but a practice known as lay investiture.

When a man was elected to—or purchased—an episcopal office, he was invested with the symbols of the office: a ring and a crozier. By the twelfth century, a layperson, often the king himself, regularly presided over this investiture. For Gregory this was unacceptable—it gave the king far too much influence over and control of the church, especially when coupled with simony. In 1075 he issued a decree outlawing the practice, infuriating Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV (1050–1106). In response Henry declared in 1076 that Gregory was deposed, going so far as to establish an antipope who called himself Clement III. Gregory responded by excommunicating Henry.

This clash of spiritual and political powers rippled throughout the empire. Excommunication meant Henry’s subjects no longer had to obey him. It created a situation so intolerable for Henry that ultimately he was forced to submit to Gregory in January 1077 after three days of penance in the harsh winter climate at Canossa in northern Italy. Gregory excommunicated Henry again in 1080 for failing to truly reform, leading Henry to install another antipope. Henry eventually seized the city of Rome in 1084, forcing Gregory to die in exile on May 25, 1085. Collectively this series of events has come to be known as the Investiture Controversy.

“I AM TRUTH”

At the heart of Gregory’s reform movement was the adage, first formulated by Tertullian (c. 155–c. 220), that Christ did not say, “I am custom,” but rather, “I am truth” (John 14:6). The idea that truth is superior to custom became the guiding principle of Gregory’s reforms, but it bumped up against the common assumption that any innovation is bad. To avoid

TURNABOUT IS FAIR PLAY? At left, Henry IV kneels before powerful abbot Hugh of Cluny and Countess Matilda of Canossa to ask for their help with Gregory.

that charge, Gregory rooted his reforms in appeals to the Scriptures and the church fathers, both of which were seen as indisputable sources for Christian faith and life. If reform recalled the practices and convictions originally set forth by Jesus Christ and his earliest followers, then, Gregory argued, as many renewal preachers have since, his reforms were not innovations. As he wrote to Werner, the archbishop of Magdeburg, “We do not set before you our own decrees . . . but we renew things decreed by the holy fathers.”

Innovate, argued Gregory, was actually what Emperor Henry had done and what the simoniacs did when they appropriated the rights and God-given prerogatives of the church and its rightly appointed leadership. “You have heard, brother,” wrote Gregory to Werner,

the novel and unheard-of presumption, you have heard the atrocious loquacity and boldness of schismatics and blasphemers of the name of the Lord in blessed Peter, you have heard the pride which has reared up to the insult and shame of the apostolic see, such as your fathers have not at any time seen or heard nor does the sequence of things written teach that the like has ever come forth from pagans or heretics.

Gregory also envisioned implementing his reforms by strengthening the role and office of the papacy, a natural corollary to his desire to limit the influence and function of kings and other powerful lay rulers in the church. Emperor Henry’s humiliation at Canossa strengthened the image of a powerful papacy—for there, standing in the snow repentant, was the man with the greatest amount of power in all of Europe. Gregory’s power lay in his ability to excommunicate anyone; excommunication cut the excommunicated off from the sacraments and, ultimately, from salvation.



But excommunicating kings and secular rulers formed only one element of Gregory's reforming goals. In 1075 he wrote a series of 26 short declarations that he called *Dictatus papae* (dictation of the pope). All of the declarations establish the primacy of the papacy and the authority and power of the pope, who can "depose or reinstate bishops" and "be judged by no one."

Further, the pope's name is to "be recited in churches" and only he "is rightly called 'universal'" bishop, since he presides over the Roman Church that "has never erred, nor will it ever err." Though Gregory's pontificate was not the high point of papal supremacy, it set in motion a series of events that would forever change the nature of the papal office (and, as articles in the rest of this issue will show, provoke a reaction).

MONKS TAKE THE MESSAGE OUT

Ecclesiastical reform, of course, is never accomplished by merely talking about it or theologizing about it. It has to be put into motion. Given the geographical and linguistic breadth of medieval Europe, it was difficult for popes to do this. But one set of men and women *could* carry a reforming impulse across all the nations and was capable of bridging geographical and linguistic divides—monks and nuns.

During Gregory's lifetime the most influential group of monks in the Latin church were connected with the French abbey of Cluny. Founded in 910 the monastery at Cluny rapidly grew into a very large community with many monks and financial resources. In due time it began to found daughter houses across Europe, expanding reforming zeal and reestablishing a vivacious Benedictine observance across the landscape.



A NEW VISION Here are Cîteaux's three founding reformers: Robert of Molesme, Alberic, and Stephen Harding (above).

THE SAME OLD PROBLEM In an illustration of simony, a layperson appears to be purchasing a place in a monastery for a child (left).

Placed directly under the oversight and protection of the pope, Cluny and its many dependent monasteries became centers of papal influence. By the time of Gregory's papacy, hundreds of Cluniac monasteries existed—but as with most reforming movements, the initial reforming zeal had become stunted and practices had solidified that no longer served reform. Though Cluny had been founded to help reinvigorate Benedictine monasticism along the lines laid out in the *Rule* of Benedict, it soon developed its own institutional ethos at odds with the *Rule*, thus creating the need for a reform of the reform.

Founded in 1098 by the monk Robert of Molesme to incorporate just such reform, the "New Monastery" at Cîteaux secured a lasting footing under its first abbots, Alberic and Stephen Harding. Dissatisfied with the spiritual state of his own monastery, Molesme (a Cluniac monastery), Robert wanted to establish a more authentic observance of the *Rule*. So, along with a number of other monks, he moved to a forest in the Burgundian region of France, near Dijon.



FROM WEALTH TO DECAY A monk is pictured kneeling in the abbey church at Cluny (left); the abbey (below), mostly destroyed in the French Revolution, is an engineering school today.



Though the pope ordered Robert to return to Molesme in 1099, the new monastery began to grow, especially after 1108 under the guidance of Abbot Stephen. In 1112 a man named Bernard entered the community along with some of his family members. Because of the influx of new monks and because of Bernard's talents, the community grew rapidly, founding four daughter houses between 1113 and 1115.

The most well-known of these houses, Clairvaux, was placed under the oversight of Bernard, whose influence through his sermons and writings continued to grow (see p. 16), so much so that by the time of Bernard's death in 1153, more than 340 Cistercian (i.e., of Cîteaux) monasteries flourished. By 1200 this number grew to 500, and, on the eve of the Reformation, over 700 Cistercian monasteries dotted Europe.

A BOLD VISION

Cistercians were generally theologically conservative and loyal to the pope and his bishops over secular rulers. Bernard himself, a particular favorite of several popes, intervened in 1130 when a schism resulted in the election of two rival popes. Bernard supported Pope Innocent II (d. 1143) and took up his pen, writing to others to do the same.

The Cistercians also renewed a careful observance of the *Rule of Benedict*, paying special attention to its liturgical requirements regarding daily prayer. Bernard, along with Cistercians William of St. Thierry (c. 1080–1148),

Aelred of Rievaulx (1110–1167), and others, wrote a large number of spiritual treatises that greatly impacted the spiritual life of the church, giving rise to a renewed Augustinianism that emphasized affect over intellect. Bernard's influence lasted well into the Reformation; he became a particular favorite of both Martin Luther (1483–1546)—who ranked him the second greatest church father, just behind the fifth-century Augustine of Hippo—and of John Calvin (1509–1564).

The influence of the Cistercians by way of their many monasteries and popular writings gave the papacy a powerful ally during the centuries when it was claiming for itself special prerogatives unknown in earlier centuries. Though the church is always in need of reform and is, in fact, always reforming, the Gregorian and Cistercian reforms changed the medieval landscape and the nature of the church itself.

Though not all of Gregory's reforms came to fruition, and though many of them did not last, Gregory demonstrated a vision that the pope ought to be, in God's economy, above and more powerful than any secular ruler. Gregory's vision proved a bold one. Secular rulers would constantly challenge this idea of playing the proverbial second fiddle, with tensions between popes and kings continuing well into the modern era.

The Cistercian reform showed that one could be deeply spiritual and committed to the pursuit of holiness while also supporting the reforming zeal of the vicar of St. Peter. Cistercian influence continues today, in a church always in need of reform. **CH**

Greg Peters is a professor in the Torrey Honors College of Biola University and the author or editor of a number of books including The Story of Monasticism and Reforming the Monastery.

Bernard of Clairvaux's labor of love

PAUL ROREM

With eloquent and forceful writings on love, Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) led a revival of medieval monasticism. Throughout his surviving sermons, essays, and an extensive correspondence, Bernard's theme of love embraces God's love for us and our love for God, as seen in the union of Christ as the bridegroom and the soul as the bride in *The Song of Songs*. In his hundreds of sermons and other expositions of this theme, Bernard did not hesitate to identify his soul with the female bride, a rhetorical device common in his time. His eloquence inspired some later poetry that is often sung today: "Jesus, the Very Thought of You," "O Jesus, Joy of Loving Hearts," and especially the great hymn on Christ's passion, "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded."

Bernard's emphasis on love even applied to "crusading as an act of love," as historian Jonathan Riley-Smith put it; the people who were loved through crusading, in Bernard's view, were the fellow Christians in the Holy Land. At the pope's invitation and upon consultation with the French king, Bernard went on a preaching tour of France, the Low Countries, and up the Rhine to raise enthusiasm and troops for what was later called the Second Crusade—a flat-out failure.

WORSHIP, WORK, WOOL, AND HONEY

As a young man, Bernard joined and soon led the movement that reformed and revived Benedictine monasticism—namely, the Cistercians. By then all Benedictine communities, male or female, met for communal prayer many hours every day, singing through all 150 psalms every week. One male strand



WALK THIS WAY Bernard leads the Cistercians (literally!) into the abbey of Clairvaux in this 15th-c. image from a royal chronicle.

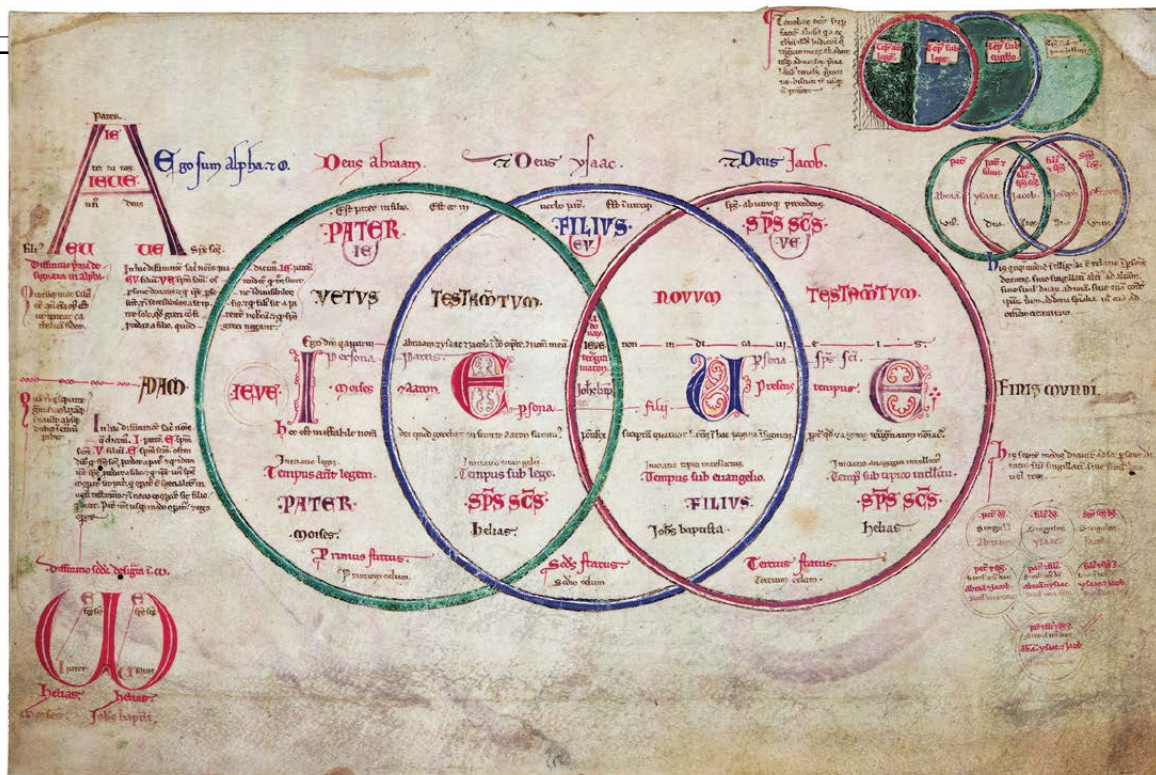
of the order, associated with the Abbey of Cluny, had for centuries emphasized worship so much that the new, young cohort wanted to restore the balance in St. Benedict's original motto of "Worship and Work."

Their energetic and creative labors on the land produced an enormous yield of crops, livestock, products (like wool and honey), and sheer real estate and institutional wealth, setting the stage for the next century's revival—and for its emphasis on voluntary poverty by Francis of Assisi, among others (see pp. 24–28).

Meanwhile Bernard's post as abbot of Clairvaux, the leading Cistercian community, led him to great authority in the church and thus in society as a whole. Mentor to popes, advisor to royals like King Louis of France and Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine, arbiter of heresies, and author for the ages, St. Bernard was the "big dog" of the twelfth century.

Paul Rorem is Princeton Theological Seminary's Benjamin B. Warfield Professor of Medieval Church History, Emeritus, and an ordained Lutheran pastor; he is the author of volumes on John of Scythopoli and Hugh of Saint Victor in the Great Medieval Thinkers series and of Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence.

Admit that God deserves to be loved very much, yea, boundlessly, because He loved us first, He infinite and we nothing, loved us, miserable sinners, with a love so great and so free. This is why I said at the beginning that the measure of our love to God is to love immeasurably. For since our love is toward God, who is infinite and immeasurable, how can we bound or limit the love we owe Him? Besides, our love is not a gift but a debt. And since it is the Godhead who loves us, Himself boundless, eternal, supreme love, of whose greatness there is no end, yea, and His wisdom is infinite, whose peace passes all understanding; since it is He who loves us, I say, can we think of repaying Him grudgingly? "I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my strength, in whom I will trust" [Ps. 18:1–2]. He is all that I need, all that I long for. My God and my help, I will love Thee for Thy great goodness; not so much as I might, surely, but as much as I can. —*On Loving God*



Looking for the last emperor

SOME MEDIEVAL THINKERS AND WRITERS SOUGHT REFORM BECAUSE THEY THOUGHT THE END WAS COMING

Randolph Daniel

"Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near." (Matt. 4:17)

In the tumult and uncertainty of world events, medieval Christians wondered if they walked in the last days and looked for the Antichrist around every corner. Often this tumult led to a search for spiritual change.

SURRENDER AT GOLGOTHA

Around 950 a monk named Adso wrote the most complete treatise on the Antichrist to date. The Antichrist would come from the Jewish tribe of Dan, he argued, and would be raised in the East. Before he could come, however, a Frankish king must reign. This king would triumph over all the enemies of Christendom and rule a peaceful, Christian world. He would then go to Golgotha to surrender his crown, and this would signal the coming of the Antichrist.

Adso's notion of this "Last World Emperor" spread like wildfire. Perhaps reform would come through a strong leader, people thought. The *Chanson de Roland*,

COLORFUL PREDICTIONS Apocalyptic writer Joachim of Fiore (left) developed an extensive system for understanding and (perhaps) reforming history (above).

written about 1095, depicts Charlemagne as a messianic ruler triumphing over all Muslims and pagans. Count Emich of Leisingen, a leader of the First Crusade, massacred Jews who refused to convert because he was convinced God had summoned him to be the Last World Emperor. At the same time, tensions between national and church rulers were waxing. Kings and emperors used Adso's messianism in their defense.

Church corruption (greed, sexual license, and power grabbing) and the inability of ecclesiastical leaders to reform the church fueled the popular expectation of impending doom. As a result people like German abbess Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) predicted that lay princes would forcibly take away land and riches clergy had amassed, but Christendom would enter an era of millennial prosperity and peace. Then disarmament would entice pagans to attack Christian nations.

NEW VISIONS An abbess admonishes her nuns (right).

