



**Subject Centre for  
History, Classics  
and Archaeology**

# **Art, the Bible and the Medieval Idea of the Family Tutor's Notes**

March 2006

*by M. Ormrod*

## **Introduction**

These notes are to be read in conjunction with the students' handbook and are intended to provide a basis for the planning of each weekly seminar session. It is assumed that the course tutor will have access to and be familiar with the IOS CD ROM.

## **Weekly Topics**

The course is intended to follow the standard 20 credit Period Topic format, with one initial briefing session of one hour, followed by eight, weekly, seminar sessions of two hours. Students are required to submit two procedural essays during the course, each of which will be discussed during a half-hour Tutorial session. The Student handbook identifies the weekly sessions as follows:

Week 1: Briefing.

Week 2: The Structures of Medieval Society, an introduction.

Week 3: Image and Consumer

Week 4: Case Study 1: Adam and Eve, models of marriage?.

Week 5: Case Study 2: Parents and Children

Week 6: Case Study 3. Noah, Abraham and Joseph. Issues of Youth and Age.

Week 7: Case Study 4. Mary Joseph and Jesus. The Perfect family?

Week 8: Field Visit. All Saints North St.

Week 9: Group Presentations.

## **Note to tutor**

Although this arrangement of seminar topics has proved successful, it would be possible to rearrange the order of delivery to suit specific circumstances or to reflect the background of the students attending the course. In general terms it is anticipated that students will be coming to the course with little or no previous knowledge of medieval history, or of the study of the history of the family. It may also be reasonably anticipated that a wide range of faith backgrounds will be represented amongst the students.

The overall structure of the course is intended to provide students with an initial foundation in the structures of the medieval society, then to move rapidly to an introduction to the role of visual imagery, and to the distinction between images intended for public and private consumption. Having established this knowledge base, a series of specific case studies provides the opportunity for students to engage with a range of sources, demonstrating the ways in which sources may be read in a range of different ways.

The field study and presentation element of the course is intended to provide students with an opportunity to get out of the classroom to see a range of stained glass images in a parochial setting. It will also challenge the students to use the IOS CD creatively in order to research elements of the background of the windows being studied.

## **Session 1: Briefing**

1 hour.

### **Target Outcomes**

- Issue of student handbook.
- Issue of IOS CD ROM
- Introduction of self and course format.
- Nomination of pairs of students to present first Seminar Papers

NB: Timetabling and the proximity of the briefing to the first seminar may require some flexibility.

It is important at this initial session to capitalise on the enthusiasm of new under-graduates, whilst allowing for the inevitable degree of bewilderment. Allow for the fact that you will have to repeat elements of the briefing at later stages of the course.

## Handbook

Draw students' attention to the format. The introductory notes in the 'How to use this book' section are intended to help students find their way through the booklet and should be fairly self-explanatory.

Pay particular attention to the sections specifying texts set in addition to the IOS CD ROM (which may or may not be provided for?) These texts should be reviewed on a periodic basis. The Goldberg volume is particularly useful as it draws attention quickly to the key structures of late medieval society. Fleming's work is a general introduction to the study of the household and family. The Marks volume offers a particularly useful introduction to the key themes of medieval devotion and the production and consumption of imagery. The Beadle and King edition of the York plays is included as a reflection of the initial tutors principal area of interest with regard to the cultural history of the later Middle Ages and may be reviewed and replaced with any one of a number of volumes to reflect the specific interests of subsequent tutors.

The introduction and demonstration of the IOS CD is a key element of the briefing. It is likely that students will have no previous experience of this kind of learning resource, although it may be reasonably assumed that they will have a sound level of computer literacy. Specialist support in the introduction of the CD and on trouble shooting is recommended. NB – Check in advance for any recently encountered problems with browser technology.

It is important to point out to students that within the IOS CD they have access to a powerful learning and research tool. This is best done perhaps when drawing attention to the 'Weekly Check List'. Remind students that the IOS CD offers a unique way to engage with a wide range of primary resources, within a fully indexed and searchable framework. The purpose of including this section in the handbook is to provide students new to the challenges of largely independent learning with some kind of key framework around which to plan their time on a week by week basis. It may be politic to point out that this is not an attempt at spoon feeding, but a reflection of the problems and difficulties that many students experience.

