

OXFORD COLLEGES' HISTORY APTITUDE TEST

2 November 2011

Answer **ALL** parts of **BOTH** questions. You have **TWO HOURS** for this test. We recommend that you read the entire paper before beginning to write your answers. Spend about a third of your time on reading, thinking and planning, and the rest of the time writing. Question One should take about twice as much time as Question Two.

If you find the texts difficult and unfamiliar, don't worry: the exercise is intended to be challenging, but we hope you will also find it thought-provoking. There is no 'right' answer to many of the questions: you will be judged on the intelligence of your case, how clearly you make it and how effectively you support it. You should use your own words in answering the questions.

Please do not turn over until you are asked to do so.

QUESTION ONE (70 marks)

This is an adapted section from a book about the church and society in the middle ages. Please read through the extract carefully and think about what it is trying to say. You do not need to know anything about medieval religion to answer the questions below.

Everywhere in the history of the religious orders¹ we find that associations which were founded as a protest against the world and all its ways had their destinies shaped for them by the society in which they had their being. There were many forces which shaped them, even against their will: their property, their family connections, their secular² functions, and the opportunity which they offered their members for advancement to the highest places in the social order. The 'worldliness' of medieval religious communities has often been remarked and generally criticised, and it is true that anyone who looks at these communities for a pure expression of the aims of their founders must very often be disappointed. The states of mind and aspirations expressed in the rules and foundation deeds of the various orders were not realised in any large measure. The driving forces in their development were quite different from those of the original founders.

This has often been looked upon as a betrayal, but there is another way of looking on it which perhaps does more justice to the achievements of the religious orders. If we consider the conditions under which they operated, the needs which they met, and the extent to which they satisfied some of the strongest impulses of a developing society, a very different judgement must be reached. The place which religious communities were expected to fill in society, the methods of recruitment and funding, the intentions of benefactors, and the religious outlook of laity³ and clergy alike, all drew the body of men who lived under a rule away from the intentions of the original founder. For better or worse these were the forces that combined to shape the professional religious life of the Middle Ages. They ensured that communities set apart from the world should become a mirror of the world in which they lived. Above all, they stamped on these communities – even the most resistant – two features which are found in every part of medieval life: a strong grasp of the things of this world, and an ardent desire for the rewards of eternity. These two conflicting desires, operating simultaneously in the same people, lie behind many of the most important developments in western history, and they are most fully exemplified in the medieval religious orders.

This is clear in the case of the Cistercian Order. The Cistercian organisation was one of the masterpieces of medieval planning. In a world ruled by a complicated network of authorities often at variance with each other, the Cistercian plan presented a single strong chain of authority from top to bottom. In each monastery there was the same simple chain of authority that we find in the order as a whole. By concentrating on compact estates worked by laymen under monastic discipline, the Cistercians cut through all the legal complexities which normally beset managers of landed estates. And the earliest statutes of the order had two other ingredients necessary for worldly success. The first was a certain military precision and

¹ i.e. religious institutions, each with its own distinctive rules, organisation, property and so on. Examples of Christian religious orders include the Cistercian monks, the Franciscan friars and, later, the Jesuits.

² i.e. non-religious.

³ i.e. people who are not priests, monks, nuns, friars, bishops or other members of the clergy.

aggressiveness in practical details. The men who were fighting for a new ideal of corporate religious life were not above regulating every detail of daily life – even the activities of their herds of pigs. And the same controlling hand determined how monks and abbots, even the greatest, were to behave in even the smallest details. Such clauses were surely very remarkable in an order which claimed to follow nothing but the pure Rule of St Benedict, and claimed that this rule was nothing but the pure Gospel in action.⁴

- (a) What can you deduce from the first paragraph about the aims of the founders of religious orders? Answer in one sentence, using your own words.

(10 marks)

- (b) On the evidence presented in the text, to what extent does the example of the Cistercians bear out the author's view that religious communities were 'a mirror of the world in which they lived'? Answer in not more than 15 lines, using your own words.

(20 marks)

- (c) Write an essay of one and a half to three sides assessing and explaining the way in which any original set of aims, ideas or principles with which you are familiar was modified in society.

(40 marks)

⁴ St Benedict was the ancient founder of the Benedictine order of monks. The Gospel means the teachings of Jesus Christ.

QUESTION TWO (30 Marks)

The following passage is adapted from the diary of a middle-class British housewife. This entry was written in 1945, a few months after the end of the Second World War. You do not need to know anything about post-war Britain to answer the question below, and you should not provide information from other sources.

I feel I've never had such a sour attitude on life in general. I thought of the fun and laughter there used to be at the Centre⁵, even in the darkest days of war. Sometimes they just say in the office, 'You are quiet' – they say it in wonder – and I just smile, but think, 'I feel quiet, I'm tired out', and wonder if that is why others feel dim. There was such an eager looking forward to the end of the war. When I used to talk of still lean times till all got reorganised, I was looked on as a real dismal Jimmy. Now it's over. We look forward to a winter which promises to be short of coal and food. Women who thought their husbands would be released [from military service] if their old job was waiting are feeling disappointed. Husbands are coming home so tired and with such altered outlooks they seem strangers. Women are leaving their wartime jobs and finding it's not as easy to pick up threads as lay them down. Clothes coupons are beginning to seem inadequate lately when big things are needed.⁶ Meat is scarcer and there is nothing to replace it in the menus of harried landladies and mothers of families. Milk is down to two pints of milk a week. There is so little brightness in life, and people's heads are so tired. Speaking for myself, I feel that if anyone said, 'tell me what you would really like to do,' I could not tell them. I could say I'd like to go somewhere where there were no bitter winds and damp to make me dread winter, somewhere where I could lie down in the sun and feel warm, but I feel too indifferent to think of anything I'd really like to buy, or do, and what I do seems only like another job – all except when I come to bed and lie reading. It's my chief joy today. I think this tiredness must be magnified to the highest degree amongst the homeless.

What can this extract tell us about British society in 1945?

⁵ A local centre, run by volunteer women, which provided welfare services in wartime.

⁶ Rationing of clothes and some foodstuffs had been introduced in wartime, and continued after the war.