HERE BE DRAGONS Apocalyptic images proliferated in the Middle Ages. Antichrist appears as a seven-headed dragon (below) and as a man sitting on Leviathan (bottom right). The dragon of Revelation also appears (bottom left).



Joachim compared Christendom to Babylon because, he said, everyone wanted money, power, and worldly fame. Shortly after 1200, he speculated, two anti-Christian forces, possibly Muslims and heretics, would attack, defeat, and severely persecute Christians. Thus purified, a reforming pope and monastic orders would create a holier world in which people would attain unsurpassed understanding of the hidden meaning of the Scriptures. For an indeterminate period, Christians would dominate the world in peace.

Little surprise, then, that rivalry between popes and emperors *did* culminate in the 1240s when Pope Innocent IV waged “total war”—a war of both swords and words—against Emperor Frederick II. Frederick’s supporters hailed him as a messiah, a wonder of the world (*stupor mundi*). But Innocent and his supporters branded Frederick the Antichrist. Even after the Holy Roman Emperor died in 1250, at least one Innocent supporter refused to believe it—the emperor had not accomplished all the evil expected of him as the Antichrist. This conflict reverberated in apocalyptic texts well into the 1300s.

NEW BEGINNING OR FINAL END?

Further church reform continued to prove elusive. Even the Franciscan and Dominican orders, founded as reform movements (see pp. 28–32), were caught up in amassing wealth. Pope Boniface VIII (c. 1234–1303), a canon lawyer, combined rampant nepotism with extreme claims for papal power. French pope Clement V (1264–1314) moved the papal court to Avignon, which upset everybody but the French, who dominated the papacy for the next 70 years.

A spate of texts interpreted these and other events apocalyptically. Benedictine monk Henry of Kirkstede, a librarian who collected prophetic texts from Hildegard, Joachim, and others, was perplexed. Authorities gave radically different meanings to the same events. The bubonic plague had swept across Europe between 1346 and 1353, killing perhaps 40 percent of the population. The Great Schism in 1378 had divided the church between popes in Avignon and Rome. Henry wondered if such events



She believed Christians would win for a time, but ultimately the Holy Roman Emperor and the pope would lose most of their power in preparation for the coming of the Antichrist. The influence of Hildegard’s visions was not limited to her convent—the pope approved her visions, and she corresponded with many church leaders and went on four preaching tours, speaking out against corruption and calling for revival and renewal.

IS THE WEST BABYLON?

One of the more well-known apocalyptic proponents of church reform, Abbot Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135–1202), constructed two schemes for understanding the past and the future. One divided history into two times, that of the Jews and that of the Gentiles, culminating after 1200. The other scheme divided history into three states, paralleling the Trinity and the three orders (laity, clergy, and monks).



portended the coming of the Antichrist and the end of history, or the beginning of true church reform.

In either case eschatological enthusiasm spilled over into great literature of the day. Virgil tells Dante (c. 1265–1321) in the first canto of the *Divine Comedy* that no one could ascend the hill past the “beast” until a hound came “who would eat wisdom, love, and virtue, not land and money.” William Langland (c. 1332–c. 1386), the author of *Piers Plowman*, envisioned a new David, whose reign would be marked by total peace, honesty, and justice. All weapons would be forcibly destroyed, and non-Christians would stand in awe of Christian goodness.

Scarcely a ruler ascended a throne without someone calling him a messiah. If English, he would seize the sword Excalibur and be a new Arthur. French kings would be Charlemagnes. German ones were all Fredericks. But though the kings of England and France took control of the church, none reformed it as expected. Disappointment led to apocalyptic visions *against* these rulers.

Jean de Roquetaillade (c. 1310–c. 1370), a pro-French Franciscan, wrote from prison that a true millennium would begin about 1370, when “popular justice” would overturn the corrupt social order. Itinerant English cleric John Ball (c. 1338–1381) preached Edenic equity and prophesied that God was ready to overthrow inequality and private property: “When Adam delved [dug] and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?” he wrote. Peasants who joined Ball in the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381 were responding to such millennial dreams.

In another corner of Europe, the burning of Czech reformer Jan Hus (1369–1415) led to widespread and apocalyptic rebellion (pp. 21–25). The most radical Hussites, called Taborites, seized a mountain and tried to start a revolution in which both worldly ranks and



FIGHTING WORDS Church troops battle Hussites (left), and John Ball encourages Wat Tyler’s rebellion (above).

private property would be abolished. Moderate Hussites eventually repressed the radicals, but similar rebels would appear in Germany in 1525 and radical millennialists would take over Münster in the 1530s (see p. 45).

Hope for Adso’s “Last World Emperor” continued into the Reformation era (pp. 44–47). In 1494 French king Charles VIII led an army into Italy. His appearance at Florence smashed the citizens’ apocalyptic illusions that they were a match for the powerful kingdoms of the north. Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola (p. 25) stepped into the spotlight, preached powerful sermons against wealth and luxuries, and predicted that the French army was only a prelude to the coming of a holy, pure, millennial world. Charles just might be the true Last World Emperor, he thought. When Charles was defeated, Savonarola was burned at the stake.

In the 1500s apocalypticism was still ubiquitous. University scholars eagerly collected new prophecies and commented anew on older ones. Churchmen dreamed of long-awaited clerical reform, and it arrived with a vengeance. Townspeople and peasants sought social justice through millennial movements. Only in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with the rise of the Enlightenment, did church authorities, both Protestant and Catholic, push underground the apocalyptic enthusiasm that had so characterized European Christianity for seven centuries. But, as the events of future centuries and on other continents would show, concern for the last days—and the spur to reform that this concern sometimes birthed—would not stay underground for long. **CH**

Randolph Daniel was emeritus professor of history at the University of Kentucky and author of The Franciscan Concept of Mission in the High Middle Ages and Abbott Joachim of Fiore and Joachimism. This article is adapted slightly from one that originally appeared in CH #61.



JESUS FREAKS The movement Valdes of Lyons (*far left*) started didn't bother church leaders at first, but insistence on change made Waldensians easy targets. Caricatures painted them as fanatics in league with demons (*left*).

Poor in spirit, new in Christ

WHILE THEY LOOKED FOR RENEWAL, THE WALDENSIA NS LOOKED LIKE TROUBLE

Alan Kreider

They go about two by two, barefoot, clad in woollen garments, owning nothing, holding all things common like the apostles, naked, following a naked Christ. They are making their first moves now in the humblest manner because they cannot launch an attack. If we admit them, we shall be driven out. So wrote twelfth-century churchman Walter Map in response to the early Waldensians. His words illustrate the eagerness of these late medieval “heretics” to experience in their own time the vitality of the earliest Christians. But these attempts to radically renew the church would soon threaten the medieval religious establishment.

The movement began in the 1170s with the conversion of a prominent merchant from Lyons named Valdes (d. 1218). Moved by the story of St. Alexis, who had left his Roman parents to live in poverty, Valdes sought counsel from a theologian, who shared Jesus’s words to the rich young man: “If you want to be perfect, go sell what you have.” Having made provision for his family, Valdes—like Zacchaeus, the tax collector—recompensed those from whom he had made unjust profits. He commissioned two priests to translate major portions of the Bible and the church fathers from Latin into the Provencal dialect and then studied and memorized these. Joyfully he gave away all his remaining property and began to travel on foot.

People gravitated to Valdes’s preaching and lifestyle. Men and women joined him, committing to spread the gospel in their language, to identify with the poor by becoming poor themselves, and to take the teachings of Jesus—which had often been viewed as for the holy or eccentrics—as the rule of life for all Christians.

south as the heel of Italy by 1211.

THE DANGEROUS BIBLE

Through the newly founded Inquisition, the church sought to snuff out the Waldensian movement. Church leaders feared what they saw as the Waldensians’ dangerous use of the Bible—translations that opened the text directly to laypeople and also seemed unduly literal.

But the Waldensians believed faithful interpretation of Scripture meant taking Jesus’s words at face value. To follow the Bible’s teachings and retrieve the church’s apostolic roots, the church needed to change. The Waldensians hoped to accomplish that, not by displacing the church, but by fostering renewal. Yet, as resistance to such change and persecution intensified, they had little choice.

In the early thirteenth century, some did stay, even forming a near-monastic order, the “Catholic Poor.” Yet others chose to leave the church. It had been seduced by power, they came to believe, since the time of the emperor Constantine; it was “infused with the venom of temporal wealth.” Many Waldensians appeared publicly in services in their parishes, but they found their true fellowship and nurture in illicit cells of brothers and sisters.

The Waldensians eventually formed their own leadership structure. Clandestine pastors traveled between the cells, preaching and hearing confessions, carrying with them pocket-sized theological works from Hussite sources. Though driven out, scattered, and reduced in number, the Waldensians’ flame burned bright—another spark in the wave of reformation soon to come. **CH**

Alan Kreider (1941–2017) was emeritus professor of church history and mission at the Anabaptist Mennonite Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana. This article originally appeared in CH #9.



Praying and preaching for a better church and society

REVIVAL AND RENEWAL TOOK MANY DIFFERENT FORMS IN THE HIGH AND LATE MIDDLE AGES

Jennifer Boardman

BRUNO OF COLOGNE (c. 1030–1101), ENCOURAGER OF PRAYER

Bruno was born into a well-known Cologne family around 1030 and studied theology in Reims (in modern-day France). After a short stint at St. Cunibert's in Cologne, Bishop Gervais called Bruno back to Reims to head a cathedral school until 1075. Among his pupils was Odo of Châtillon, the future Pope Urban II.

In 1075 Bruno became chancellor of the church in Reims but soon had to flee because of his protestations against the corruption of new archbishop Manasses de Gournay. In 1080 Manasses was deposed, but by that point, Bruno wanted nothing to do with any positions of ecclesiastical power. With like-minded friends, he retreated to mountains near Grenoble and began the Carthusian order in 1084.

Instead of codifying new rules for his order, Bruno modified the Benedictine *Rule*. The Carthusians lived

SEEKING CHRIST'S HEART Bruno of Cologne and other Carthusians experience a vision in this 16th-c. painting.

in solitary cells, practiced poverty, and spent their time in study and prayer. Odo, now pope, called the reluctant Bruno to Rome as part of an effort to surround himself with devout advisors in 1090. Bruno advised the pope but wanted no real power for himself, even rejecting the pope's offer of the archbishopric of Reggio, Italy.

Instead Bruno created a second Carthusian community in Calabria. The Order of Carthusians today consists of 21 charterhouses, 16 for monks and 5 for nuns. Almost a thousand years after its founding, the order still emphasizes humility and shared solitude.

CLARE OF ASSISI (1194–1253), RADICAL LEADER

Clare was from a wealthy family; her parents desired her



to marry a rich young man when she was 12 years old. She begged to wait until she was 18, during which time she heard Francis of Assisi preach in a local church. Moved, she decided to dedicate her life to God. On Palm Sunday, 1212, she left her home and went to the Porziuncola Chapel to meet Francis; the bishop of Assisi, Guido II, agreed to Clare's decision.

A few days later, Clare took her vows, initiating the Second Order of St. Francis, the Poor Clares. Eventually other women joined, including her own mother and sister, Agnes. They lived in the church and convent in San Damiano, near Assisi. By 1216 Clare was abbess. The sisters kept to a life of poverty and seclusion in accordance with Francis's *Rule*. They forewent shoes, slept on the ground, and lived almost in silence. Unlike Franciscan friars, who were itinerant preachers, the women instead spent their time in prayer and manual labor.

Increasingly prelates urged the sisters to follow a new rule, closer to the *Rule* of St. Benedict. But Clare defended the *Rule* of St. Francis. Some called her *alter Franciscus*, "another Francis." After Francis's death Clare fought against every pope who attempted to minimize their vow of extreme poverty. Finally, after years of infighting, Pope Gregory IX gave the Poor Clares special dispensation for their "radical commitment to corporate poverty."

As soon as the pope approved the order's vows, Clare began articulating a rule for the sisters to follow after she died. Based on Francis's teaching and Clare's own convictions, her rule forbade, among other things, any possession of property. Clare died at the age of 59,



WOMEN OF VALOR This image of Clare of Assisi (far left) dates from about 50 years after her death; of Julian of Norwich, on the other hand, we have no contemporary images—this is a 1922 rendering (left).

and within 10 years, the order she so loved was christened the Order of Saint Clare.

JOHN WYCLIFFE (c. 1328–1384), PREACHER OF THE GOSPEL

Born in northern England, John Wycliffe moved to Oxford as a teenager to further his education. By 1360 he became a professor of philosophy, while also pursuing his own study of theology and Scripture. He earned his doctorate in divinity in 1372.

Grieved by the Catholic Church's abuses, Wycliffe took aim at the clergy and the institution. In the 1370s he wrote three works criticizing corruption. In *On Divine Dominion* (1373–1374), Wycliffe decried the pope's dishonesty, arguing that papal authority is not based in Scripture.

Then, in *On Civil Dominion* (1375–1376), he questioned England's support of a corrupt Roman church, arguing that the English crown should not be forced to bow to a crooked external organization. Finally, in *On the Truth of Sacred Scripture* (1378), he continued to assert the Bible's authority over ecclesiastical traditions. All three works laid the groundwork for future reforms.

Though many church leaders discouraged translation into the common language, Wycliffe was convinced that "it helps Christian men to study the Gospel in that tongue which they know best." Wycliffe and other scholars not only translated Scripture, but hand-copied hundreds of Bibles that an order of Poor Preachers disseminated across England, preaching the gospel as they went.

Wycliffe died in 1384 after suffering a stroke. Considered by some as a precursor to the Protestant Reformation because of his harsh criticism of the pope, the church, and transubstantiation, his infamy among church leadership continued well after his death. Thirty-one years after his burial, the Council of Constance declared him a heretic, exhumed and burned his bones, and scattered the ashes in the River Swift.

JULIAN OF NORWICH (c. 1343–after 1416), DEVOTIONAL WRITER

Little is known of Julian's life, though it is safe to assume she lived most if not all of it in Norwich in East Anglia. Norwich was a cathedral city, and during her lifetime one of the most religious cities in Europe. The Black Plague arrived there when Julian was around the age of



A BIG REVIVAL COMING Both Jan Hus (*above*, being captured at the Council of Constance in an image from 50 years after his death) and John Wycliffe (*right*, dispatching Lollard followers to preach in a 20th-c. image) have been seen as Protestant precursors.



six. She could have been educated by Benedictine nuns at nearby Carrow Abbey, though no sure evidence exists.

When Julian was approximately 30 years old, on May 13, 1373, she was suddenly healed of a terrible illness after seeing visions of Christ's sufferings and the Virgin Mary. After her healing she produced a "Short Text" of what she experienced during her visions. She spent the next two decades meditating on the meaning of Jesus's revelations to her; her "Long Text" turned into *Revelations of Divine Love*, a rich theological treatise and the earliest known extant work of any Englishwoman.

By the 1390s Julian committed to living as an anchoress in Norwich's St. Julian's Church (which is why we call her Julian—her original name is unknown). Before becoming an anchoress, Julian had the Office of the Dead sung for her, as if she were at her own funeral. Then she was sealed into her cell, where she remained for the rest of her life. She devoted her life to prayer and would accept occasional visitors to her window, advising them on how to live in holiness.

Though she lived during a tumultuous time of revolt and plague, Julian always returned to the hope of Jesus:

You would know our Lord's meaning in this thing? Know it well. Love was His meaning. Who showed it to you? Love. What did He show you? Love. Why did He show it? For love.

JAN HUS (c. 1370–1415), ATTACKER OF CORRUPTION

Born to a poor family in Bohemia (in the modern Czech Republic), Jan Hus was educated in a monastery around age 10, eventually matriculating at the University of

Prague and becoming a professor there. Thinkers at the university were discussing the works of John Wycliffe, and Hus was impressed with his thoughts on reforming the clergy. In Bohemia the church held great power and wealth, often to the detriment of the peasant population because of oppressive taxes. Hus agreed with Wycliffe about the corruption and overreach of the church and the sin of the sale of indulgences.

Hus was appointed rector at the University of Prague and began ardent preaching—in Czech, not Latin—at Bethlehem Chapel. During Hus's tenure at the church, the Western Schism—with one pope in Rome and one in Avignon, France—was in full swing, creating chaos in Europe. King Wenceslaus IV of Bohemia gave Czech clergy the freedom to preach as they felt led, and Hus's reform views quickly spread.