## Seminar Paper checklist

This is an opportunity to encourage volunteers to step forward to present papers in the first formal session. It is useful to encourage paired working at this early stage in order to break some of the ice and encourage participation. Remember to provide sufficient time for the pairings to exchange details and set up meetings. The first seminar (held in week 2) calls for 5 separate papers – emphasise the need to keep to the 10-minute guide time, as this is an ambitious schedule.

Emphasise to all students once more the importance of familiarising themselves with the layout of the information within the CD and the navigation principles. The [Help](#) facility should be recommended as suitable start point. Go on to emphasise in particular the flexibility of the [Search by Topic](#) facility.

## Bibliography

This section should be reviewed on a regular basis. The selection of new material for this course is largely a matter for personal choice.

## Essay programme

A selection of six essay titles is offered in the final section of the book. In fixing essay deadlines, it is important to remember that a degree of co-ordination with the submission dates for the other taught elements of the course is required. It is likely that these other deadlines will be less flexible than those for this course. As a start point, submission of essays in weeks 4 and 7 should be reasonable, affording opportunity to schedule tutorials for weeks 5 and 8.

The specification of essay titles is again largely a matter for personal choice. The selection offered in the handbook could certainly be varied for future offerings of the course.

## Seminar Week 2: The Structures of Medieval Society, an introduction.

2 Hours.

### Target Outcomes

- Building student confidence.
- Addressing any concerns / problems issues.
- Introductions to the key structures of medieval society.
- Demonstrate the flexibility of the IOS CD in selected areas.
- Troubleshooting and problems encountered.

Before commencing papers, remind the students of the need to stick to the time limit of ten minutes per paper. (If deemed appropriate – refer to the conference round as a potential long term aim for students).

IOS Usage – for the summary paper on Gender and Hierarchy, refer the students to the IOS theme [Old Testament Women](#). Demonstrate the links through from the Theme search box, and point out the links though to the Glossary for the explanation of any key or unfamiliar terms, and the links though to the case studies. Highlight the fact that one future case study will specifically focus on Adam and Eve.

There are fewer direct opportunities to link specifically from the other set Seminar Papers to the IOS CD, so it is important to establish the ways in which the [Search by Topic](#) facility can be used creatively. This can usefully be demonstrated by directing the students to explore the power of the facility to complement their understandings of Guild and Fraternity. To follow an appropriate line of enquiry, demonstrate the links by entering the Topic search field and typing 'Merchants' – this brings up two references. Select the [Bolton Hours](#) entry. On the information relating to this particular image (the Trinity) draw attention to the ability to link on the information about [Books of Hours](#), and beyond that to the [Office of the Virgin](#). The objective here is to show how the IOS CD can act as a resource for researching, in this instance, elements of the daily lives of a specific social class.

It is unlikely on this first seminar that there will be a great deal of time available to go into further examples of the search engines capability.

At the end of the seminar, elect the students to present papers for the next seminar. The volunteers for the Duggan and Chazelle articles should be informed that the articles deal with the views of Gregory the Great, and an IOS search under that name may prove fruitful.

It is a packed agenda again for this session, so warn the student looking at the Camille paper that there is the likelihood that their paper may have to be carried over to the next week.

### Seminar Week 3: Image and Consumer.

2 Hours.

#### Target Outcomes

- Exposure to range of different critical perspectives on the use and interpretation of images.
- Further experience of group discussion.
- Demonstrate ability to link through from the IOS CD to interrogate aspects of thought and commentary to run alongside the week's readings.
- Give students an opportunity to sample the work of key art historians.

#### Seminar Papers

Despite the ordering of the papers in the book, they are best presented with the Duggan and Chazelle articles first, followed by Aston and Marks. If the group is particularly vocal, it is likely that time will run out before the Camille paper – this can be carried over to the next week as there is some overlap into the issues of the depiction of gender.

Papers on Duggan and Chazelle. The key points to emphasise here are the ranges of interpretations which scholars put on the ways in which images may have been accessible to the consumers. For comparison and further reading, demonstrate the links through from the IOS search engine to [Gregory the Great](#). This brings up a number of references – suggest that the students follow up the links in specific areas to access the commentaries on the illustrations presented.

The Aston and Marks articles introduce the students to the varying approaches of Historians drawn from different disciplinary backgrounds. The Aston article in particular allows for some discussion of the exhibition catalogue as a specific type of scholarly reference work.

