[**Tartan Jack**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/4587-tartan-jack/)

* Notorious Pyrate
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_notorious_pyrate.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/4587-tartan-jack/)
* Member
* 908 posts
* Location:South Carolina
* Interests:History, Scotland, Batman, Cars, and more<br />Married with 2 kids<br />

[Posted May 26, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18066-religion-on-pirate-ships/&do=findComment&comment=400467) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18066-religion-on-pirate-ships/&do=reportComment&comment=400467)

I've been wondering about the religious beliefs of those on pirate ships. Often they are portrayed as Godless, yet we have examples (thinking specifically of Roberts and his associates) of overtly Christian practices on pirate ships. Also, a number of authors I have read mention the Catholic vs. Protestant grouping of pirates/privateers. Primarily, they are discussing the Irish and the French, where Catholics went toward the Spanish side (or French royalist), while the Huguenots and other "Reformed" groups rallied more to the English and Dutch side (who where usually on the same-side in this period).

So, based on YOUR readings, what have you found?

Were the pirates "God-fearing men," by the standards of the day (as were most of the population)?

Were they a godless horde, as writers like to portray?

A real mix?

Something else?

(This should be an interesting discussion)

[**William Brand**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1471-william-brand/)

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* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_immortal_pyrate.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1471-william-brand/)
* Admin
* 8,884 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Logan, Utah
* Interests:My name is William Pace and I live and work as a graphic designer, illustrator and photographer in Northern Utah. I'm married to the lovely Tracy Pace and we have three children. In addition to all things art, I enjoy traveling and meeting new people from every walk of life. I've always been a fan of history, theology, and of course, Pyracy.  
    
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PSkt-q-HihQ

[Posted May 27, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18066-religion-on-pirate-ships/&do=findComment&comment=400469) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18066-religion-on-pirate-ships/&do=reportComment&comment=400469)

This is an excerpt from a piece written by James Johnson. Unfortunately, the article did not contain citations.

"Some of the Caribbean Pirates seemed genuinely concerned about religion. Few people realise that Captain William Kidd was the son of a Scottish missionary and donated a significant portion of his profits to found the Trinity Church in New York. He felt he was blessed by God and should return what he had been given.

Captain "Black" Bart Roberts wore a red waist coat and a gold chain with a diamond studded cross. He established a code as to how everybody should be treated and was adamantly opposed to slavery, feeling that God created all men as equals. God, or some one, certainly looked after him as he officially sunk 479 ships in less than 19 months, more than any three other pirates combined! He said he lived a short but happy life.

Even the feared Franois L'Ollonais, the pirate who reportedly ate a beating, bleeding, human heart wanted the blessings of God. He went to Martinique and persuaded a Catholic priest to come on board and bless the crew. Unfortunately, one crew member wasn't impressed and interrupted the service, causing L'Ollonais to pull out a pistol and shoot the crew member, throwing the body overboard, threatening to send anybody else to meet their maker, and asking the priest to pardon the interruption."

[**Mission**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1929-mission/)

* Goat Specialist
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* Admin
* 5,081 posts
* Gender:Male
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[Posted May 27, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18066-religion-on-pirate-ships/&do=findComment&comment=400475) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18066-religion-on-pirate-ships/&do=reportComment&comment=400475)

We actually sort of discussed some of this (specifically regarding Catholicism) not too long ago. See [this thread](http://pyracy.com/index.php/topic/17412-papist-pyrates/).

[**Daniel**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/352-daniel/)

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* Gender:Male
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* Interests:History, pirates, fiction, writing, writing historical fiction about pirates, jokes, games, law.

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George Roberts reported that when he stated religious reasons for not joining Ned Low's pirate crew, that "Some of them said, *I should do well to preach a Sermon, and would make them a good Chaplain.* Others said, *No, they wanted no Godliness to be preach'd there : That Pirates had no God but their* Money, *nor* Saviour *but their* Arms. Others said, *That I had said nothing but was very good, true, and rational, and they wish'd that Godliness, or, at least, some Humanity, were in more Practice among them ; which, they believ'd, would be more to their Reputation, and cause a greater Esteem to be had for them, both from God and Man.*"

Quite some time ago, in a book called *Pirates of New Spain*, I remember reading about a good deal of Christian religious practice among the Anglo-French buccaneers raiding the west coast of Mexico in the late 1600s. The French buccaneers, after robbing and sacking a Spanish town, went immediately to the church and heard Mass! There was also considerable conflict between the Catholic French buccaneers and their Protestant English comrades; some of the English Protestants would smash and profane the "idols" of the Catholic church, believing it to be their sacred duty. This mortally offended many of the Catholic French.

I had a previous post that showed a Captain Roberts (quite possibly Bartholomew) using a quarto Bible to swear in new recruits, but he did it at gunpoint and was swearing "monstrous hellish Oaths" the whole time, so I wouldn't say he was necessarily a very religious sort. Cindy Vallar and Douglas Botting mention some other pirates swearing to the articles on an axe, a human skull, crossed pistols, crossed swords, or astride a cannon, but I can't say whether this was a conscious rejection of the Bible or merely an expedient when no Bible was handy.