But reform-minded Hussites began butting heads with the church in Bohemia, and in 1411 three of Hus's followers were declared heretics and executed. Wenceslaus tried to reconcile them the next year, but Hus could not defy his conscience by declaring the pope the head of the church: the Scriptures, he believed, made clear that role was reserved for Christ alone.

During the Council of Constance in 1414, Catholic officials arrested Hus after preaching. Hus said he would recant his beliefs if someone could show him from Scripture, and not church teaching, where his views were wrong, but officials refused to argue with him. When he refused to recant, Hus was burned at the stake on July 6, 1415.

At his death he announced "[M]y declarations, teachings, writings, in fine, all my works, have been intended and shaped toward the object of rescuing dying men from the tyranny of sin." Within less than a century, a young Martin Luther came upon Hus's writings and exclaimed, "I was overwhelmed with astonishment. I could not understand for what cause they had burnt so great a man, who explained the Scriptures with so much gravity and skill."



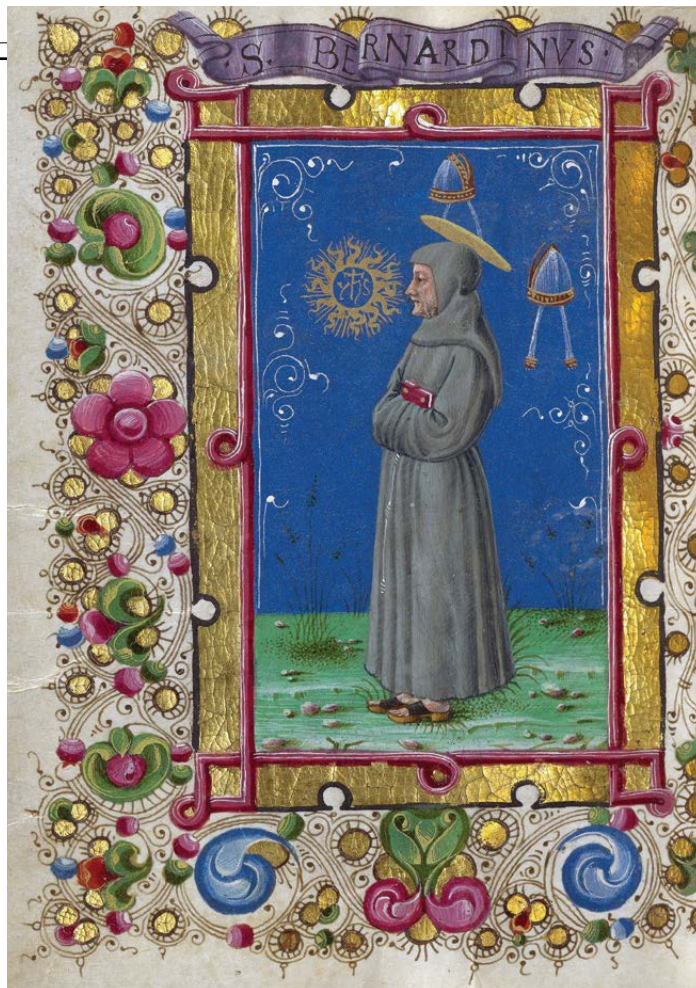
**MARGERY KEMPE (c. 1373–after 1438),
TRAVELING VISIONARY**

Born in Norfolk around 1373, Margery's father was John Brunham, a merchant, mayor, and member of Parliament. Though from a prosperous family, Margery herself was illiterate. Around age 20, Margery married John Kempe, a town official. They had 14 children.

After the birth of her first child, Kempe spent eight months in crisis, experiencing numerous visions of demons and devils demanding she forsake her family and faith. Her husband and their servants finally restrained Kempe in bed to keep her from hurting herself. One day she woke up, and Jesus was sitting near her, asking, "Daughter, why have you forsaken me, and I never forsook you?" She was healed of her torments and rose from her bed.

Kempe became known in her town for doing constant penance and for her frequent sobbing as she would tell her friends and neighbors of Jesus's love and forgiveness for her old life of sin. She also desired to remain chaste, although she knew that she had a wifely duty to sleep with her husband. Kempe avowed that her husband could have her body, but Jesus had her soul.

At age 40 Kempe began traveling and preaching, which was illegal for women. She was frequently tried for heresy—she associated loosely with the Lollards (followers of Wycliffe)—but was never convicted. In Kempe's travels she visited Julian of Norwich, who reassured Kempe that her visions were from God.



NOT FOR ME The two miters in this image of Bernardino (above) represent the bishoprics he refused.

A HEART ON FIRE As with Julian we have no images of Margery Kempe; we only have her manuscript (left).

By the 1430s Kempe decided to tell her life story with the help of a scribe (possibly her son). *The Book of Margery Kempe* is considered the first autobiography written in English, and it details her life story into her midsixties. The manuscript was rediscovered in a cupboard in 1934 in England after being effectively lost for centuries. It was officially published in 1940.

**BERNARDINO OF SIENA (1380–1444),
EVANGELIST OF REPENTANCE**

Bernardino of Siena was born into a wealthy Tuscan family, orphaned as a young boy, and raised by his devout aunt. He joined the Confraternity of Our Lady, attached to a hospital. When the plague arrived in his region three years later, he attended to the sick and almost died of the plague himself. A few years later, he joined the Franciscan Order and became a priest in 1404.

Thirteen years later Bernardino began his famous preaching tours throughout Italy. Grieved by the Western Schism, he implored people to return to Christ's teachings to restore lives and quell civil strife. Bernardino used themes and examples from the everyday



FROM SCAFFOLD TO SCULPTURE Savonarola, burned in Florence in 1498 (*above*), is honored there today with this statue, completed in the late 19th c. (*right*).



lives of his listeners. He traveled by foot throughout Italy, usually preaching at dawn in town centers for up to four hours. He spoke against luxury, gambling, and blasphemy and encouraged his listeners to repent and seek lives of holiness.

Bernardino's preaching was curtailed somewhat when in 1438 he was appointed vicar general of the Observant branch of the Franciscans. Under Bernardino's leadership the Observant branch grew exponentially. He also helped found or reform hundreds of convents of friars, and he established missionary groups to minister throughout Asia. He still felt called to preaching, however, and in 1442 the pope accepted his resignation as vicar general. He died having preached in all corners of his native land in 1444.

GIROLAMO SAVONAROLA (1452–1498), HOLINESS REFORMER

Born in Ferrara, Italy, Savonarola was educated by his grandfather, a physician of strong principles, both moral and religious. Even in his teen years, Savonarola developed a hatred of the corruption he saw in Italy and mourned the humanistic paganism in the culture. He wrote to his father as a teenager that he abhorred "the blind wickedness of the peoples of Italy."

In 1475 Savonarola decided to forego his study in medicine to enter the Dominican order in Bologna. In subsequent years he was a lecturer in Florence and an itinerant preacher in northern Italy. In 1490 Lorenzo

de' Medici (1449–1492) called Savonarola to Florence, where he spoke openly on government and church abuse of power. He preached to large crowds, calling for repentance before a great coming judgment.

In September 1494 it appeared that judgment had come to Florence. King Charles VIII of France crossed the Alps into Italy, bringing fear on the nation. As Charles was about to advance upon Florence, Savonarola visited the king in his camp outside the city, begging him to spare the city and become a reformer in the church. After Charles agreed to go south, Savonarola's power and influence in Florence grew.

Savonarola wanted to make Florence a beacon of godliness in Italy, a place of order and faithfulness. He set up "bonfires of the vanities," where luxury goods, cosmetics, and gaming tables were burned, and he continued to preach against corruption. But not everyone was pleased with Savonarola's success. The Florentine Arrabbiati Party formed against him, with the Duke of Milan and Pope Alexander VI as patrons.

The pope kept trying to limit Savonarola's success and influence, and he even tried to tempt Savonarola to become a cardinal, to which Savonarola replied, "A red hat? I want a hat of blood." Pressure continued to build against Savonarola, with the pope finally excommunicating and then arresting him on Palm Sunday, 1498. He was executed on May 23 in front of a large crowd in Florence, still against corruption and for holiness, still devoted to the primary tenets of the Roman Catholic Church. **CH**

Jennifer Boardman is a freelance writer and editor. She holds a master of theological studies from Bethel Seminary with a concentration in Christian history.

REFORM, RENEWAL, REVIVAL, REACTION

Both clergy and laity sought a renewal of devotion and an end to corruption throughout the Middle Ages—but it was sometimes a bumpy road



Miniature of Gregory the Great with the Holy Spirit, 12th c.

910 William of Aquitaine founds a strict Benedictine monastery at Cluny.

c. 950 A monk named Adso writes a popular apocalyptic treatise.

1073 Gregory VII (Hildebrand) is elected pope.

1084 Bruno of Cologne begins the Carthusian order.

1075 Gregory VII prohibits lay investiture and writes *Dictatus papae*.

1095 The *Chanson de Roland* depicts Charlemagne as a messianic figure.

1098 Robert of Molesme founds a monastery at Cîteaux to reform the Cluniac order.

1112 Bernard enters the Cîteaux monastery.

1115 Bernard founds a Cistercian abbey at Clairvaux.

1146 Bernard preaches a famous sermon at Vézelay urging support of the Second Crusade.

c. 1146 Hildegard of Bingen goes on the first of her preaching tours.

c. 1173 Valdes of Lyons abandons his business, distributes his goods, and preaches the gospel in public. He and his followers, the Waldensians, are later exiled.

1179 The Third Lateran Council condemns simony.

1200 Joachim of Fiore submits his apocalyptic writings to the judgment of the pope.

1205 At San Damiano, Francis of Assisi hears the words “Rebuild my church.”

1209 Francis organizes the Order of Friars Minor (Franciscans).

1212 Francis and Clare of Assisi organize the Poor Clares.

1216 Dominic founds the Dominicans.



Fresco of Clare and Francis, Chapel of Saint Jerome, San Damiano, 1520s

1217 Valdes of Lyons dies. The Waldensians spread, despite persecution.

c. 1220–1221 Francis resigns as leader of the Friars Minor.

1233 Pope Gregory IX issues *Gloriam Virginalem* protecting the rapidly spreading Beguine movement.

c. 1260 Meister Eckhart, later known as a mystic and a Dominican preacher, is born.



An image of the Antichrist in the Catalan Atlas, 1375

c. 1300 Johannes Tauler, disciple of Eckhart, is born.

1309–1377 The papacy moves to France in the “Babylonian Captivity.”

1321 Dante completes the *Divine Comedy*.

c. 1329–1330 Henry Suso writes the *Clock of Wisdom*.

c. 1339–1343 A group known as the Friends of God gathers around Tauler and Suso.

1340s Richard Rolle writes *The Fire of Love*.

1347–1350 Bubonic plague sweeps through Europe.

1350 Jan van Ruusbroec writes *Spiritual Espousals*.

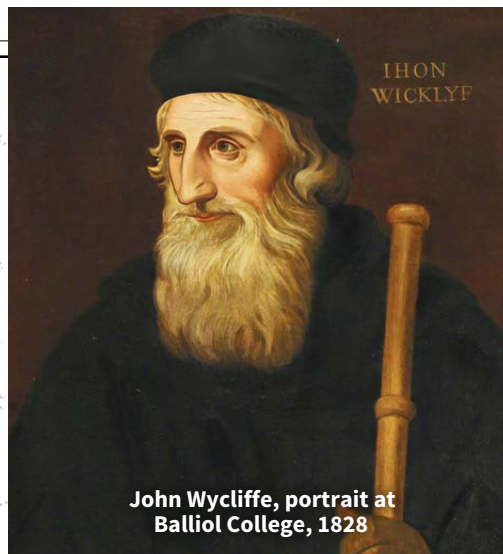
1367 Rulman Merswin buys an abandoned convent as a retreat center for the Friends of God.

1373 Julian of Norwich begins writing.

1374 Ludolph of Saxony writes *Life of Christ*. Gerard Groote turns his house into a gathering place, beginning the Devotio Moderna movement.

1377 John Wycliffe is censured for the first time. His followers will develop into the Lollard movement. Around this time William Langland writes *Piers Plowman*.

1378 Wycliffe writes *On the Truth of Sacred Scripture*.



John Wycliffe, portrait at Balliol College, 1828

1386 The Windesheim Congregation of Canons Regular grows out of the Devotio Moderna.

1387–1400 Geoffrey Chaucer writes the *Canterbury Tales*.

c. 1395 Julian's *Revelations of Divine Love* is published.

1404 Franciscan Bernardino of Siena becomes a priest.

1404–1418 The Council of Constance declares Hus and Wycliffe heretics—Wycliffe posthumously. In 1415 Hus is burned at the stake.

1400s Anonymous author publishes *Theologia Germanica*.

1418 Thomas à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ* is first published.

c. 1430 Margery Kempe dictates *The Book of Margery Kempe* to scribes.

1431 Joan of Arc is burned at the stake.

1455 Gutenberg prints his first Bible.

1470 Girolamo Savonarola attempts to reform Florence.



Thomas à Kempis, monument by Pierre Cuypers, 19th c.

1498 Savonarola is hanged and then burned at the stake.

1517 Luther publishes his 95 Theses.

1524–1525 Peasants' Revolt breaks out in Germany.

1527 Swiss Anabaptists write *The Schleitheim Confession*.

1536 John Calvin first publishes his *Institutes*.



Rothschild Prayerbook, c. 1505–1510

1381 John Ball leads the Peasants' Revolt.

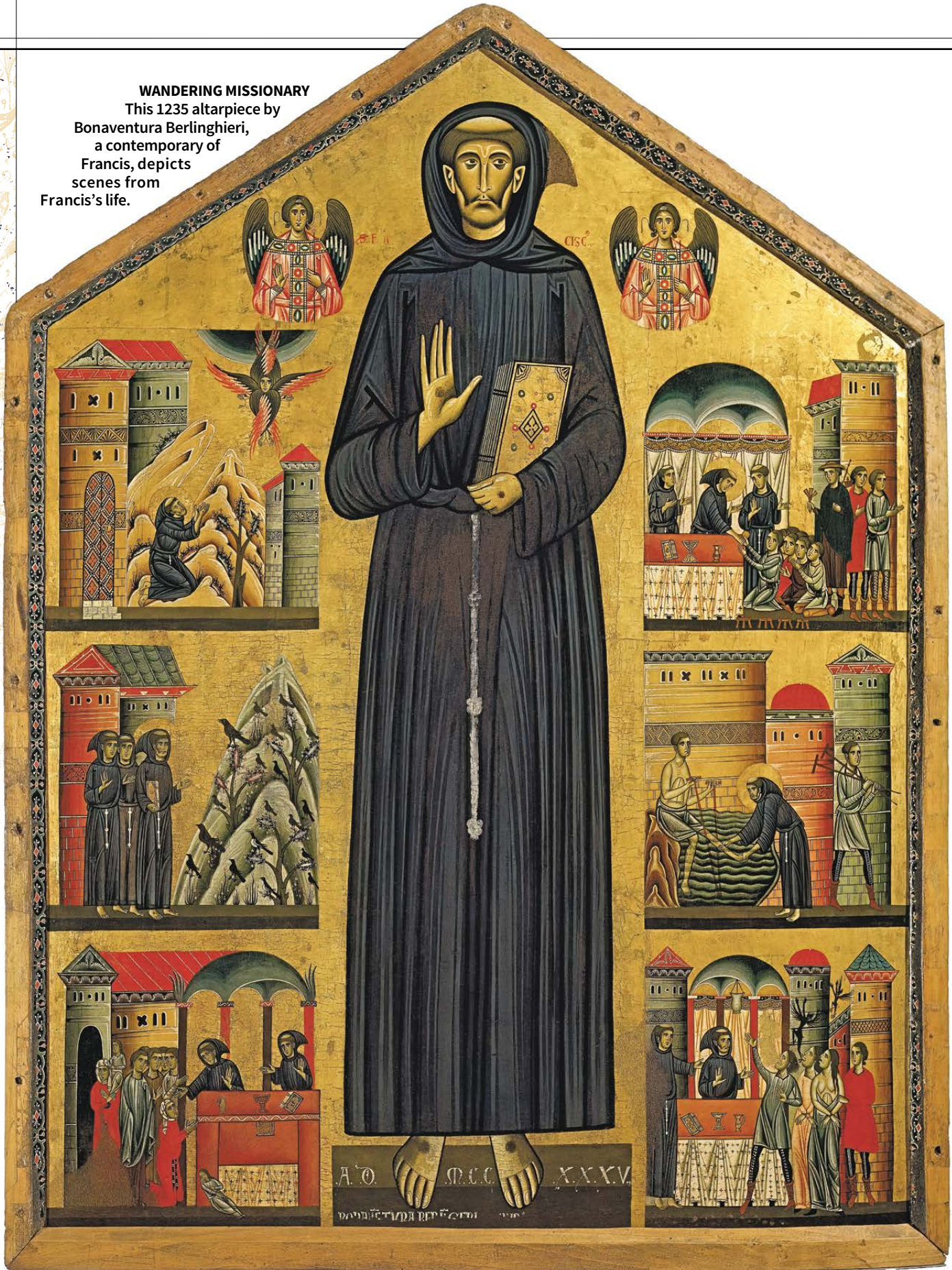
c. 1384 Florens Radewyns leads the formation of the Brothers of the Common Life. Thomas à Kempis, Martin Luther, and Erasmus will later be educated by the Brothers.