#### Looking ahead

In preparation for next week, demonstrate to the students how to follow the links to the Fall of Humankind theme page, and to the Temptation and Fall sub-theme page. (This page may be accessed directly from entry four under the Gregory The Great search results). Following this link facilitates a demonstration of the link through to appropriate scriptural passages. Note how they are highlighted in green to distinguish them from the other references.

Select presenters for the next round of seminar presentations. Remind about the potential for exploring the topic by creative use of the search engine.

### Seminar Week 4: Case Study I. Adam and Eve. Models of Marriage?

2 Hours.

(First Essays Due this week?)

## Target Outcomes

- Direct engagement with the IOS CD.
- Developing an understanding of medieval marriage practice.
- Revision of the basic scriptural narratives of the Fall.

## Seminar Papers

This weeks Seminar Papers are drawn directly from the themes on the IOS CD relating to Old Testament Women , the Creation and Fall of Humankind.

It is important to introduce the students this week to the mechanics of marriage in this era. In particular, the problems of clandestine marriage and the desire to regulate moral behaviour should be highlighted. Point out to students that there is an extensive literature dealing with various aspects of marriage practice and ideology should this become a specific area of interest.

The resources of the IOS CD can be used here to draw attention to the concepts of the construction of ideal 'types' and 'hierarchies'. Within this topic it is also useful to draw students attention to the concept of continuity and change. Accessing sources in this way can tend to lead to a loss of sensitivity to the processes of change over time. Remind the students to take particular note of the dating of various images – a detail that can be overlooked by the enthusiast!

It is important to ensure that the students pay particular attention to the hierarchy of creation. There is scope this week to introduce the students to one or more dramatic texts to complement their understandings and readings of the texts. The Creation and Fall are episodes that are dealt with in all the major Corpus Christi cycles. Comparison with the illustrations highlights some points of particular importance. Examine together the illustrations of the Creation theme. In the illustrations drawn from the mid-fifteenth century *Bible Historiale* a traditional interpretation of the events of the creation of Eve from Adam's rib is illustrated. There is a significant contrast with the dramatised version of this event as enacted in the York Corpus Christi play, where Deus simultaneously animates both Adam and Eve.

## Looking ahead

Select the volunteers for next weeks papers. Draw to the attention of all students the themes that are being studied. Draw to the group's attention the links from the Childhood of Jesus theme page to the discussions of the distinction between the Canonical Gospels and the apocryphal Infancy Gospels.

## Seminar Week 5: Case Study 2. Parents and Children.

### Target Outcomes

- Awareness of the History of Childhood as a particular field of enquiry.
- Introduction to the Aries thesis and the challenges / responses thereto.
- Awareness of other cultural sources which may be used to complement the study of the family.

The IOS Themes recommended for study this week are the Massacre of the Innocents and the Childhood of Jesus. The key point to wrestle with here is whether or not the artists were illustrating the various groups with any specific perspective on either the child, or the child parent relationship – this distinction may need to be drawn out.

The responses to the Aries thesis are particularly relevant here. The Burton article needs to be afforded sufficient time for discussion.

It will be useful here to draw to the attention of the group the range of images of the Holy Kindred. This is a theme that will be returned to in seminar six. Ensure that the group notes the distinctions between the portrayal of the character and status of Joseph– highlight the fact of the ambiguous nimbung of the figure. There may be an opportunity to branch out into discussion of the way in which the division between the human and divine is drawn. It may be necessary here to revise certain elements of the practice of medieval religion.

Group discussion is a key element of this week's seminar.

### Looking ahead

Next weeks seminar requires the students to have access to extracts from a range of dramatic texts for comparative purposes. If these have not been circulated in advance they should be prepared for distribution in the seminar. To provide a break from the routine, there are no specific Seminar Papers to be prepared. It is the intention instead that the group will read together from a range of dramatic texts. These may be either distributed in advance, or tabled during the session.

## Seminar Week 6: Case Study 3. Noah, Abraham and Joseph. Issues of youth and age.

### Target Outcomes

- Awareness of the issues of age in medieval society.
- Exposure to wider range of cultural artefacts.
- Comparison of a range of scenes as depicted in visual imagery and dramatic texts.

The IOS Theme of Typology has been set as the core study for this week. It is important that the students have grasped the concept and are able to discuss its implications with reference to a range of images, most notably Abraham and Noah. The notion of Isaac prefiguring Christ is an important element to draw to the attention of the group. Note – the Typology theme page does not offer a link directly to the Abraham or Noah theme pages.