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On 5/27/2011 at 8:35 AM, Daniel said:

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This sounds like the story from the book *The Travels and Controversies of Friar Domingo Navarrete 1618-1686* which I mentioned in the thread on Catholicism and piracy. It's a wonderful read and I highly recommend it. It's a bit expensive to buy, but I got it through inter-library loan, so that may be the way to go.

[**Fox**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1019-fox/)

* Old Twillian
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_pyrate_legend.gif
* [Fox](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1019-fox/)
* Moderator
* 2,564 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Beautiful lush Devon, England
* Interests:Nautical history of the 16-18th centuries and living history based thereon.  
    
  Shooting pirates.

[Posted May 27, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18066-religion-on-pirate-ships/&do=findComment&comment=400484) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18066-religion-on-pirate-ships/&do=reportComment&comment=400484)

while looking for stuff on pirate funerals for the PB forum I came across this observation by Jacob du Bucquoy regarding John Taylor's crew:

"*When one of them dies they chant a psalm or canticle while escorting the body, but that is rather a custom left over from their earliest education than a sign of their submission to God*"

Bear in mind that while du Bucquoy is generally quite kind in his descriptions of the pirates, he was their captive and was writing for a European readership who may not have shared his good opinions. Whether the pirates were religious or whether it really was just habit is therefore debateable.

I have a handful of other references to religion amongst pirates which I'll try to dig out later.

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On 5/27/2011 at 9:07 AM, Foxe said:

Whether the pirates were religious or whether it really was just habit is therefore debateable.

Yeah, but I think you could say that about just about any social group in any time period (and with regard to almost any regularly practiced moral behavior.) It probably came down to some were religious, but many weren't unless it was convenient. (And I think you could say *that* about just about any social group in any time period.)

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On 5/27/2011 at 9:17 AM, Mission said:

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Agreed. B)

Some may stand out as being particularly religious by some action or other, but how many others fit into which box is impossible to tell.

[**Jib**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/2545-jib/)

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* Location:Minneapolis, MN
* Interests:Piracy, stage combat, martial arts, reading, film, travel

[Posted May 27, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18066-religion-on-pirate-ships/&do=findComment&comment=400521) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18066-religion-on-pirate-ships/&do=reportComment&comment=400521)

I imagine a bible would be worth a good amount of silver.

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There are various references to religion in some of the printed "Dying Words" pamphlets. These were not always composed by the pirates themselves, and even if they were, were not necessarily an accurate reflection of what they thought *before* they were sentenced to hang. Just for kicks though, here's an example:

"*He was Mightily concern'd and troubl'd, that he was to leave a poor Wife and five young children without any Susistence or provision. He was told, that God who is a father to the Fatherless, and an husband to the Widow, would not suffer them to want, if they put their trust in him; But his great concern was to secure to himself a portion in that heavenly inheritence, which should never be taken from him.*" (William Ingram)

Faced with a more natural death, some of Bellamy's men aboard the prize *Mary-Anne* turned to God during the storm that wrecked the Whydah:

"*And in their distress the [pirates] ask'd the Deponent to Read to the the Common Prayer Book, which he did about an hour*"

On the other hand, an un-named pirate crew the following year attacked Benjamin Gatchel's vessel and,

"*In ravaging the Vessel they met with two or three Bibles, at the sight whereof some started and said, They had nothing to do with them, nor with God, nor any thing Above*"

In John Taylor's company the articles were sworn to and "*signed by the interested parties who intend to uphold them by placing, in the English fashion, two fingers on a Bible*". Du Bucquoy reckoned that the pirates' singing of Psalms was more habit than conviction, but there mut have been some conviction because,

"*In order to preserve the peace and union necessary between members of the brotherhood, quarrels and insults are forbidden, likewise religious disputes*"

Perhaps the most interesting piece of evidence records that amongst the goods sent to Adam Baldridge to trade with the pirates of St Mary's Island there were "*some books, Catechisms, primers and horne books, two Bibles...*"

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[Posted May 3, 2015](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18066-religion-on-pirate-ships/&do=findComment&comment=418069) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18066-religion-on-pirate-ships/&do=reportComment&comment=418069)

Here's some stuff on religion from the 1741 Quartermaster's account of the Rhode Island-based privateer *Revenge*.  
  
"*Sunday [July] 16th.* All hands att Rest. few Godly inclin'd, it being the Lords day." (Peter Vezian, “145. Journal of the Sloop Revenge. June 5-October 5, 1741.”, *Privateering and Piracy in the Colonial Period,* John Franklin Jameson, ed., 1923, p. 338)

"*Sunday [August] 6.* ...Gott Clear of the Reefs and Hurricane which was terrible. Very few Godly Enough to Return God thanks for their deliverance." (Vezian, p. 347)

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So, based on YOUR readings, what have you found?

Were the pirates "God-fearing men," by the standards of the day (as were most of the population)?