1382–1386 John Mirk composes the *Festial* sermon collection.



French preacher describing hellfire, manuscript c. 1484–1496

WANDERING MISSIONARY
 This 1235 altarpiece by
 Bonaventura Berlinghieri,
 a contemporary of
 Francis, depicts
 scenes from
 Francis's life.



BONAVENTURA BERLINGHIERI, ALTARPIECE OF SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI, TEMPERA AND GOLD ON WOOD, 1235, PESCIA, ITALY—ALFREDO DAGLI ORTI / ART RESOURCE, NY

“Repair my house”

FRANCIS OF ASSISI AND HIS FOLLOWERS CALLED THE CHURCH BACK TO HOLINESS THROUGH VIBRANT PREACHING AND VOLUNTARY POVERTY

Jon M. Sweeney

He began life as Francesco Bernardone in the little town of Assisi, 90 miles north of Rome. We know him as Francis of Assisi (1181–1226). His path from one name to the other would profoundly alter Christendom. Born in 1181 he grew up in what we would call an upper-middle-class home. His father traveled back and forth to northern France for his business as a successful cloth merchant. Francis helped in his father's shop and occasionally traveled abroad with him as a boy.

Restless and unsure of what else to do, 21-year-old Francis went off to war against Perugia, as all young men were supposed to do to defend their city, only to end up a prisoner. When he was released, his father purchased for him the very best armor. Two years later he set off to battle once more, dreaming of renown, but returned almost immediately, making it only as far as Spoleto, where he saw a vision. Francis proved to be either inept at soldiering, a deserter, or both. He would see other visions that prompted a different calling and turned his thoughts from worldly aims to spiritual.

Francis struggled with intense and disparate emotions during the early years of his conversion, soaring to heights of exceeding joy at one moment while sinking into morose, brooding depths in the next. Bonaventure (1221–1274)—the early Franciscan theologian who wrote the authorized biography of Francis—says the sensitive young man “sought lonely places, dear only to mourners.”

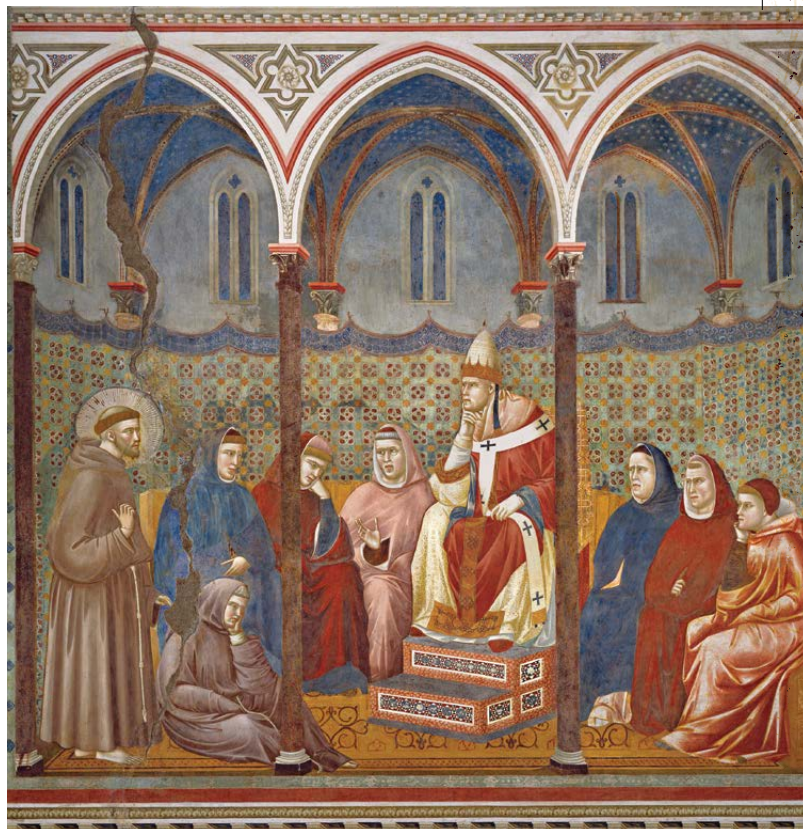
He sometimes frequented the dark caves upon Mount Subasio, which had given its pink-colored stone to construct many of Assisi's churches and other buildings. In these quiet places, loving solitude for the first time, Francis repented of his sins of pride, luxury, and selfishness.

Then he returned to Assisi and repented again in very public fashion. In this small town, where everyone knew one another, such a display only served to embarrass his respectable father. Francis also stole from him—expensive silken materials, easily sold for coin—to give money to the poor. The good priest to whom he gifted it would not accept it.

Bernardone found out and imprisoned Francis in the basement of the family home, hoping his son would snap out of it and grow up. Soon thereafter, when Bernardone left on business, Francis's mother (about whom we know precious little) freed the young man. Francis fled to San Damiano, the somewhat remote and abandoned church he had grown to love. There the most famous scene in his life took place.

“REBUILD MY CHURCH”

San Damiano was probably tended by a priest, but a poor or absent-minded one. The building had fallen into the beginning stages of ruin, but its pitiful state had drawn Francis to



CALLING OUT CORRUPTION In this famous image by Giotto, Francis preaches before Pope Honorius III—note the difference in their clothing!

it in the first place. The altar appealed to him, and the icon that hung above it; that icon of Christ on the cross was one of the most striking in all of Umbria.

Francis looked into the eyes of Christ there, feeling absolutely sure that they were the eyes of God looking back at him. He looked at icons as medieval people did; he wandered down to San Damiano so often because he wanted to be seen by Christ. Kneeling in the church alone that day in 1205, Francis heard the voice of God telling him, “Go and rebuild my church.” The word of God, a word spoken directly to his heart, pointed to a direction for his life.

When Francis returned to Assisi from the abandoned church having just heard the voice of God, he had no one to whom he could tell this story. Bonaventure said, “The servant of the Most High had no one to instruct him except Christ.” But later he would expand on what Christ said to him, telling his first companions what he heard: “Francis, go



and repair my house, which, as you can see, is falling down.” Immediately he set out on his first mission: to gather stones and repair the fallen chapel. He was a simple man who lived in the present and valued direct action.

Francis became a mendicant as well, a deliberately poor wandering preacher of salvation. Slowly but surely, and almost by accident, he started gathering followers. People wanted to know what was happening to Bernardone’s son and why he was changing so obviously and dramatically. When someone inquired how they might do what Francis was doing, Francis replied that they must first sell everything they owned and give the money to the poor.

Though he lived out this conviction daily, his most public opportunity to prove it arrived in the form of his father.

SCENES OF SERVICE Giotto or a disciple painted an entire series about Francis’s life; *above (l-r)* the saint has a vision of the crucified Christ, confronts his father, and appears to Pope Innocent III in a dream.

TWO PROPHETS In the 1660 painting at *left*, El Greco pairs Francis (r) with John the Baptist (l).

In Assisi’s town square, Bernardone confronted Francis. The two stood together before the local bishop, who was acting as judge, so that Francis could face his father’s accusations of stealing and insolence.

Bernardone insisted on receiving respect from his son, as every father is due, but Francis stripped himself of every last bit of fine clothing, laid them at his father’s feet, and declared that he now had only a Father in heaven. With this Francis renounced all the privilege, honor, and wealth that came with the name Bernardone, taking on instead the poverty befitting one who must give all for Christ.

FRIARS WITHOUT BORDERS

Francis spent the rest of his life sharing this vision and ministering to others. He focused on preaching the good news to people in the simplest of terms, explaining to them how they could find more joy in their lives if they too lived in poverty. He helped the sick, caring even for lepers, who were cast out of the community and forbidden to come in contact with other people. Francis would wash their bodies and spend time with them, having overcome his own earlier feelings of repulsion toward them.

The Legend of the Three Companions—written by Francis’s friends Angelo, Leo, and Rufino between 1241 and 1247, almost 20 years before Bonaventure’s official biography—tells us that the moment before the cross of San Damiano initiated Francis’s identification with Christ, and in



UNWANTED RESULTS? A massive church rises over Francis's crypt today (*above*).

DREAMING OF HEROES? Innocent III dreams of Francis and Dominic (founder of the Dominicans) holding up the church (*right*).

particular, with Christ's Passion. This would later culminate in the mystical event of receiving stigmata on a mountaintop during a particularly intense Lenten retreat. Francis's reception of these marks, resembling the marks on Christ's crucified body, is the first such event recorded in history.

When Francis received his word from God at San Damiano, he did not run off and join a monastic order—an important piece of information. Becoming a monk with the Benedictines or the Cistercians would have been the most logical thing for a young man to do in these circumstances. But Francis looked upon joining these institutions as different from what he was called to fix and to do. Instead he began his work in the reforming mendicant tradition.

As Francis left San Damiano, he already had his mission in mind and plunged his hands in both pockets to give every coin to the attendant priest nearby. His religious order would eschew monastery walls. His friars would live without permanent houses of their own, walking from place to place, wherever they were needed. Not only was this central to Francis's interpretation of God's will for his life, he also found freedom and joy in such living.

FROM 11 TO 30,000

In the spring of 1209, Francis, now with 11 companions, walked to Rome to ask Pope Innocent III (1161–1216) for a blessing. Over the next 15 years, Francis traveled to Dalmatia, Spain, France, Acre, and Damietta, Egypt, where he later famously met with the sultan. By this time he led a religious movement of both men and women, numbering in the thousands. Clare of Assisi (no relation), the first woman to join, did so rather suddenly on Palm Sunday in 1212; she soon came alongside permanently, taking vows like the men. Francis and Clare cofounded what is most often called the “Poor Clares” today—women living by vows similar to male Franciscans, surrounding Clare in the refurbished San Damiano.



Charity and compassion marked the lives of Francis, Clare, and all the first Franciscans, but they did not seek the sort of work done by large organizations. Such movements often became merely career paths for social advancement and power in the church, which the Franciscans resisted. They wanted only simple and joyful men and women living by those seemingly impossible-to-follow instructions of Jesus in the Gospels—not thinking about tomorrow, but living for today. Believing themselves called to a life of following Christ, they cut away anything that stood in the way.

They were not as interested in changing institutions as they were in impacting individual lives. They cared for people's needs immediately rather than in the long-term. Ironically their movement grew more rapidly than any religious order had before. By 1250 it numbered about 30,000. Hundreds of Franciscan friaries existed within a decade of Francis's death and a thousand by 1275.

In the year 1220 or 1221, Francis resigned as spiritual leader of the religious order he had founded, and another friar was appointed vicar. By the end of his life, Francis watched with a measure of sadness as the order grew beyond the boundaries of his original, most simple, intentions. Houses were built. Young friars were sent off to theological schools. Closer ecclesiastical supervision was welcomed, as



the Franciscans became just another religious order within the Roman Catholic Church.

Even before his death on the night of October 3, 1226, most already considered Francis a saint. As he was dying, people tried to pilfer pieces of his clothing. They literally wanted a piece of him because, in their worldview, proximity to a saint meant a little more holiness in one's life. For the last century, he has been the world's most popular saint in churches, books, paintings, sculpture, and every other imaginable representation. It took nearly 700 years for a pope to take his name, so presumptuous it seemed to onlookers that anyone could imitate him.

"GOD'S JUGGLERS"

Curiously we rarely see Francis smile in paintings and sculptures—an unfortunate omission, for, according to his biographers, he was one of the most joyous of people. He was the leader of a band of brethren calling themselves "God's jugglers" as they worked, played, sweated, and laughed with men in fields and towns before ever preaching to them.

This sunny disposition also showed itself in how Francis located God in some startlingly new places according to the thirteenth-century worldview: not just in church, or in people trying to be faithful, but in lepers and outcasts, in ravenous wolves, in fish and birds, in the sun and the moon, even in bodily pain and death. This was a man who rolled in the snow; who stripped naked to demonstrate to his father how joyfully he had renounced owning things; and who even preached in his underwear to show humility.



WOUNDED BY JESUS Francis is shown with stigmata in a painting from 1280 (left) and a manuscript from the early 1300s (above).

Historians of Italian literature often note Francis as the first Italian poet for his now-famous "Canticle of the Creatures" written in 1225. Francis composed this song in the Umbrian dialect of vernacular Italian when he was nearly blind, one year before his death, living in a small hut outside the walls of San Damiano in a place that Clare had prepared for him among the gardens. In it he expressed his wonder and belief in the wildness and expectancies of nature as part of God's plan for human life. One of its verses runs:

Praise be to You, my Lord, for Mother Earth,
who sustains us and keeps us,
and brings forth the grass and all
of the fruits and flowers of many colors.

It was in honor of this song that Pope Francis wrote his encyclical, *Laudato si'*, in 2015. Describing his namesake he wrote, "He was particularly concerned for God's creation and for the poor and outcast. He loved, and was deeply loved for his joy, his generous self-giving, his openheartedness. He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself." **CH**

Jon M. Sweeney is the author of many books, including *Feed the Wolf*, a work of Franciscan spirituality, and *The Complete Francis of Assisi*, used by Third Order Franciscans worldwide.

Walking in the way of St. Francis

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REFORM FROM THE TRAVELING PREACHER

From Words of Admonition of Our Holy Father St. Francis

I did “not come to be ministered unto, but to minister,” says the Lord. Let those who are set above others glory in this superiority only as much as if they had been deputed to wash the feet of the brothers; and if they are more perturbed by the loss of their superiority [high rank] than they would be by losing the office of washing feet, so much the more do they lay up treasures to the peril of their own soul.— *Admonition 4, “That no one should take superiority upon himself”*

Where there is charity and wisdom there is neither fear nor ignorance. Where there is patience and humility there is neither anger nor worry. Where there is poverty and joy there is neither cupidity [greed] nor avarice [grasping]. Where there is quiet and meditation there is neither solicitude [anxiety] nor dissipation. Where there is the fear of the Lord to guard the house the enemy cannot find a way to enter.—*Admonition 27, “Of the virtues putting vices to flight”*

From First Rule of the Friars Minor

The Rule and life of these brothers is this: namely, to live in obedience and chastity, and without property, and to follow the doctrine and footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ, who says: “If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come, follow Me.” And: “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me”; in like manner: “If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple” “And everyone that hath left father or mother, brothers or sisters, or wife, or children or lands, for My sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall possess life everlasting.”—1. “*That the brothers ought to live in obedience, without property and in chastity*”

Let the brothers . . . not be chamberlains [stewards], nor cellarers [supply managers], nor overseers in the houses of those whom they serve, and let them not accept any employment which might cause scandal, or be injurious to their soul, but let them be inferior [subordinate] and subject to all who are in the same house. And let the brothers who know how to work, labor and exercise themselves in that art they may understand, if it be not contrary to the salvation of their soul. . . . And for their labor they may receive all necessary things, except money. And if they be in want, let them seek for alms like other brothers. . . . Let the brothers take care that



LOOKING HEAVENWARD Francis provided a *Rule* to live by, governing outward behavior, but his words show a great concern for hearts changed by Christ.

wherever they may be, whether in hermitages or in other places, they never appropriate any place to themselves, or maintain it against another. And whoever may come to them, either a friend or a foe, a thief or a robber, let them receive him kindly. And wherever the brothers are and in whatsoever place they may find themselves, let them spiritually and diligently show reverence and honor toward one another without murmuring. And let them take care not to appear outwardly sad and gloomy like hypocrites, but let them show themselves to be joyful and contented in the Lord, merry and becomingly courteous.—7. “*Of the manner of serving and working*”

All translations by Paschal Robinson, The Writings of St. Francis of Assisi (1905)



Winds of spiritual renewal

MYSTICS LOOKED INWARD TO REVIVE AND RENEW THE LOVE OF CHRIST

Glenn E. Myers

Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Europe witnessed arguably the most extensive spiritual renewal of the laity since the early church. Termed the “harvest of medieval mysticism” by Bernard McGinn, these two centuries saw revival in England, Italy, and other regions of Europe, but especially in the German territories known as the Holy Roman Empire and in the Lowlands.

