THE THEOLOGY OF DEBT IN LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLISH LITERATURE

Exploring debt's permutations in Middle English texts, Anne Schuurman makes the bold claim that the capitalist spirit has its roots in Christian penitential theology. Her argument challenges the longstanding belief that faith and theological doctrine in the Middle Ages were inimical to the development of market economies, showing that the same idea of debt is in fact intrinsic to both. The double penitential–financial meaning of debt, and the spiritual paradoxes it creates, is a linchpin of scholastic and vernacular theology, and of the imaginative literature of late medieval England. Focusing on the doubleness of debt, this book traces the dynamic by which the Christian ascetic ideal, in its rejection of material profit and wealth acquisition, ends up producing precisely what it condemns. This title is part of the Flip it Open Programme and may also be available Open Access. Check our website Cambridge Core for details.

ANNE SCHUURMAN is Associate Professor of English at the University of Western Ontario. She is the author of *Shame and Guilt in Chaucer* (2012) and co-editor of *An Epistle of Noble Poetrye* (2022).

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 09:23:27, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009385947

CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

Founding Editor
Alastair Minnis, *Yale University*

General Editors
Marisa Galvez, *Stanford University*
Daniel Wakelin, *University of Oxford*

Editorial Board
Anthony Bale, *Birkbeck, University of London*
Zygmunt G. Barański, *University of Cambridge*
Christopher C. Baswell, *Barnard College and Columbia University*
Mary Carruthers, *New York University*
Rita Copeland, *University of Pennsylvania*
Roberta Frank, *Yale University*
Alastair Minnis, *Yale University*
Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Fordham University*

This series of critical books seeks to cover the whole area of literature written in the major medieval languages – the main European vernaculars, and medieval Latin and Greek – during the period c.1100–1500. Its chief aim is to publish and stimulate fresh scholarship and criticism on medieval literature, special emphasis being placed on understanding major works of poetry, prose, and drama in relation to the contemporary culture and learning which fostered them.

Recent titles in the series

Jennifer A. Lorden *Forms of Devotion in Early English Poetry: The Poetics of Feeling*
Harriet Soper *The Life Course in Old English Poetry*
Taylor Cowdery *Matter and Making in Early English Poetry: Literary Production from Chaucer to Sidney*
Olivia Holmes *Boccaccio and Exemplary Literature: Ethics and Mischief in the "Decameron"*
Joseph Taylor *Writing the North of England in the Middle Ages*
Mark Faulkner *A New Literary History of the Long Twelfth Century: Language and Literature between Old and Middle English*
Mark Chinca and Christopher Young *Literary Beginnings in the European Middle Ages*
Andrew M. Richmond *Landscape in Middle English Romance: The Medieval Imagination and the Natural World*
David G. Lummus *The City of Poetry: Imagining the Civic Role of the Poet in Fourteenth-Century Italy*
Richard Matthew Pollard *Imagining the Medieval Afterlife*

A complete list of titles in the series can be found at the end of the volume.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 09:23:27, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009385947

THE THEOLOGY OF DEBT IN LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLISH LITERATURE

ANNE SCHUURMAN
The University of Western Ontario

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 09:23:27, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009385947

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,
a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of
education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781009385954

DOI: 10.1017/9781009385947

© Anne Schuurman 2024

This work is in copyright. It is subject to statutory exceptions and to the provisions of relevant licensing agreements; with the exception of the Creative Commons version the link for which is provided below, no reproduction of any part of this work may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

An online version of this work is published at doi.org/10.1017/9781009385947 under a Creative Commons Open Access license CC-BY-NC 4.0 which permits re-use, distribution and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial purposes providing appropriate credit to the original work is given. To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0

All versions of this work may contain content reproduced under license from third parties. Permission to reproduce this third-party content must be obtained from these third-parties directly.

When citing this work, please include a reference to the DOI 10.1017/9781009385947

First published 2024

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
NAMES: Schuurman, Anne, author.
TITLE: The theology of debt in late medieval English literature / Anne Schuurman, The University of Western Ontario.
DESCRIPTION: Cambridge ; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2024. | Series: Cambridge studies in medieval literature | Includes bibliographical references and index.
IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2023025422 (print) | LCCN 2023025423 (ebook) | ISBN 9781009385954 (hardback) | ISBN 9781009385985 (paperback) | ISBN 9781009385947 (epub)
SUBJECTS: LCSH: English literature–Middle English, 1100-1500–History and criticism. | Debt in literature. | Penance in literature. | Theology in literature. | Economics in literature. | LCGFT: Literary criticism.
CLASSIFICATION: LCC PR275.D44 S38 2024 (print) | LCC PR275.D44 (ebook) | DDC 820.9/001–DC23/eng/20230706
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2023025422
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2023025423

ISBN 978-1-009-38595-4 Hardback
ISBN 978-1-009-38598-5 Paperback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 15 Nov 2026 at 09:23:27, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009385947