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[Posted May 27, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18066-religion-on-pirate-ships/&do=findComment&comment=400486) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18066-religion-on-pirate-ships/&do=reportComment&comment=400486)

On 5/27/2011 at 9:07 AM, Foxe said:

Whether the pirates were religious or whether it really was just habit is therefore debateable.

Yeah, but I think you could say that about just about any social group in any time period (and with regard to almost any regularly practiced moral behavior.) It probably came down to some were religious, but many weren't unless it was convenient. (And I think you could say *that* about just about any social group in any time period.)

[**Fox**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1019-fox/)

* Old Twillian
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_pyrate_legend.gif
* [Fox](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1019-fox/)
* Moderator
* 2,564 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Beautiful lush Devon, England
* Interests:Nautical history of the 16-18th centuries and living history based thereon.  
    
  Shooting pirates.

[Posted May 27, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18066-religion-on-pirate-ships/&do=findComment&comment=400500) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18066-religion-on-pirate-ships/&do=reportComment&comment=400500)

On 5/27/2011 at 9:17 AM, Mission said:

Yeah, but I think you could say that about just about any social group in any time period (and with regard to almost any regularly practiced moral behavior.) It probably came down to some were religious, but many weren't unless it was convenient. (And I think you could say *that* about just about any social group in any time period.)

Agreed. B)

Some may stand out as being particularly religious by some action or other, but how many others fit into which box is impossible to tell.

[**Jib**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/2545-jib/)

* Dread Pyrate
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_dread_pyrate.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/2545-jib/)
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* 1,076 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Minneapolis, MN
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[Posted May 27, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18066-religion-on-pirate-ships/&do=findComment&comment=400521) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18066-religion-on-pirate-ships/&do=reportComment&comment=400521)

I imagine a bible would be worth a good amount of silver.

[**Fox**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1019-fox/)

* Old Twillian
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_pyrate_legend.gif
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  Shooting pirates.

[Posted May 27, 2011](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18066-religion-on-pirate-ships/&do=findComment&comment=400526) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18066-religion-on-pirate-ships/&do=reportComment&comment=400526)

There are various references to religion in some of the printed "Dying Words" pamphlets. These were not always composed by the pirates themselves, and even if they were, were not necessarily an accurate reflection of what they thought *before* they were sentenced to hang. Just for kicks though, here's an example:

"*He was Mightily concern'd and troubl'd, that he was to leave a poor Wife and five young children without any Susistence or provision. He was told, that God who is a father to the Fatherless, and an husband to the Widow, would not suffer them to want, if they put their trust in him; But his great concern was to secure to himself a portion in that heavenly inheritence, which should never be taken from him.*" (William Ingram)

Faced with a more natural death, some of Bellamy's men aboard the prize *Mary-Anne* turned to God during the storm that wrecked the Whydah:

"*And in their distress the [pirates] ask'd the Deponent to Read to the the Common Prayer Book, which he did about an hour*"

On the other hand, an un-named pirate crew the following year attacked Benjamin Gatchel's vessel and,

"*In ravaging the Vessel they met with two or three Bibles, at the sight whereof some started and said, They had nothing to do with them, nor with God, nor any thing Above*"

In John Taylor's company the articles were sworn to and "*signed by the interested parties who intend to uphold them by placing, in the English fashion, two fingers on a Bible*". Du Bucquoy reckoned that the pirates' singing of Psalms was more habit than conviction, but there mut have been some conviction because,

"*In order to preserve the peace and union necessary between members of the brotherhood, quarrels and insults are forbidden, likewise religious disputes*"

Perhaps the most interesting piece of evidence records that amongst the goods sent to Adam Baldridge to trade with the pirates of St Mary's Island there were "*some books, Catechisms, primers and horne books, two Bibles...*"

[**Mission**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1929-mission/)

* Goat Specialist
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_immortal_pyrate.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1929-mission/)
* Admin
* 5,081 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Monroe, MI
* Interests:Scholarly piracy, designing and creating haunted house rooms and props, movies, abstract thinking, abstruse thinking, obstructive thinking, ideating, random thinking, movies, cartoons, movies, movies scores, cycling, world peace and small furry dogs, movies, writing, drawing, personal skills training, gremlins and, of course, lest I forget, movies.

[Posted May 3, 2015](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18066-religion-on-pirate-ships/&do=findComment&comment=418069) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18066-religion-on-pirate-ships/&do=reportComment&comment=418069)

Here's some stuff on religion from the 1741 Quartermaster's account of the Rhode Island-based privateer *Revenge*.  
  
"*Sunday [July] 16th.* All hands att Rest. few Godly inclin'd, it being the Lords day." (Peter Vezian, “145. Journal of the Sloop Revenge. June 5-October 5, 1741.”, *Privateering and Piracy in the Colonial Period,* John Franklin Jameson, ed., 1923, p. 338)

"*Sunday [August] 6.* ...Gott Clear of the Reefs and Hurricane which was terrible. Very few Godly Enough to Return God thanks for their deliverance." (Vezian, p. 347)