Spiritual renewal is marked by personal faith. Before the High Middle Ages, the average layperson certainly attended church and assented to teachings of the faith; however, with the liturgy and Bible both in Latin, few would have been able to appropriate their faith on a truly personal level. In addition many priests and bishops seldom gave sermons, and Bibles and devotional books were few and prohibitively expensive.

But with the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages (Middle German, French, Dutch, Italian, English) beginning in the twelfth century, everything began to change. More laypeople were learning to read and write in the vernacular, and now portions of the Bible were available to them. Many became hungry for deeper Christian lives. Devotion of the time stressed the experience of God’s presence when

SEEKING THE PRESENCE In this 13th-c. image from an abridgement of the *Domesday Book*, Christ appears to Edward the Confessor in the Eucharistic bread.

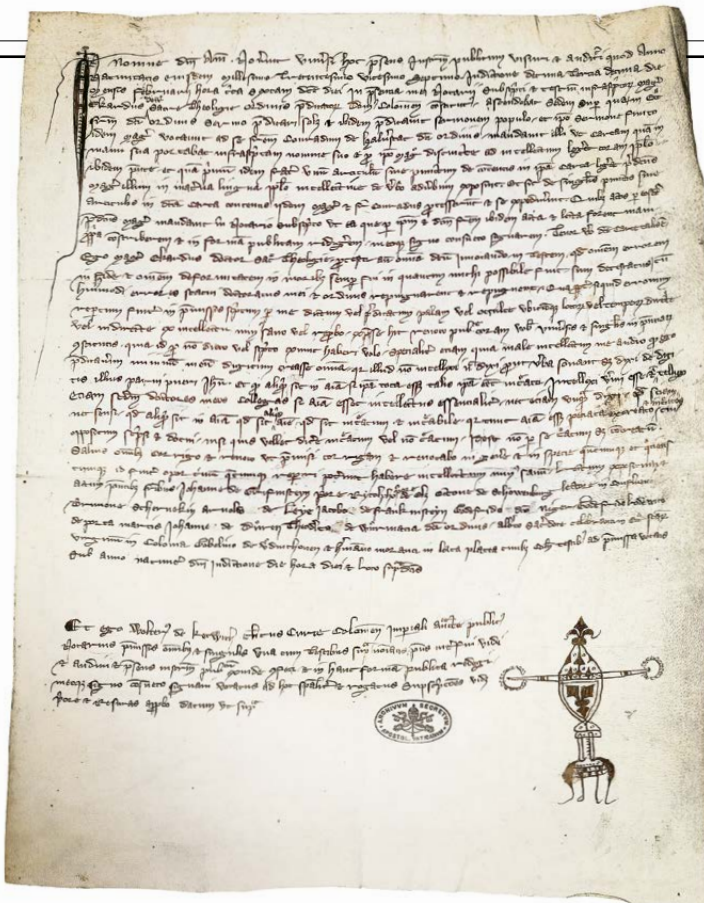
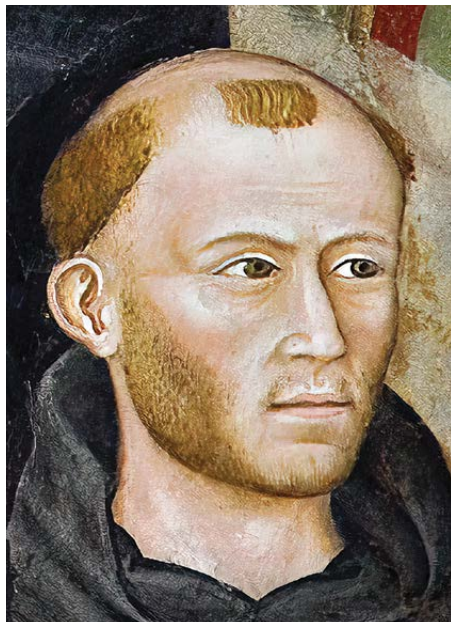
taking the Eucharist, as well as individual prayer, during which believers could encounter the consolation of Christ’s presence.

THREE PREACHERS LIGHT A FIRE

In the fourteenth century, three key figures of the Order of Preachers (Dominicans) sought to meet the growing spiritual hunger and lit renewal fires in the Rhineland: Meister Eckhart, Henry Suso, and Johannes Tauler. Traveling and preaching extensively, they laid the spiritual foundation for this renewal. In addition many of their sermons and books were distributed in German.

Eckhart (c. 1260–c. 1329), a brilliant scholar and speculative theologian, served twice as the Dominican *magister* at the University of Paris, as well as being the Dominican provincial of Saxony for a time. In his preaching and writing, Eckhart emphasized all things flowing from God and

INNER PEACE, OUTER TURMOIL Meister Eckhart (below in a 14th-c. fresco) was both influential and controversial; at right is his 1327 recantation related to his heresy trial.



all things returning back to God through Christ. For us to return to God, he posited, we need radical detachment from all that we cling to. Then we have Christ born in us each day and experience *Gelassenheit*, “yielded-ness,” as we savor inner peace that comes from surrender to God.

Building on Eckhart’s thought, Henry Suso (c. 1299–1366) taught the need for both contemplation and action in the true Christian’s life. Although early in his life Suso had engaged in severe self-mortification, he turned away from such ascetic practices. He highlighted the experience of *jubilus*, uncontrollable joy and jubilation as we move toward spiritual maturity and union with Christ.

Suso became one of the most influential spiritual writers of the Middle Ages, especially through his book, the *Clock of Wisdom* (c. 1329–1330), which was second only to Thomas à Kempis’s *Imitatio Christi* (*Imitation of Christ*) in its circulation at the end of the Middle Ages.

Johannes Tauler (c. 1300–1361) likewise traveled and preached widely to laypeople, households of Beguines, and convents of Dominican nuns as he emphasized becoming a “friend of God.” Influenced in part by Eckhart, Tauler’s sermons were very practical and down-to-earth, calling people to obey Scripture, walk in humility, and embrace challenging circumstances in their lives, since these ultimately come from God. He emphasized the nobility of the human soul that is created in God’s image.

Tauler also preached that for us to grow spiritually, we must regularly die to ourselves. In particular Tauler saw two great seasons of trial, darkness, and dying along the path toward maturity. The first of these occurs in the early years

of Christian growth when we die to the fleshly desires of the “old self” (Col. 3). After such purgation we enter a victorious season of the Christian life during which we walk in triumph over temptation, serve God tirelessly, and love God so much we would willingly die as martyrs for our faith. Here we experience *jubilus*, spiritual elation in which we “sometimes are shouting, sometimes laughing or singing.”

Such an ecstatic period, however, is followed by an even harder season of darkness that can endure for years. During this dark time, we must relinquish the ways in which we previously experienced God’s presence and our limited mental images of God. Those who pass through such darkness, however, emerge on the other side into spiritual maturity and the blessedness of bridal union with Christ. Interestingly John of the Cross later followed the same progression in his “dark night of the senses” and “dark night of the spirit,” possibly influenced by Tauler.

BECOMING FRIENDS WITH GOD

Suso and Tauler, along with the priest Henry of Nördlingen (whose dates are unknown), became leaders in a renewal movement in the Rhineland known at the *Gottes fründe*—Middle High German for “Friends of God”—with centers in Basel, Strasbourg, and Cologne.

The Friends of God were an unstructured association of Christians seeking a deeper life of faith, comprised of a remarkable cross section of late-medieval society, including laywomen and laymen, Beguines, priests, and Dominican nuns and friars, who shared friendships and maintained correspondence with each other. (Read more



POPULAR DEVOTION Henry Suso sits by his Clock of Wisdom (left), and Christ washes his disciples' feet in the opening of a book by Geert de Groote (below left).

its author, though most likely a knight of the Teutonic Order in Frankfort wrote it.

The *Theologia Deutsch* follows the metaphysics and spirituality of the sixth-century spiritual author Pseudo-Dionysius. It teaches that to come to know the Creator who is Being himself, true Christians must become detached, not only from material things, but from “I,” “me,” “self,” and “mine.” That detachment comes by way of submitting to all “creatures”—that is, our creaturely circumstances and situations of life—which often entails hardship and cultivates humility and poorness of spirit.

Becoming poor in spirit comprises the first major step of Christian growth—purification—which is followed by two other stages: illumination and union. In the ultimate stage of spiritual union with God, mature souls love only God who is the “one true and perfect Good.” In doing so they truly “become partakers of the divine nature” (1 Pet. 1:4). Yet as long as believers are in their earthly bodies, warns the *Theologia Deutsch*, they must beware of sin and self-will, not thinking themselves beyond temptation.

A second anonymous work, *The Book of Spiritual Poverty*, likewise highlights the need for detachment from material possessions and from self-will. Because it presents much of the same message as did Tauler, it is also thought to be Tauler’s writing. The third significant work, *The Life of Christ* by Ludolf of Saxony (d. 1378), shows readers how to meditate on Scripture by envisioning Jesus’s ministry and Passion, a devo-

tional method especially helpful in personalizing God’s Word. In coming years Ludolf’s book would greatly impact the Devotio Moderna and John of the Cross.

STOKING RENEWAL IN THE LOWLANDS

Some 120 miles west of Cologne, Jan van Ruusbroec (c. 1293–1381) was concurrently stoking the fires of renewal in the Lowlands, first through his preaching at the Cathedral of St. Gudula in Brussels and then through his writing, mostly done while he lived in Groenendael.

Ruusbroec emphasized the necessity of practicing virtues in the spiritual life. Those who move from the outer spiritual life to the inner spiritual life experienced *jubilus*—that uncontainable joy of God’s presence and consolation. Ruusbroec, like Tauler, described the painful darkness we experience following this season when we no longer enjoy frequent spiritual consolation. Such a time, however, is necessary to liberate us from clinging to emotional experiences, and it frees us to love God simply as God.



about Beguines in CH issue #127). Such inclusion of lay-people marked a significant shift in the church during the late Middle Ages.

A key layman of the Gottes fründe, Rulman Merswin was a wealthy banker and a friend of Tauler’s. He and his wife, Gertrude, rose to leadership in the movement around Strasbourg. As well as writing a number of books on spiritual growth, Merswin purchased an unused convent on an island in the Ill River, naming it Green Island. He and his wife established it as a center for retreat and contemplation, but it never became an enduring spiritual renewal center.

Three additional key spiritual writings emerged in the milieu of the renewal along the Rhine. The most significant of these, the anonymous work *Theologia Deutsch* (or *Theologia Germanica*), offers a rich theology of spiritual growth. Martin Luther bestowed this title on the book when he published it in 1516 and again in 1518. Because many of its themes are the same as those of Johannes Tauler, Luther speculated in his first edition that Tauler might have been



SCRIPTURES AND VISIONS The 1390s Wenceslas Bible was one of the earliest German translations (above); this image from a book by Hildegard of Bingen shows the church marrying Christ (right).

That freedom leads us into mystical union with God, the deepest oneness we can know before heaven. Given their close geographical proximity, it is quite possible that Tauler and Ruusbroec influenced each other's thought. Ruusbroec's best-known work, *Spiritual Espousals* (1350), is recognized as a great masterpiece of Christian spirituality.

ON FIRE FOR GOD

Ruusbroec influenced a key preacher in the Lowlands, Geert de Groote (c. 1340–1384), founder of the *Devotio Moderna*, meaning “devotion, or spiritual renewal, in our time.” A significant revival movement centered in the Lowlands and northern German territories, the *Devotio Moderna* began just before de Groote's death and flourished through the fifteenth century. The movement included laity as well as those who took permanent religious vows.

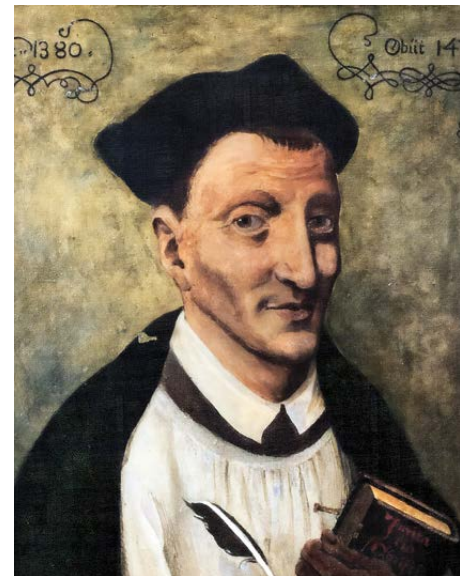
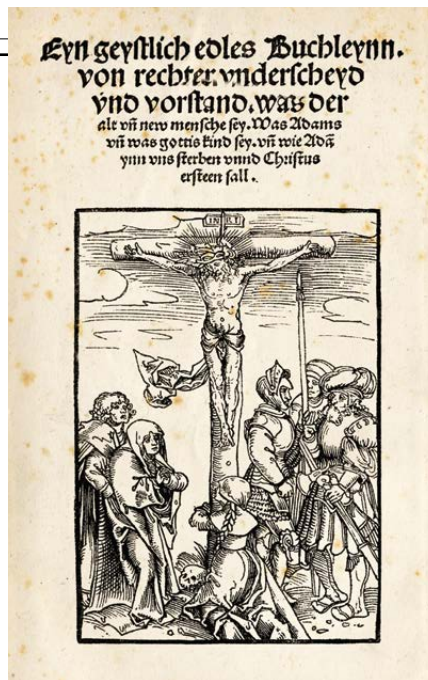
Laywomen known as the “Sisters of the Common Life” formed the first branch of the *Devotio Moderna*, living in households where they practiced devotion and sought to live out their faith, sharing everything in common. Their first



household was in de Groote's own home, and in time they grew to nearly a hundred houses, accommodating several thousand laywomen. In lesser numbers lay “Brothers of the Common Life” formed households as well, engaging in copying Bibles and works on spiritual growth, then printing them after the printing press became available in 1454.

Both men and women were expected to read the Bible daily since Bibles were ever more accessible. Spiritual emphases included love, humility, obedience, purity of heart, and being aflame for God. The brothers began orphanages and schools for boys who could not afford an education. They sought to shape the boys' character while also teaching them to read so they could study the Bible. Erasmus of Rotterdam and Martin Luther both received part of their education from the brothers, and both further promoted public education and reached even more laity across Europe with Scripture and an emphasis on personal faith.

The other main branch of the *Devotio Moderna* was the “Windesheim Congregation of Canons Regular,” a network of women's and men's houses. As canons and canonesses, they took permanent religious vows and followed Augustine's *Rule*. Over time some of the households of the Sisters and the Brothers of the Common Life adopted Augustine's *Rule* and joined the Windesheim convents, giving more structure to their corporate devotion as well as



placing them under the jurisdiction of the church rather than the local city council.

The largest branch of the movement, the Windesheim Congregation, likewise published Bibles and devotional works. In fact the *Devotio Moderna* produced 75 percent of Bibles and devotional books published in the last decades of the fifteenth century. The most famous member of the canons was Thomas à Kempis, whose practical guide to the spiritual life, *Imitatio Christi* (c. 1418–1427), is said to be the most published book of all time next to the Bible.

FORERUNNERS OR STANDALONES?

