



EDITED BY  
**JOHN H.  
ARNOLD**

≡ The Oxford Handbook of  
**MEDIEVAL  
CHRISTIANITY**



THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF  
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# MEDIEVAL CHRISTIANITY

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*Edited by*  
JOHN H. ARNOLD

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AASS	Acta sanctorum
Aquinas, ST	<i>Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia</i> (Rome: Ex Typographia Polyglotta S. C. de Protaganda Fide, 1888–1906)
BL	British Library, London
BNP	Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
CIC	<i>Corpus Iuris Canonici</i> , ed. E Friedberg, 2 vols (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1879–81)
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
CCCM	Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis
MGH AA	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Auctores antiquissimi.</i>
MGH Capit.	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Capitularia regum Francorum.</i>
MGH Capit. Episc.	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Capitula episcoporum.</i>
MGH Concilia	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Leges: Concilia.</i>
MGH, Const.	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Leges: Constitutiones et acta publica imperatorum et regum</i>
MGH DKarl 1	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Diplomata Pippin, Karlmann und Karl de Grosse.</i>
MGH Epistolae	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Epistolae (in Quart. Epp).</i>
MGH Ep. Sel.	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Epistolae selectum in usum scholarum.</i>
MGH Fontes	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Fontes iurs Germanici antiqui in usum scholarum separatim editi</i>
MGH Leg. nat. germ.	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Leges nationum Germanicarum.</i>
MGH SS	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores (in Folio)</i>
MGH SS RM	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum</i>
MGH SRG	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum</i>
MGH SRG NS	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores rerum Germanicarum Nova series</i>
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> , ed. J. P. Migne, 221 vols (Paris, 1844–1865)



In the following chapters, we write ‘the church’ to indicate the building in which Christians worship; and ‘the Church’ to indicate the larger entity which contained Christianity.

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# CHAPTER 1

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# INTRODUCTION

## *A History of Medieval Christianity*

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JOHN H. ARNOLD

We shall say, therefore, that the Christian religion [*religio Christiana*] could not even survive, and could not have the necessities of life, if some Christians were not diligent with regard to temporal matters, such that they engaged in business. For since some regions in which Christians dwell abound in one commodity and are deficient in another—for example, some abound in excellent wool but are deficient in fruitful vines, whilst the converse is true of others—it was necessary that some members of the human race should engage in business and that others should plough the land and cultivate the vineyards. And the possession of temporal goods in this way—in the sense of having concern [*sollicitudinem*] for them—is the province of the laity; but, in the sense of exercising lordship [*dominium*], and for the sustenance of life, it can lawfully be the province of the clergy.

[Giles of Rome, *On Ecclesiastical Power*]<sup>1</sup>

I begin with Giles of Rome, writing a political treatise in the early fourteenth century in the context of the struggles between Pope Boniface VIII and King Philip IV of France, not for what he argues (about clerical possessions being licit) but for what he takes as obvious: that the Christian religion is inextricably bound up with material reality, and that that material reality varies from place to place. We might then add: and changes over time.

To say that religion is not separate from the lived conditions of existence has a number of potential implications, from the theological to the political. My purpose here is not to presuppose the necessary outcomes of this link, nor to attempt to ‘reduce’ medieval religion to its material expression or argue that it is ‘merely’ the outcome of worldly necessities. In providing an introductory opening to this volume of collective historiographical endeavour, I want to suggest rather that Giles of Rome’s insight both demands and complicates a *history* of medieval Christianity. That is to say first, that if religion and material life are connected, this necessarily implies that as material conditions change (socially, economically, politically, geographically) so might ‘religion’ change also. And second, however, as we then attempt to trace the history of those changes, we have to struggle constantly to decide what it *is* that we are considering—that is, what constitutes ‘religion’ in a given time and place; what, in this specific case, ‘counts’ as Christianity in a particular moment in the medieval west. These, it should be noted, are not only historiographical issues, but essential to Christianity itself: the foundational tenet of Christianity, that God was incarnated as man, places the question of the relationship between the material and the spiritual at the very heart of the faith; and the question of how to understand that relationship provides a core dynamic to contemporary issues of morality and identity—to the question of what being ‘a good Christian’ means and entails at any particular given moment in time.