In the place of specific Seminar Papers, group study of the selected dramatic texts will provide a change of routine and approach. The key element to pick up here is the contrast between the ways in which the elements of the biblical narrative could be interpreted by playwright and illustrator. It is important here to allow the students opportunity to discuss the dramatised images created by the plays with comparable images.

The key theme to draw out here is that it would be wrong to simplify medieval perspectives on age and status based on visual imagery alone. Within the images contained in the IOS CD, there are no examples of the comic or derogatory treatment of Uxor Noah, a theme that may be drawn out through the examination of the creation of character in the dramatic examples considered. There are images that could be drawn upon for this comparison – this is an area in which students should be encouraged to undertake their own Internet search for examples and references. Similarly, and harking back to the study of parents and children, the anguish of Abraham affords a potentially contrasting perspective on the value placed on the child (NB this itself is not clear cut, as the York Isaac was probably presented as a young man rather than a child).

### Looking ahead

By incorporating a discussion of the figure of Joseph into the programme for the week, some anticipation of the themes tabled for discussion in the next seminar is facilitated. Draw to the attention of the group the person of Jean Gerson (remind about the entries in the search engine) and his work to rehabilitate the character of Joseph in the early fifteenth century.

## Seminar Week 7: Case Study 4. Mary, Joseph and Jesus. The Perfect family?

2 Hours

(Second Essays due this week?)

### Target Outcomes

- Introduction to the notion of the nuclear family.
- Reminder of the main areas of debate regarding the structure of the family in past times.
- Reminder of the importance of exploiting cultural artefacts to enhance our understandings of past societies.
- Prepare for the field study visit to All Saints North Street.

Draw attention to the links through from the image of the Flight into Egypt to the apocryphal infancy gospel. Highlight also the links to the glossary for explanations of the terms Apocryphal, Book of Hours (reminder). Highlight the uncertainty surrounding elements of the established canon of scripture.

By this stage of the course the students should be thoroughly familiar with the processes of navigating the various links within the IOS CD. Following on from last week's discussion of the character of Joseph, students should be engaging in particular with the images drawn from the early-fourteenth century Queen Mary Psalter and the mid-fifteenth century Spanish book of hours.

The Seminar Papers introduce key elements of the debate about family forms. The Laslett and Razi papers do not specifically contrast with each other, but do offer something of a contrast. Laslett's main thrust is that the belief in the general dominance of extended family forms in the medieval era is unsustainable. Razi pursues an alternative line, arguing that the notion of an unchanging continuity of the nuclear family is in itself unsustainable. The key notions to convey here are that there is a limited range of sources available for the historian for the family in the middle ages, and that these are problematic. Both these studies draw on demographic sources to develop their arguments. A strong contrast may be drawn out with the approach of Sheingorn, who redirects attention to the potential importance of cultural artefacts in the study of past society.

Students should be encouraged here to read Sheingorn's treatment of Holy Kindred iconography against the illustrations on the IOS CD.

## Looking ahead.

There will be some arrangements to make for the field visit. All Saints North Street has its own web-site which the students should be encouraged to exploit.

## Seminar 8 and 9: Field Study and Presentations.

(Flexible by arrangement, and 2 hours).

### Target Outcomes

- Opportunity for the students to apply the skills they have been learning in a field environment.
- Basic experience planning and organising a group research project.
- Basic experience planning a group presentation.

There are a number of ways in which this exercise may be carried out. For the purposes of this course, there are four key windows in the church that may be studied:

- The Blackburn window.
- The Nine Orders of Angels window.
- The Works of Mercy window.
- The Prick of Conscience window.

Allocating one group to each of these may prove profitable. In preparing for the visit, students should be encouraged to undertake research using both the IOS CD and wider web-based resources.

### Key research areas

In order to develop an understanding of the Blackburn window, students will be required to familiarise themselves with the apocryphal narratives of the childhood and parentage of the Virgin Mary. Sheingorn's study of the Holy Kindred will support this. The window also offers an opportunity to revisit elements of the role of the guild and fraternity discussed at the outset of the course.

The Nine Orders window requires a familiarity with the origins of the Celestial Hierarchy. There is a brief entry relating to the Celestial Hierarchy and Dionysius on the IOS CD. This will need to be supplemented by the students' own researches.