This widespread spiritual renewal in the late Middle Ages raises a question for contemporary Christians. Were these revivals forerunners of Luther and the reformers, as Protestant scholars argue? Or should they be interpreted—and appreciated—as genuine renewal movements in their own right that brought men and women into a deeper faith as they remained in the Catholic Church?

On the one hand, the spreading fires of revival did prepare the way for Protestantism. Emphases on Scripture, lay spirituality, widely circulated devotional writings (especially in vernacular languages), cross-pollination between laity and religious, and ever more widespread public education—along with sharp criticism of abuses in the church’s hierarchy: the Protestant Reformation built upon and further developed all these themes. Both Erasmus and Luther, educated in the schools of the Brothers of the Common Life, could follow where the thread began.

Yet, just as Erasmus “laid the egg that Luther hatched” (see CH #145) but refused to join the Protestants because he did not want to see the body of Christ divided, so did these groups avoid the path of schism, a path that various other movements across Europe took in the Middle Ages. Fully conscious of problems in the Roman Catholic leadership, these fervent believers experienced profound revival in their faith and sought to live out their love of God and

LONG-LASTING LOVE John of the Cross (left) may have been influenced by Tauler; the *Theologia Deutsch* was first published by Luther (middle); the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis (above) has been a best-seller since it was published.

neighbor in their given contexts. Indeed the Brothers of the Common Life who lived into the sixteenth century never felt a need to join with the Protestants, and Luther never closed down their buildings as he did those of the monks and nuns.

On whichever side of this debate we might stand, a growing number of Christians today—both Protestant and Catholic—value the need for movements of spiritual renewal in the universal body of Christ. They share hymns and worship music, pray together, and stand against today’s culture of death. They appreciate the common heritage we share and recognize that from the beginning the church has been *semper reformanda*, always reforming, as we “become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

Throughout the history of Christianity, fresh winds of spiritual renewal have blown again and again, bringing new life to the church and drawing believers into a dynamic personal faith. While some of these renewals are well-known in our day, many others are less famed yet no less important.

To get a fresh glimpse of such revival movements opens our eyes to a broader view of the Body of Christ beyond the circle of our own Christian experience. Such a perspective also invites us to open ourselves afresh to the blowing of God’s Spirit. Above all seeing God’s work in the past expands the horizons of our faith to appreciate a God who is ever-faithful, ever-active, and ever-welcoming us to draw closer to him in love. **CH**

Glenn E. Myers is professor of church history and theological studies at Crown College and the author of *Seeking Spiritual Intimacy: Journeying Deeper with Medieval Women of Faith*.



First, preach Christ's gospel

MANY MEDIEVAL PREACHERS INTENDED THEIR SERMONS TO RENEW AND REVIVE

Beth Allison Barr

Thousands of people filled the church, with more spilling out into the street. Some chanted, “Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!”; some sang Psalm 132, rejoicing in their ability to meet as fellow Christians; some climbed onto their rooftops, hoping to catch sight of the spectacle. All had come to hear a superstar, albeit a controversial, preacher.

His sermon met their expectations. He preached the coming of tribulation, shouting the warnings of Old Testament prophets and the need for repentance. He preached the coming of a new millennium when tears would be no more and peace would reign. He exhorted the crowds that until then, they would have renewal and restoration of riches beyond their imagination if they turned to God, supported good government, and rejected prideful leaders.

POPULAR PRAISE AND WORSHIP

As modern as this spectacle sounds, it doesn't represent an event at the Azusa Street Revival, or a preaching crusade of either George Whitefield or Billy Graham, or even a scene from a prosperity gospel megachurch in Texas or California. Conventional wisdom tells us it must have taken place after the Reformation era because sermons rooted in Scripture and delivered

LAY UP TREASURES IN HEAVEN Savonarola's “bonfires of the vanities” exercised a pull on the imagination of Europe for centuries—this painting is from 1879.

by charismatic clergy were a product of the religious changes wrought in the sixteenth century.

Except they weren't.

In the last decade of the fifteenth century, a Dominican friar named Fra Savonarola (see p. 25) became the most popular preacher in the politically tumultuous medieval city of Florence. Crowds would swell the Duomo of Florence to hear him. Long before Hillsong a medieval version of praise and worship music often accompanied his sermons. Take for example these lyrics, probably sung for the first time in 1496:

Long live, live in our hearts Christ the king, leader and lord.

Let everyone purge his mind, memory, and will of earthly and vain affections.

Let all burn in charity, contemplating the goodness of Jesus, King of Florence.

Through fasting and penitence let us reform ourselves inside and out.

Similar *laude*, as they were called, from the same time ring with vibes reminiscent of modern Christian



singer David Crowder. Instead of giving Jesus a “sloppy, wet kiss” as Crowder controversially sang in the original version of “How He Loves,” medieval singers proclaimed, “I feel myself melt when I look at my Lord who was born and dies for us, only to make us heir to heaven.”

Such lyrics proved particularly popular among Florentine youth who celebrated the preaching of Savonarola (both before and after his death) by marching through the streets singing. Thousands of young people (mostly boys and some girls) sang and shouted “Viva Cristo!” as they went.

MEDIEVAL MASS MEDIA

The preaching of sermons provided a consistent refrain on both sides of the Reformation era—teaching and edifying in the central and late Middle Ages just as they teach and edify Christians today. Of course medieval and modern homilies show differences. Sermons, past and present, are dynamic texts, echoing the sounds of the world that creates them even as they narrate familiar biblical passages and themes.

Modern ears may not always recognize the cadence of medieval preachers, but even across the divide of the



PRaise BAND WARM-UP Savonarola’s lyrics (left) were set to music and sung just like the psalms chanted to heaven by these cantors (above) almost a century earlier in France.

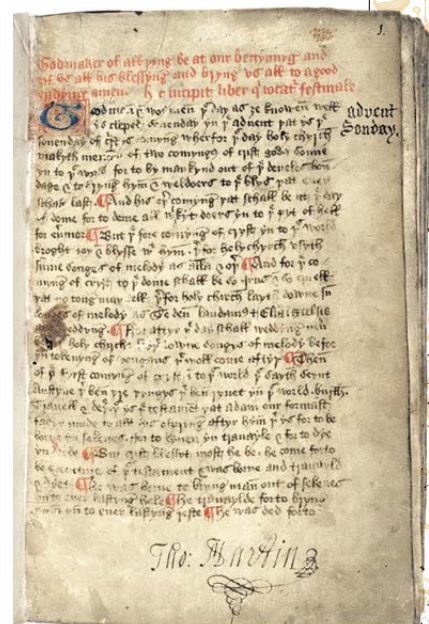
sixteenth century, their sermons follow the basic definition Beverly Kienzle offered in her book *The Sermon*: “an oral discourse spoken in the voice of a preacher who addresses an audience to instruct and exhort them on a topic concerned with faith and morals and based on a sacred text.”

Historian Pietro Delcorno described sermons as medieval “mass media” and emphasized both their popularity and persuasive power. Long before Martin Luther and John Calvin entered the scene, medieval clergy preached regularly not only to the choir (or other clergy) but also to the ordinary people within their communities.

By the year 1000, preaching in Western Europe was a regular component of Roman Christianity, albeit at that point mostly occurring in cathedrals and monasteries. A few sermon collections were composed (or translated) in vernacular languages, such as the Benedictine monk Aelfric’s sermons written in English in the early eleventh century, but most were preached in Latin and geared toward clergy.

APOSTLE TO THE APOSTLES

Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), a Benedictine abbess, provides a good example of medieval preaching before the thirteenth century. Hildegard’s pastoral preaching tour in Germany involved preaching in Latin mostly to clerical audiences in monastic spaces, but her sermons taught clergy how to be better pastors as well as grounding them in Roman Catholic orthodoxy.



PULPIT PRINCES Jan Hus (*above*) and Fra Bernardino degli Albizzeschi (*middle*) deliver sermons—both these images date from the 15th c.

PREACH THIS WAY John Mirk's *Festial* (*right*) provided sermon helps for the busy medieval cleric.

Thus, even though her immediate audience was clerical, the impact of Hildegard's sermons extended to the broader church.

Hildegard is not a medieval anomaly. Women, fueled by the example of biblical women like Mary Magdalene, preached their way through medieval Europe: from the twelfth-century Hildegard to the thirteenth-century Marie of Oignies (1177–1213) and Rose of Viterbo (1234–1252) to even the fourteenth-century Catherine of Siena (1347–1380).

While it is true that reforming winds blowing between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries diminished women's access to ecclesiastical authority, it is also true that stories of female preachers such as Mary Magdalene and monastic women like the seventh-century Hilda of Whitby (c. 614–680) swirled through the air of medieval churches even centuries later.

One can't help but wonder if the memory of Mary Magdalene as the "apostle to the apostles" (as she was known to medieval Christians) strengthened Margery Kempe (p. 23) as she faced down the archbishop of York in the late fourteenth century, declaring that she would not stop teaching about God because Jesus himself had given women permission to speak (preach?).

PREACH, PRAY, STUDY, PROVE

The same reforms of the central Middle Ages that strengthened the celibacy and masculinity of the

priesthood also strengthened the sermon as a didactic tool for teaching faith to ordinary people. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 defined the office of priest as "properly ordained according to the church's keys, which Jesus Christ himself gave to the apostles and their successors," and declared that sermons were important as "conducive to the salvation of the Christian people" and hence were necessary to be delivered by qualified clergy throughout the year. The council described clergy's *cura animarum* (the cure of souls) as including both administering the sacraments and preaching sermons.

Two hundred years later, the clerical scribe who included notes on the office of a priest in Worcester Cathedral Library MS F. 172 was still emphasizing the significance of preaching: the five manners for the "office of a Bishop or a priest," it stated, were first

to preach Christ's gospel. The second is to pray to God continuously for the church. The third is the sacraments freely to make and bear to whom it behooves. The fourth is only to study in holy Scripture. The fifth is openly to prove and give example of perfection.

Instead of only sermons preached in Latin and geared toward clerical audiences, like those preached by Hildegard, sermons were now also preached in vernacular languages (English, French, German, etc.) and geared toward educating parishioners.

"SUCH MEAN CLERICS"

The popular sermons of John Mirk in the fourteenth century provide a good example not only of the framework of late medieval sermons but also of their popularity. An Augustinian prior from Lilleshall Abbey in Shropshire, who probably also served as a parish priest at St. Alkmund's in the neighboring town of Shrewsbury, he



wrote the sermon collection *Festial* sometime between 1382 and 1390 for the express purpose of helping clergy like himself.

"In help of such mean clerics, as I am myself," he wrote in the prologue, "I have drawn this treaty from the *Legenda Aurea* [a collection of saints' stories] with more adding to it. So he that desires to study therein, shall find ready for all the principal feasts of the year a short sermon needful for him to teach and others to learn."

Organized to provide sufficient preaching material for the entire liturgical year, *Festial* contains 74 sermons written in English, arranged in chronological order, and appropriate for immediate delivery. *Festial* sermons were hand copied more than 40 times during the next 150 years, including by a savvy Dominican priest in the fifteenth century who sold his copies. Some of these copies were partial, with only a few sermons represented, but many were substantial and included most of the sermons.

Festial's popularity persisted into the Reformation era; it was printed 23 times between 1476 and 1532, including by the first economically stable printshop in England owned by famous printer William Caxton. It is telling that out of the 110 books published by Caxton between 1476 and 1491, two were copies of *Festial*.

A trial record in the Borthwick Institute of York shows the last known preaching of *Festial* to be in 1582—50 years after the start of the English Reformation and 200 years after John Mirk penned the first *Festial* sermons. It would be centuries before *The New York Times* started tracking the sales of books, but if such a thing as a list of best-selling books existed in England between 1382 and 1532, *Festial* would have made the cut several times.

PLEASE PREACH TO ME We have no images of Margery Kempe, but you can imagine her as you look at this woman in prayer in a late 14th-c. book of hours.

The hunger for a sermon cycle like *Festial* mirrored the public demand for preaching in the late medieval era. Ordinary parishioners had access to routine Sunday morning sermons (included with the Mass) and special event sermons preached outside the Mass by local clergy of larger churches and by preaching friars (Dominicans and Franciscans).

More opportunities to listen to sermons occurred during certain times of the year, such as around Easter, but the frequency of preaching increased across the board after the thirteenth century—including what we would probably call revival preaching, as exemplified by the opening example of Savonarola. The presence of famous preachers like Savonarola impacted local communities not only spiritually but also economically. Businesses would temporarily close as huge crowds gathered to listen to a celebrity preacher.

SAINTS AND SCRIPTURES

Some cities even reconfigured the architecture of their public spaces to accommodate larger sermon audiences. *The Book of Margery Kempe* hints at this importance of sermons in the lives of ordinary medieval people—showing the crowds who gathered with Kempe in the early fifteenth century to hear weekly sermons near her hometown of King's Lynn.

Stories of saints and miracles filled the sermons they heard, but Scripture did too. More than 500 direct biblical references can be found in *Festial* sermons, and more than 900 can be found in the sermon compilation sold by the previously mentioned Dominican priest.

Medieval parishioners who listened to sermons would have learned their Bible in ways similar to modern Christians—especially the Psalms; the Old Testament narratives connected to the genealogy of Jesus; the birth, death, and Resurrection of Jesus; and the Gospel accounts. They would have been fairly well acquainted with the letters of Paul as well. *The Book of Margery Kempe*, for example, recounts how Kempe was inspired to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land after hearing a sermon that preached Romans 8:31: "if God is for you, then who can be against you?"

In short, to dismiss the sermon as a product of the Reformation era is to misunderstand medieval Christianity. It also misunderstands the faith of medieval Christians who believed in the same Jesus professed by Christians today. **CH**

Beth Allison Barr is James Vardaman Professor of History at Baylor University and the author of The Pastoral Care of Women in Late Medieval England and other books.

Preaching for revival

PREACHERS WITH A BURDEN FOR SOULS

Our sweet lord God of heaven, who wills to destroy no man, but wills that we come all to the knowledge of him, and to the blissful life that is imperishable, admonishes us by the prophet Jeremiah, who says in this way: “Stand upon the ways, and see and ask of old paths (that is to say, of old sentences) which is the good way. And walk there in that way, and you shall find refreshing for your souls” [Jer. 6:16]. Many are the spiritual ways that lead folk to our Lord Jesus Christ and to the reign of glory. Of which way, there is a full noble way and full convenient and proper, which may not fail to man nor to woman who through sin has mis-gone from the right way of Jerusalem celestial. And this way is called penitence, of which man should gladly hearken and enquire with his heart.

—“The Parson’s Tale,” by Geoffrey Chaucer, c. 1387–1400, modernized by Jennifer Woodruff Tait; the parson may have been based on a Lollard preacher.

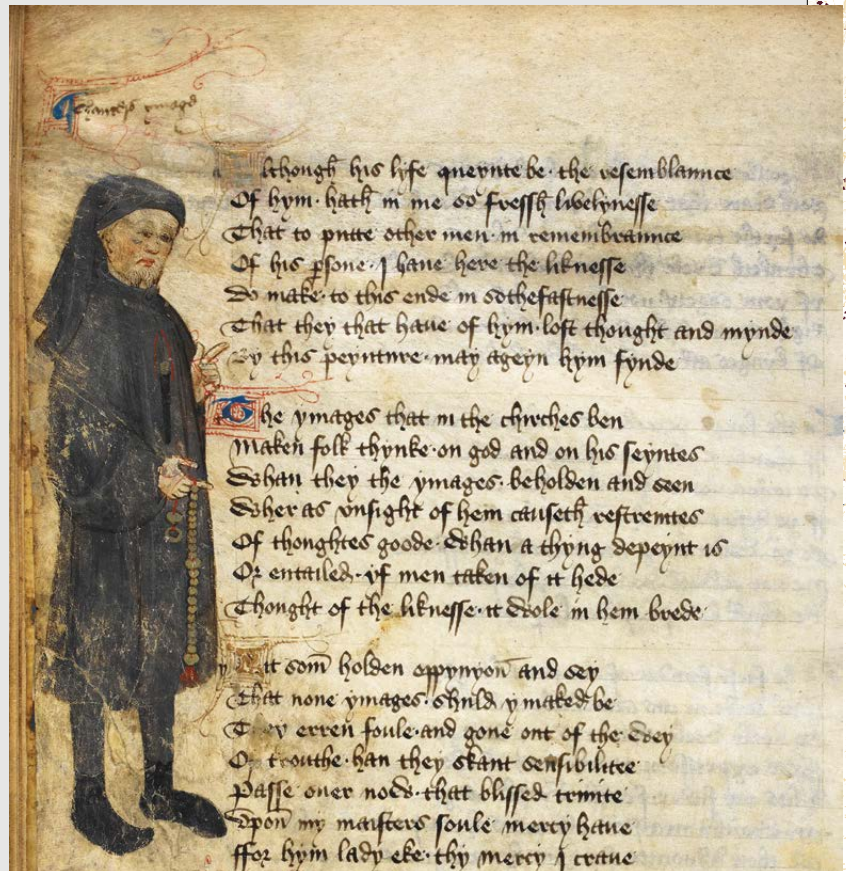
For now in the last days, when priests have been turned to avarice, stones shall cry.... Here may men touch of all manner of sin, and especially of false priests, traitors to God, who should truly call men to bliss and tell them the way of the law of Christ, and make known to the people the cautions of Antichrist.