The next chapter will discuss the various strands of historiography that we have inherited in our study of medieval religion. In this introductory chapter it suffices to note that in the early twenty-first century, after several decades of notable revisionary study in the field—inspired by anthropology, archaeology, literary study, sociology, critical theory, as well as imaginative revisiting of the available sources—historians have been prompted to move decisively beyond the largely confessional historiographies of preceding centuries. Those working in the field now largely do so from what we might call a ‘post-secular’ and resolutely non-confessional perspective (‘post-secular’ because, although many historians

now hold no confessional or spiritual allegiances, and live and work in largely secular societies, it is no longer the case in the twenty-first century that one can assume that religion is something private, marginal, a-political or in decline).<sup>2</sup> New generations of students and academics—whether or not themselves persons of faith—thus tend not to approach the subject from the perspective of confessional loyalty, collective religious struggle or personal spiritual experience. They have, rather, a keen interest in how religion was lived within its full social, cultural, economic, and political setting, and thus of the place of religion within history in general.

The purpose of this *Handbook* is not to trace, step by step, the history of medieval Christianity or the development of the medieval Church, nor to write a chronology of religious ideals and theological reflections, nor to forge any other kind of collective narrative. Part of the problem of such narratives is that they slip too easily into teleology: that is, knowing the perceived ‘end’ of the story (the shape and nature of religion and the Church at the close of the middle ages), they tend to allow this to dictate the unfolding of all that precedes, and in doing so simplify and distort the many and complex ways in which Christianity existed—was made, re-made, performed, debated, rejected, embraced, embodied, pursued, and generally *lived*—in different times and places. So, this is not a book with one story to tell. Instead, in the chapters which follow we aim collectively to consider what Christianity *was* in its various aspects during the period *c.*400–*c.*1500; that is, what ‘Christendom’ encompassed (conceptually as much as geographically), what was involved in ‘being’ a Christian, what constituted ‘the Church’, and what changed in different times and places and contexts. The focus is on western Christendom, including northern and parts of central/eastern Europe (but for the most part regrettably excluding the Christianities of north Africa, the middle east and Byzantium, proper inclusion of which would require a separate book). The chapters in this volume do not follow a chronological order, but come at the field from a variety of angles, to explain various areas of investigation and analysis, and as importantly to make intervention into current debates. Authors have often approached their theme via one or more case studies, so as not only to describe or explain a particular aspect of medieval faith, but also to provide tools for thinking about medieval Christianity. The perspectives taken are not uniform, but the volume as a whole aims to encourage reflection on the fundamental bases of the subject—reflection on the worldly and material as much as the spiritual and numinous.

So our approach here is thematic and analytical. But given the prompt that Giles of Rome provides, it is nonetheless useful to attempt to outline *a* history that can frame, if only lightly and provisionally, the more focussed discussions that follow. There is of course an immediate question to address: the history of what, exactly? Of ‘the Church’ (but, the institution? the gathered faithful? the concepts of salvation, the habits of worship?). Or a history of the intellectual lineaments of faith, the relative influence or weakness of religion, the ebb and flow of the dominance of particular versions of Christianity? One might indeed make changes in theology and spiritual practice central to the story, reflecting on the one hand on the long continuities of the liturgy, and on the other tracing the development of sacramental practice (the use of processions, of fixed or portable altars, of music and sound) and material resource (the size of buildings of worship, the techniques used to fashion and adorn the objects through which devotion was focussed), thinking also perhaps about the slowly mutating roles played by saints, the development of vernacular works of piety, and the economic contexts which encouraged or constrained pious activity. One could focus on the external and internal geography of Western Christendom, the shift to Rome as the geographical ‘centre’ (though displaced periodically in the later middle ages as the papacy moved to Avignon and then splintered into schism in the late fourteenth century), the



expansion and then slow expulsion of Muslim rulership in the Iberian peninsula, the break in the eleventh century with the Eastern Church, the conversion of northern European lands in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries.<sup>3</sup> One could think geographically in a different way also, noting for example the considerable differences of scope in dioceses between different realms, the different periods in which parishes were formed and the different concentrations of such parishes in rural and civic areas. Or one could place the institutional and governmental structures of the Church centre stage, where the fortunes of the papacy would be a key element through much of the period, and the story would attempt to trace the contexts in which greater uniformity of process, the growth of bureaucratic machinery, and the flow of income and expenditure were key issues.<sup>4</sup>

## A HISTORY OF MEDIEVAL CHRISTIANITY

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All of the above could inform valid histories. But my aim here is to frame a brief account by reflecting on where we might locate the ‘centre of gravity’ for Christianity across different periods of time; and in so doing, to reflect on the issues of transcendence and materiality intrinsic to Christianity’s very essence. By ‘centre’, I do not mean a directing central cadre or core of policy or top-down organization, but rather the broad area in which one can identify the most dense and vibrant agglomeration of activities, ideas, and actors.