There are entries on the IOS CD for the Seven Corporal Works of Mercy – against which a basis of understanding for may be established for the Works of Mercy window. In addition, it will be relevant to remind students to interrogate the CD for the references to Merchants, especially the Bolton and Blackburn families who have a strong link with this particular church.

An understanding of the Prick of Conscience window requires the students to engage with the book of Revelation – the IOS Theme will lead students towards.

Students with access to the appropriate technology should be afforded the opportunity to employ digital photography and display or projection techniques when planning and delivering their presentations.

## Essay Programme

The essay selection included in the handbook is intended to offer students a range of topics that will afford them the opportunity to develop their research and writing skills in a new environment. The subject titles are fairly generic, and therefore a specific strategy is required in order to encourage students fully to exploit the resources of the IOS CD. Although not specified in the handbook, it is recommended that students be required to submit in advance a standardised bibliography plan, which will afford the course tutor the opportunity to comment and offer guidance.

### 1) What were the principal features of religious life in the late medieval city?

This is a general survey type question that will afford students the opportunity to engage with a new topic area. In terms of exploiting the IOS CD, students should be directed towards the search engine to look into the subjects under 'Works of Mercy', 'Affective Piety', 'Books of hours', 'Merchants' in order to develop a basic understanding of the key elements of devotional practice. In terms of the general bibliography, the standard works by Swanson, Duffy and Bossy should be introduced.

### 2) How reliable is devotional imagery as evidence for the role of women in late medieval society?

This is a challenging topic that offers a number of possible angles of approach. The challenge here is really for students to engage with some of the key terms here. The use of the word 'reliable' is deliberate and requires the student to impose his or her own definition on what this vague word means in this context. The IOS discussion of the depiction of Old testament Women provides a useful ideological background. Reading beyond this will require students to engage with the works of Marx, Aston and a revision of Goldberg on Gender and Hierarchy.

### 3) Should we regard devotional imagery an expression of faith or of pride and material wealth?

Students here need to engage with the concepts of Affective piety, on which the IOS CD can supply background and recommendations for additional reading. As a case study, the Bolton Hours offers an opportunity to explore the devotional tastes of a wealthy merchant family from the fourteenth century. The challenge the students face here is perhaps that of exploring the subject without necessarily becoming over-dogmatic.

### 4) What can biblical imagery tell us about the late medieval image of the ideal Christian community?

This essay affords the students the most direct opportunity to draw upon the range of material in the IOS CD to illustrate their essays. Images with an eschatological theme lead towards considerations of the definitions of sinfulness. Reference to the Corporal Works of Mercy also leads towards a consideration of the way in which imagery can help to establish model patterns of behaviour.

### 5) What was the role of the Parish and its church in late medieval society?

This question invites the student to consider some of the mechanics of parish life. It offers an opportunity to explore some of the political aspects of the role of the parish in the later medieval city. The links with the IOS CD are less direct, this calls therefore for some creative thought on the part of the student. Searching the CD for references to 'Parish' will lead students towards an understanding of the imagery

### 6) How far does the Aries thesis fit with the evidence of the depiction of children in Medieval biblical imagery?

This question requires the students to develop a good understanding of the work of Aries and of the ways in which he deploys visual imagery to support his main thesis. The IOS CD offers a range of imagery that may be deployed within the essay. As an opening, students may consider the suggestion that the various artists did or did not have a specific way of illustrating children. Within examples on the IOS CD are images that may be taken to support both lines of argument. The stark imagery of the Massacre of the Innocents contains an image of a child, drawn basically as a miniature adult. In contrast with this image are a number of images, notably from the Infancy of Jesus which suggest a strong concept of the child as a specific developmental stage.

It is possible that students may wish to develop or exploit a particular area of interest as an alternative to writing on one of the set topics, particularly for the second essay. This is a matter for discretion, and use of the essay / bibliography plan is a useful tool in this situation.

## Concluding Comments:

The students should be reminded frequently of the need to exploit the resources of the CD, but also of the need to undertake researches of their own. The Case Study based nature of the course is such that the course can appear a little disjointed to students used to a more linear narrative style of study. It should be emphasised that the course is intended to open up to the students areas of enquiry and debate.

Students should be reminded of the desirability of illustrating their essays. This can be a frustration – as the weak point in the technology available to students is frequently the quality of the printers to which they have access. At the tutor's discretion, it may be feasible for essays to be submitted electronically, with the tutors marks and commentary being returned via the same route.

*Prof. Mark Ormrod  
University of York*