—John Wycliffe, sermon for the second Sunday after Trinity, late 1300s, modernized by Jennifer Woodruff Tait

Dear saint, pray for the people of Pilsen, that in this matter they may be imitators of you; and then, as of old, they will spread abroad God’s word, will love sermons preached against sins, will embrace their true leaders and reject ravaging wolves. Then they will perceive that he who chastises leads them to God, while the flatterer separates them from God, and that while the flatterer nourishes with poison, the chastiser restores with wine. They will remember that they are soon to die, and that he who dies well will be in bliss, while the wretch that has defiled himself will fall into eternal fire.

—Jan Hus, letter to the people of Pilsen, 1412, translated by David Schaff

In these days, prelates and preachers are chained to the earth by the love of earthly things. The care of souls is no longer their concern. They are content with the receipt of revenue. The preachers preach to please princes and to be praised by them. They have done worse. They have not only destroyed the Church



PREACHING TO PRINCES Chaucer points knowingly on this page of “The Regiment of Princes” by Thomas Hoccleve, a poem meant to advise the future king on the virtues and vices of rulers.

of God. They have built up a new Church after their own pattern. Go to Rome and see! In the mansions of the great prelates there is no concern save for poetry and the oratorical art. Go thither and see! Thou shalt find them all with the books of the humanities in their hands and telling one another that they can guide men’s souls by means of Virgil, Horace and Cicero.... The prelates of former days had fewer gold miters and chalices and what few they possessed were broken up and given to relieve the needs of the poor. But our prelates, for the sake of obtaining chalices, will rob the poor of their sole means of support. Dost thou not know what I would tell thee! What doest thou, O Lord! Arise, and come to deliver thy Church from the hands of devils, from the hands of tyrants, from the hands of iniquitous prelates.

—Sermon of Savonarola, c. 1490s, quoted in volume V.2 of History of the Christian Church by Philip and David Schaff



Dormant and exploding volcanos

REVIVALS KEPT BREAKING OUT IN THE REFORMATION—BUT SOMETIMES WHEN PEOPLE DIDN'T WANT THEM TO

Edwin Woodruff Tait

Early sixteenth-century Western Europe experienced one of the most dramatic and rapid religious changes in the history of Christianity. A network of primarily young humanist-trained theologians and other intellectuals, most within the boundaries of the Holy Roman Empire, argued that the existing theology and practice of Catholic Christianity had developed in ways that contradicted or undermined key teachings of Scripture.

Many local European rulers listened to these intellectuals, changing the doctrines and practices of the state churches in their territories. When the Reichstag, the representative body governing the empire along with the emperor, voted to stop these religious changes in 1529 under imperial pressure, the princes and city-states that favored the changes “protested” against the order, leading to the moniker “Protestant,” initially a political term.

COMFORTABLE TIDINGS

The word these reformers preferred for themselves, however, was “evangelical.” They believed they had recovered the biblical gospel, the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus. They believed this message had the potential to restore

“LIGHT HAS BEEN SET ON THE CANDLE” This 1650 painting pits magisterial Protestant reformers against Catholic leaders trying to blow out their candles.

church and society. The most radical and influential evangelical was Augustinian friar Martin Luther (1483–1546), but contemporaries such as Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531) and Gasparo Contarini (1483–1542) claimed to have made the same discovery independently. The experience Luther described of moving from the terrors of the law to the consolation of the gospel spoke to many in early modern Europe. As William Tyndale put it in *Pathway into the Holy Scriptures*,

The wretched man (that knoweth himself to be wrapped in sin, and in danger to death and hell) can hear no more joyous a thing, than such glad and comfortable tidings of Christ so that he cannot but be glad, and laugh from the low bottom of his heart, if he believe that these tidings are true.

In the early 1520s, in the teeth of opposition from papal and imperial authorities, it looked very much as if this evangelical movement would be a massive populist surge, transforming and unifying the fractious and often violent



world of late medieval Europe. Luther flooded Germany with vernacular pamphlets while simultaneously articulating his increasingly radical theology of salvation in Latin treatises and lectures. In Switzerland Zwingli proclaimed a message of obedience to the Word of God as the path to societal and church renewal.

In city after city across Germany and Switzerland, groups of devout laypeople and clergy began pressuring city governments to allow evangelical preaching and to reform church and society based on that preaching. Such preaching had occurred throughout the later Middle Ages (see pp. 39–42), but the message now clearly conflicted with significant aspects of late medieval Catholicism.

Historians often refer to an “urban reformation” in the cities of southern Germany and Switzerland. But it affected rural areas as well. In Germany local communities had considerable self-government, often in conflict with feudal authorities. Luther called for each community to be able to choose its own pastor rather than having a priest imposed by a distant hierarchy. This call, and Luther’s message of Christian freedom more broadly, resonated across Germany.

RADICAL PROPHETS

One populist manifestation of this was the claim that the Holy Spirit could speak to people directly, unmediated by church hierarchy or the work of learned theologians such as Luther. In the town of Zwickau, about 90 miles south of Wittenberg, the town government exiled a group of men who claimed to hear messages directly from God. These “Zwickau prophets” showed up in Wittenberg in early 1522, while Luther was in hiding in the Wartburg.

Andreas von Carlstadt (1486–1541), one of Luther’s colleagues at the university, listened respectfully to their ideas. But Luther, intensely perturbed, returned in disguise to urge Wittenberg’s people not to listen to them. He argued that changes should proceed slowly, under the authority of the local government, and with concern for the “weak” who were not ready to see their form of worship altered.

POWERFUL OR POPULIST? The art *above* commemorates the 1530 presentation of the Augsburg Confession; at *right* Luther is matched with Wycliffe and Hus.

In 1524–1525 a massive uprising broke out across Germany and in its neighboring areas. Often called the “Peasants’ War,” the uprising included miners and members of the urban working classes as well as poor farmers. Economic changes and conflicts with the nobility over land use, rent, and traditional rights enjoyed by the peasants provoked the rebellion. But it had a spiritual component as well.

The rebellion’s most famous manifesto, the “Twelve Articles” of the Swabian rebels, made demands rooted in what the rebels believed to be the law of God as revealed in Scripture. It called for their right to appoint their own pastors and asked for the abolition of serfdom since “Christ has delivered and redeemed us all, without exception, by the shedding of His precious blood, the lowly as well as the great.”

Radical theologian Thomas Müntzer (c. 1490–1525), an associate of the Zwickau prophets, joined the rebellion and encouraged it with his fiery preaching. Müntzer believed the kingdom of God proclaimed in Daniel was at hand and that the true reformation involved the overthrow of all corrupt and tyrannical authority, in the state as well as in the church.

While Luther initially called for the nobility to listen to the peasants and to treat them with moderation, he increasingly came to see the peasants’ use of violence as evidence they were serving the devil and perverting the gospel. His understanding of Christian vocation focused on civil order as an act of love. To be a true follower of the gospel did not mean overthrowing the existing order, but acting lovingly within it. The way to bring people to the gospel was





A TIME OF FERMENT (clockwise from left) Iconoclasts pull down statues; Zwingli preaches; Müntzer looks unexpectedly sedate.

the “papists.” Luther argued the Anabaptists represented a new kind of “monkery,” seeking to justify themselves before God by acts of obedience. Zwingli suggested that the sense of joy and liberation Anabaptists felt during adult baptism was similar to the feeling experienced in the Catholic confessional and was, like that feeling, irrelevant spiritually.

BLOOD AND DESPAIR

During the late 1520s and the 1530s, mainstream Protestant leaders became increasingly concerned that radical, populist reform was dangerous, perhaps even diabolical. One particularly charismatic Anabaptist leader, Melchior Hoffman (c. 1495–c. 1543), inspired a mass movement of repentance and preparation for the Second Coming, which he initially proclaimed in Strasbourg. After Strasbourg authorities imprisoned him, many of his followers came to believe Jesus would come to the northern German city of Munster instead.

They flocked to Munster and, in 1534, created a utopian community in which social differences and private property were abolished. Under siege from the bishop of Munster’s armies, theocratic leaders seized power and began practicing polygamy and beheading the opposition. The city fell in 1535 after a long siege, and

the Anabaptists were slaughtered. A movement that began in joyful hope had ended in fanaticism, blood, and despair.

Menno Simons (1496–1561) organized the remnants of Hoffman’s followers and other scattered, persecuted groups into an ordered community not dependent on the state. The Mennonites—the organized movement emerging from the ashes of early radical Anabaptism—practiced church discipline more strictly than any state church, causing Reformed champions of such discipline such as Martin Bucer (1491–1551) and John Calvin (1509–1564) to envy their Anabaptist rivals even as they denounced them. A populist renewal movement had become a disciplined, isolated minority.

As the Lutheran expression of Protestantism in northern Germany and Scandinavia came to distinguish itself more and more from the Reformed expression in southern Germany and Switzerland, it clearly sided with submission to governmental authority and to the learned clergy appointed by civil authorities.

But Lutheran theology, however academic and politically sedate, always throbbed with the pulse of the gospel Luther had proclaimed: that Christ has set us free from the anxiety of seeking to please God by our works, so that in joyful gratitude for the gift of grace we might serve one another in love. Over and over again in the centuries to come, that message would



through an alliance with civil authorities that would allow the preaching of right doctrine and good morals, the orderly celebration of the sacraments, and church discipline.

Luther denounced “preachers of murder” who encouraged violence against authorities. This certainly meant Müntzer, but possibly also Zwingli, with whom Luther had growing disagreements—including over Zwingli’s belief that the gospel mandated social and political reform. When Zwingli died in battle against Swiss Catholics in 1531, Luther gloated he had reaped the fruit of his own false teachings.

Zwingli had already experienced problems in Zurich with those more radical than him. Conrad Grebel (c. 1498–1526), Felix Manz (c. 1498–1527), and George Blaurock (c. 1491–1529) grew tired of Zwingli’s willingness to wait for the city government’s approval before changing worship. Eventually they came to believe that infant baptism had no biblical basis and baptized each other, inaugurating the Anabaptist movement. Zwingli condemned them and encouraged the city government to repress them, leading to the execution of Manz by drowning in 1527.

While radicals like the Anabaptists believed they were following through on the original evangelical vision, their magisterial Reformation critics claimed they had missed the point entirely and were falling back into the same errors as

RENEWAL AND RESPONSE Reform movements approved by Catholic leaders (some of whom are seen at Trent, right) included Ignatius of Loyola's Jesuits. (Ignatius preaches below.)

bubble out from the sober channels in which Lutheran authorities of both church and state sought to confine it.

The Reformed tradition went through a similar process of “confessionalization,” taking widely different forms in different regions. In much of Germany, as well as in England in what would eventually be known as Anglicanism, the Reformed resembled Lutheranism with more austerity, although England was never as austere as the Continent.

Soon a more radical wing once again emerged in England; the Puritan movement, within (and eventually out of) the official state church. Contrary to popular depictions, Puritans were not joyless extremists. They sought to revive the faith of their nation through preaching that awakened consciences, through small Bible study groups, and through a flood of religious literature calling on people to repent and believe the gospel and live lives of holiness.

RIVAL CONFESSIONS

Meanwhile many Catholic evangelicals, particularly those living where the government remained firmly aligned with Rome, sought to live out the spiritually transformative insight of justification by faith while remaining in communion with Rome and faithful to Catholic sacramental practice.

Contarini, a Venetian diplomat and cardinal who supervised the last serious Catholic attempt at rapprochement with Protestants in 1541, experienced God's grace powerfully during sacramental confession. He recognized that Luther had described the same experience of unconditional forgiveness and sought to find room for it within Catholic theology. Spanish preacher Constantino Ponce de la Fuente (1502–1560) proclaimed a message of forgiveness by grace through faith while carefully seeking to remain within Catholic orthodoxy; in the end this did not save him from arrest and condemnation by the Inquisition.

Other Catholic renewal movements more successfully gained church authorities' favor. Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) experienced a powerful personal conversion and created a new religious order dedicated to reawakening the faith of Catholics as well as evangelizing non-Christians (and, eventually, reconverting Protestants, though that was not his initial purpose). Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582) and John of the Cross (1542–1591) reformed the Carmelite order after mystical experiences.

Across the Catholic world during the later 1500s, these and other religious movements with the full backing of Rome sought to renew the faith and spiritual experience of baptized Catholics. These approved movements steered clear of anything that sounded like “Protestant” language about justification by faith, focusing rather on increasing love and



devotion to Christ through passionate preaching and emotionally moving art and music.

Thus Western Christianity went into the seventeenth century divided into rival confessions, each of which had an official, government-sponsored set of beliefs and practices. These official confessions promoted piety but sought to repress unauthorized expressions of spiritual hunger, especially those looking too much like their rivals. Meanwhile the radical impulse of the early Anabaptist movement had been channeled into a minority away from the mainstream.

But the hopes that had burned so high for a short time in the 1520s never went away. The lofty mountains of doctrine, liturgy, and government-imposed godly order that faced each other across the European landscape by the end of the sixteenth century were all, it turned out, barely dormant volcanoes of explosive faith and hope. Hope for the coming of God's kingdom, for true justice, for a relationship with God characterized by joy and love and gratitude rather than merely by dutiful fear and diligent obedience. And these hopes exploded again and again in the centuries to come. They have not ceased to do so. **CH**

Edwin Woodruff Tait is a contributing editor of Christian History.

What does it mean to live in Christ?

REFORMING AND CHALLENGING WORDS FROM MARTIN LUTHER

A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.

A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.

These two theses seem to contradict each other. If, however, they should be found to fit together, they would serve our purpose beautifully. Both are Paul's own statements, who says in 1 Corinthians 9, "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all," and in Romans 13, "Owe no one anything, except to love one another." Love by its very nature is ready to serve and be subject to him who is loved. So Christ, although he was Lord of all, was "born of woman, born under the law," and therefore, was at the same time a free man and a servant, "in the form of God" and "of a servant."...

One thing, and only one thing, is necessary for Christian life, righteousness, and freedom. That one thing is the most holy Word of God, the gospel of Christ.... To preach Christ means to feed the soul, make it righteous, set it free, and save it, provided it believes the preaching.... Therefore it is clear that, as the soul needs only the Word of God for its life and righteousness, so it is justified by faith alone and not any works; for if it could be justified by anything else, it would not need the Word, and consequently it would not need faith.... Wherefore it ought to be the first concern of every Christian to lay aside all confidence in works and increasingly to strengthen faith alone and through faith to grow in the knowledge, not of works, but of Christ Jesus.—*The Freedom of a Christian (1520), translation originally published in CH #34*

Faith is a living, unshakeable confidence in God's grace; it is so certain, that someone would die a thousand times for it. This kind of trust in and knowledge of God's grace makes a person joyful, confident, and happy with regard to God and all creatures. This is what the Holy Spirit does by faith. Through faith, a person will do good to everyone without coercion, willingly and happily; he will serve everyone, suffer everything for the love and praise of God, who has shown him such grace. It is as impossible to separate works from faith as burning and shining from fire.

