

The LTSN at 'Revisiting Chaucer and Christianity' Christianity and Culture Conference

Canterbury Cathedral International Study Centre, 21-23 July 2003

This was an international, interdisciplinary conference held within the precincts of Canterbury Cathedral. Having been invited to give a paper by Dr. Dee Dyas of Saint John's College, Nottingham, the director of Christianity and Culture I used the conference's remit of material to inform both teaching and research to give a presentation which combined both aspects of my current post.

One of the aims of Christianity and Culture is to introduce students to medieval religion. In my discussion of 'Chaucer and the friars' I tried to suggest ways in which students might be made aware of the issues surrounding mendicant spirituality in the middle ages. Taking Sonja Cameron's work on 'Using the WWW to teach History...' as the source for most of my ideas I showed the variety of modern visions of Franciscan spirituality on the web, including pet memorial sites, prayer lines and the corporate identity of the Franciscan Order's web site. I then looked at the ways in which Franciscan history was presented on the web and how students might be encouraged to make a critical appraisal of this material. It may well be that these modern presentations have little to do with Francis' original ideas, but there is no doubt of their potency and many believers are happier with them than the more apocalyptic religious web sites which may well have more closely resembled the views of Francis' early followers.

This pattern was probably already established in Chaucer's time. Using the template of early Catholic writings on the Cathar heresy, criticism of a religious group can often unwittingly reveal its strengths. The Summoner's Tale may be a classic example of this (although not unwitting on Chaucer's part). Like the modern web sites, the friar in the tale delivered a version of spirituality which most of the time was very popular; however the arrival of illness disillusioned a usually generous patron. The friar is a greedy hypocrite, tending to the rich, but he offers a less repulsive vision of religion than the summoner or the pardoner. An attendance at the session of ten was a little disappointing, but the discussion was lively and the paper well received.

On the Tuesday evening there was a demonstration of the CD-Rom of medieval 'Biblical Images' developed by the 'Christianity and Culture' team with financial help from, among others, the Subject Centre. This has previously been shown at Kalamazoo in May and once again attracted enthusiastic attention. The CD is aimed at providing an authoritative introduction to medieval religion for anyone teaching medieval studies. It can be used by students, but seems most suited to allowing tutors from a variety of disciplines to 'pick and mix' the images and commentary relevant to their teaching needs. Contact Dr. Dee Dyas on d.dyas@stjohns-nottm.ac.uk for more information. The Centre's assistance with the project was generously acknowledged and there was also interest in the briefing papers and promotional material I was able to display.

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Revisiting Chaucer and Christianity Conference
'Chaucer and the friars'

Web sites

www.saint-francis.co.uk
www.saintfrancis.net

www.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook.html
Halsall

www.geocities.com/Athens/forum/5918/francis.htm

www.travel.it/relig/saints/francis.htm

www.ofm.org

www.wtu.edu/franciscan/packs/tour/index.html

www.remnantsofgod.org/flash/whore/whoremenu.html

Pet memorial service
Saint Francis parish, Dracut, Boston,
Massachusetts
Internet Medieval Sourcebook ed. Paul

Maltese Capuchin brothers
Italian tourism site
Franciscan Order site
Tour of Assisi
'Remnants of God' website.

Bibliography

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V.Davis 'Mendicants in London in the Reign of Richard II', *London
Journal*, 25 (2000), pp.1-12.

C. H. Lawrence *The Friars: the impact of the early mendicant movement on
western society*, (London, 1994)

J. R.H. Moorman *History of the Franciscan Order* (Oxford, 1968)

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No.93, (York, 1997)

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