Therefore be on guard against your own false ideas and against the chatterers who think they are clever enough to make judgments about faith and good works but who are in reality the biggest fools. Ask God to work faith in you; otherwise you will remain eternally without faith, no matter what you try to do or fabricate.—Preface



PILGRIMS ON THE WAY Luther's first concern remained pastoral through his life and ministry; here he appears to exhort a fellow traveler with the gospel.

to Romans (1522), translation from CHI study module on the Reformation. Luther's Preface later had a profound influence on John Wesley and the Methodist revival.

It is a good thing to let prayer be the first business of the morning and the last at night. Guard yourself carefully against those false, deluding ideas which tell you, "Wait a little while. I will pray in an hour; first I must attend to this or that." Such thoughts get you away from prayer into other affairs which so hold your attention and involve you that nothing comes of prayer for that day.

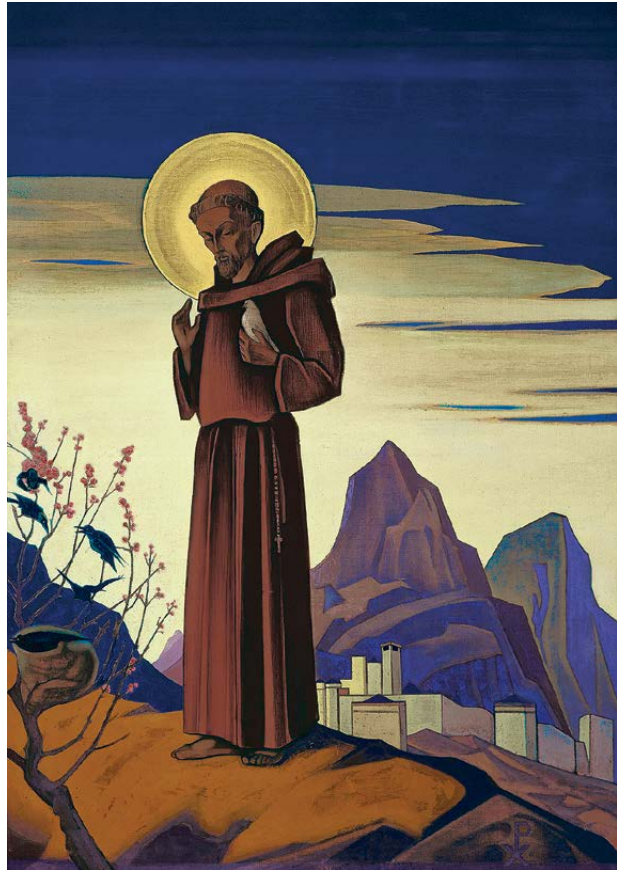
It may well be that you may have some tasks which are as good or better than prayer, especially in an emergency. There is a saying ascribed to St. Jerome that everything a believer does is prayer, and a proverb, "He who works faithfully prays twice." Yet we must be careful not to break the habit of true prayer and imagine other works to be necessary which, after all, are nothing of the kind.—*A Simple Way to Pray (1535), translation originally published in CH #34*

Renewal, revival, and reform

Questions for reflection

Use these questions on your own or in a group to reflect on medieval renewal movements.

1. Would you agree that Christianity is naturally a reforming faith (pp. 6–10)? Why or why not?
2. How would you put the definition of revival on page 11 into your own words? Do you agree with it? Why or why not? How can you seek God through both ordinary and extraordinary experiences?
3. Why was there great conflict between secular and religious power in the eleventh and twelfth centuries (pp. 12–15)? How was this conflict connected to desires for reform?
4. How would you describe Bernard of Clairvaux's impact on the church (p. 16)? Do you recognize traces of his influence today?
5. Why did many medieval thinkers believe the end of the world was near (pp. 17–19)? How did this affect their aspirations for reform and revival?
6. How would you characterize the beliefs of the Waldensians (p. 20)? How did they compare to other reform movements?
7. With which person in our gallery (pp. 21–25) do you most identify? How might you have sought reform and renewal in their situations?
8. What was revolutionary about Francis of Assisi's thought (pp. 28–33)? How did he echo earlier cries for reform? Where do you see his influence in the modern church?
9. How did mystical writers encourage a more passionate devotion (pp. 34–38)? How did this contribute to renewal? If you've read our issue #127 on medieval mysticism, what new things did you learn this time around?
10. What sorts of things did late medieval preachers preach about and why (pp. 39–43)? How did people respond to their calls for revival? How would you have responded?

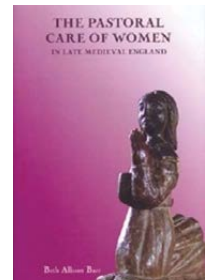
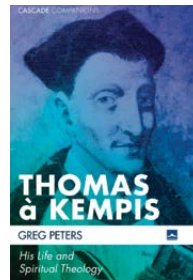
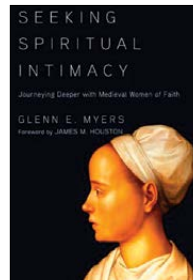
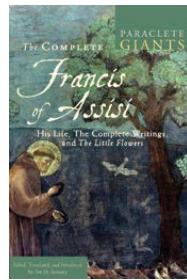
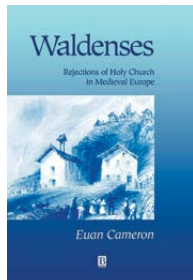


CHANGING THE SCENE Francis inspired popular and even radical revival; this modern image puts him in the center of a subtly transitioning landscape, suggesting a lasting reform.

11. In what ways was the Reformation a revival? In what ways was it not (pp. 44–48)? How did it serve as a culmination of medieval calls for reform?
12. What's one thing you learned from this issue that surprised you? What is one thing that confirmed something you already thought?
13. Did some types of reform seem to inspire greater revival than others? Why do you think so? What parallels can you draw between these reforming trends and similar movements today?
14. If you could ask a historical figure from this issue one question, what would that question be and whom would you ask?

Recommended resources

READ MORE ABOUT REVIVAL, RENEWAL, AND REFORM IN THE MIDDLE AGES IN THESE RESOURCES RECOMMENDED BY OUR AUTHORS AND THE CH TEAM.



BOOKS

To learn more about **early medieval renewal**, look at Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* (1966); Bernard McGinn, *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century* (1987); John Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ* (1994); R. A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World* (1997); Richard Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion* (1998); C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism* (3rd ed., 2000); Marilyn Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism* (2003); Jennifer L. Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert* (2005); and Carmen Acevedo Butcher, *Man of Blessing: A Life of St. Benedict* (2006).

Read about the **Gregorian and Cistercian** reforms in Uta-Renate Blumenthal, *The Investiture Controversy* (1988); Colin Morris, *The Papal Monarchy* (1991); Gerd Tellenbach, *The Church in Western Europe from the Tenth to the Early Twelfth Century* (1993); Giles Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* (1996); Christopher Brooke, *The Age of the Cloister* (2003); and Jean Truax, *Aelred the Peacemaker* (2017). Learn specifically about **Bernard of Clairvaux** in Gillian Evans, *Bernard of Clairvaux* (2000); and Brian Patrick McGuire, *Bernard of Clairvaux* (2020) and (as editor) *A Companion to Bernard of Clairvaux* (2011).

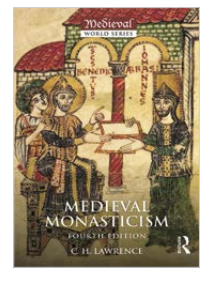
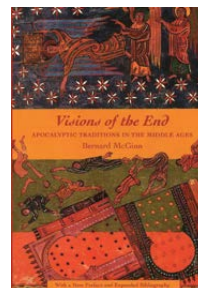
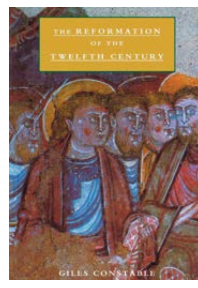
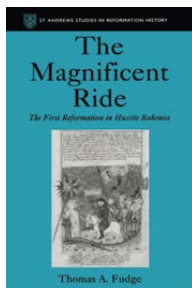
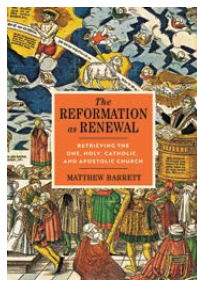
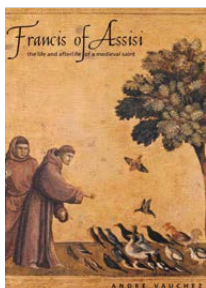
Learn about **Joachim of Fiore** and apocalyptic thought in Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End* (1979); and Randolph Daniel, *Abbot Joachim of Fiore and Joachimism* (2011). To understand the **Waldensians**, look at Euan Cameron,

Reformation of the Heretics (1984), *Waldenses* (2001), and (with Marina Benedetti) *A Companion to the Waldenses in the Middle Ages* (2022); Gabriel Audisio, *The Waldensian Dissent* (1999); and Giorgio Tourn, *You Are My Witnesses* (1989).

Encounter **Francis of Assisi** and the Franciscans in Randolph Daniel, *The Franciscan Concept of Mission in the High Middle Ages* (1975); William Short, *The Franciscans* (1989); Paul Sabatier, *The Road to Assisi* (the updated 2004 version of the 1920s classic); Michael Robson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Francis of Assisi* (2012); André Vauchez, *Francis of Assisi* (2013); and Jon Sweeney, *When Saint Francis Saved the Church* (2015) and (as editor) *The Complete Francis of Assisi* (2015). G. K. Chesterton's famous *St. Francis of Assisi* (1923) is still worth reading (and is available for free online).

Learn more about medieval **mystics** in Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* (1986); Joan Nuth, *God's Lovers in an Age of Anxiety* (2001); Glenn E. Myers, *Seeking Spiritual Intimacy: Journeying Deeper with Medieval Women of Faith* (2011); and Greg Peters, *Thomas à Kempis* (2021). You may also want to look at our fuller Recommended Resources in CH #127.

Read about late medieval **preaching** and related reforms in Matthew Spinka, *John Hus* (1968); Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation* (1988); Augustine Thompson, *Revival*



Preachers and Politics in Thirteenth-Century Italy (1992); Patrick Macey, *Bonfire Songs* (1998); Beverly Mayne Kienzle, *The Sermon* (2000); Siegfried Wenzel, ed., *Preaching in the Age of Chaucer* (2008); Beth Allison Barr, *The Pastoral Care of Women in Late Medieval England* (2008); and Nicholas Orme, *Going to Church in Medieval England* (2021).

For **Reformation** resources, start with Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation* (1991); David Steinmetz, *Reformers in the Wings* (2001); Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation* (2003); Alister McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea* (2007); James Payton, *Getting the Reformation Wrong* (2010); Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation* (2012); Thomas F. Mayer, ed., *Reforming Reformation* (2012); John O'Malley, *Trent* (2013); and Matthew Barrett, *The Reformation as Renewal* (2023). Also, consult our five-issue series on the Reformation. If you don't have hard copies, digital versions are available for free online.



PAST CH ISSUES

Related past issues of *Christian History* can be read online; some print copies are still available for purchase.

- 3: Wycliffe
- 12 and 120: Calvin
- 22: Waldensians
- 24: Bernard of Clairvaux
- 30: Women in the Medieval Church
- 34, 39, and 115: Luther
- 40: The Crusades
- 42: Francis of Assisi
- 57: Converting the Empire
- 49: Everyday Faith in the Middle Ages
- 68: Jan Hus
- 93: Benedict and Monasticism
- 108: Charlemagne
- 110: Vocation
- 116: 25 Writings
- 118: People's Reformation
- 122: Catholic Reformation
- 127: Medieval Lay Mystics
- 131: Women in the Reformation

VIDEOS FROM VISION VIDEO

Relevant videos include *Francis and Clare of Assisi*, *St. Clare of Assisi and Poor Clares*, *Hildegard*, and two from our



Pioneers of the Spirit series, *Julian of Norwich* and *Hildegard of Bingen*. Learn more about proto-reformers with *John Wycliffe: The Morningstar* and a newer docudrama, *John Wycliffe: Morningstar*; as well as *John Hus—A Journey of No Return*, and *Truth Prevails: The Undying Faith of Jan Hus*. Vision Video has many Reformation-related films, but most helpful for this issue's focus are *This Changed Everything* and *Protestant Reformation at 500 Years*. Some of these titles are only available via digital download; you may access more content by streaming on Redeem TV.



WEBSITES

As always many public-domain primary source documents referenced in this issue can be found at the [Christian Classics Ethereal Library](#) and at [Gutenberg.org](#). (You will also find older secondary sources at Gutenberg.) Have a look at the [Internet Medieval Sourcebook](#) and the [Internet Modern Sourcebook](#) as well. All kinds of medieval texts (both secular and religious) can be found at [Middle English Texts](#). Reformation-era sources in particular can be found at the [Post-Reformation Digital Library](#) and [Project Wittenberg](#).

Some of the groups dedicated to the study of movements and people in this issue include the [American Waldensian Society](#), [Cistercian Publications](#), [Franciscan Institute](#), [International Medieval Sermon Studies Society](#), [Lollard Society](#), [Medieval Academy of America](#), [New Chaucer Society](#), the [Order of St. Benedict's historical site](#), [Sixteenth-Century Society](#), and the [Society for Reformation Research](#).

The modern Franciscan order is at [OFM.org](#). Multiple Cistercian sites highlight specific groups, but a Cistercian abbey in Dallas has put together a [particularly rich set of historical resources](#) about the order. An extensive website devoted to Chaucer's life and works is at [Harvard University](#), and a set of resources on every aspect of medieval life including both primary and secondary sources is at [Online Medieval Sources](#). You may also want to look at [UMILTA](#), an idiosyncratic website devoted to the study of women mystics (mostly medieval) and Chaucer. **CH**

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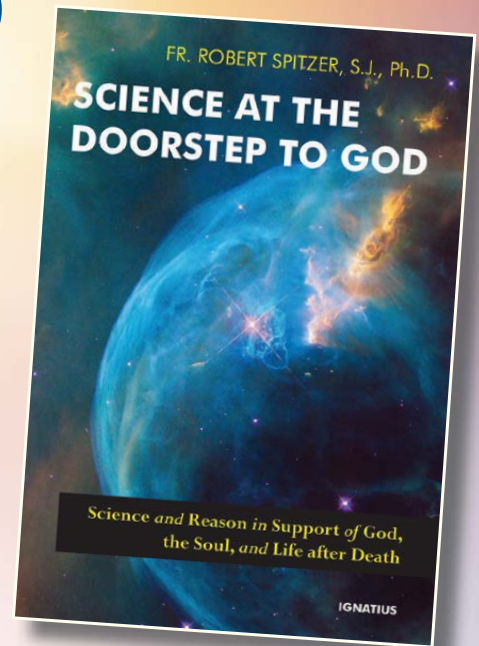
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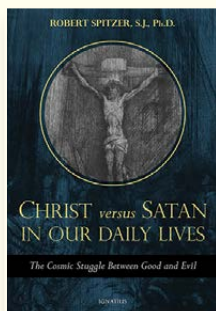
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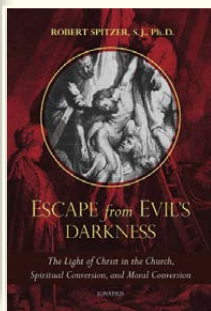
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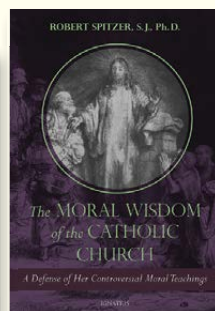
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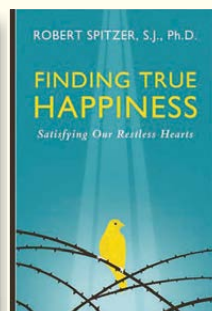
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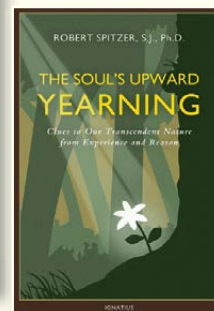
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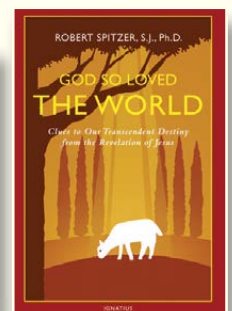
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