Following the establishment of the Church under the Emperor Constantine in the early fourth century ad, it is the role and activities of the bishop which most strongly draw the eye.<sup>5</sup> The ecclesial role of the bishop had arisen within the first centuries of Christianity, and was not an innovation in itself. But Constantine extended the privileges granted to Christian bishops, rendering them free from taxation, and free from the duties that attached to the imperial court, whilst being able also to act in various legal and charitable ways—by granting the manumission of slaves, for example, or hearing some legal cases in their ‘audience court’ (a juridical role they retained throughout the middle ages, and indeed beyond). Bishops preached to, wrote for, and otherwise directed their congregations—the possessive pronoun being notably apposite in this period—attempting to usher them forward to future salvation, whilst navigating the perilous rapids of theological and doctrinal debate. Some particular figures—Augustine of Hippo (354–430) above all others—had a major effect on the direction in which Christian theology developed; but even less well-known bishops were hugely influential within their own dioceses, in terms of how Christianity was understood and expressed, and as the focal point for the wealth that the early Church accumulated and channeled to its own ends. Early Christianity had become an ‘official’ religion, supported by the last centuries of the Roman state, but in this period it was still very much engaged in a fluid process of self-definition. At councils like that held at Nicea in 325 fundamental issues of theology were debated—was the essence of Christ more that of God or that of man? Were priests in some sense separate from their fellow Christians? If they were, what difference in behaviour did this demand? Those participating in such councils were bishops; those disseminating the decisions formulated in the councils were bishops; and just as importantly, those dissenting from the decisions and attempting to lead their flocks in a new direction were also most often bishops. The early Christian ‘heresies’—divergent interpretations of the Christian message, such as Arianism and Gnosticism—were propagated by particular bishops, and denounced by other bishops. Even by the 590s, when Gregory of Tours was completing his *Histories of the Franks*, he felt it necessary to begin his lengthy chronicle with a statement of his creed, ‘so that whoever

reads me may not doubt that I am a Catholic'; the point being not that Gregory's personal faith was likely to be in doubt, but that the tussle between different Christian beliefs—and different episcopal defenders of different theological positions—was still very much an issue. The 'truth' of a particular bishop's Christianity mattered because of their spiritual responsibility for their congregation: they were the spiritual leaders and directors of a flock, and thus what was at stake was not just the bishop's personal beliefs, but the future salvation of the people of the diocese (not usually thought to have much independent interpretive agency on theological matters).

There was no inevitability to the triumph of this predominantly episcopal Church. In Christianity's first centuries, as recent work has made clear, there was a competing focus rooted in the late Roman household, more structurally continuous with the 'pagan' worship of household gods; a 'private' form of Christianity in which the priest and the bishop were much less prominent.<sup>6</sup> In fact, in both the office-holding role of the bishop and the private devotions in the household, we see reflected the fact that Christianity was, throughout the fourth century and perhaps for a century or more thereafter, operating still within the structure of the Roman Empire. It worked, that is, both through the political success of a class of office-holders given imperial privilege; and also through the localized cultic choices made by private citizens, whose material resources fostered and sustained the Church at a local level.

The first few centuries of Christianity also have a strong claim to be thought of as an age of holy men and saints, as the influence of living ascetic figures such as St Anthony (c.251–356) or Simon Stylites (c.388–459) was clearly strong in certain communities, and the rise of the cult of saints is one of the features closely associated with late antiquity. Holy men provided Christianity with a different mechanism, as extraordinary figures who sat outside the structures of authority, rank, and privilege by which late antique society generally operated. Through their distanced position, they could be invoked to mediate tensions within mainstream society, providing a different way in which the otherworldly and the material came together. The point stands whether one sees them operating thus in a strongly functional role, or more as an ideological claim and aspiration: the holy man supplemented the structures of the episcopal Church, occasionally coming into conflict, but more usually providing a different but complementary means by which Christianity worked within the world. One may see saints (the safely dead holy people) playing something of a similar role; and there it is notable that the success or failure of particular saints and cults depended very much on local promoters and managers—and these were, once again, the bishops.<sup>7</sup>

Christianity in these early centuries was a religion also geographically entwined with the Roman Empire, with archbishoprics in Constantinople, in the middle east and parts of north Africa, and in Rome, with some other outposts beyond, in Gaul and at Trier and Tarragona. As the Empire faded or fell, the focus expanded somewhat further north and west, into the provinces of the old Empire. New secular powers arose (the Merovingian kings in particular), and bishops such as Caesarius of Arles (bishop 502–542) and Gregory of Tours (c.539–594) worked to ensure that Christianity embraced, and to some degree directed, its new secular patrons. This was a period of conversions, first the 'conversion' of the countryside by the city-dwelling elites within the old structure of empire (particularly in the fourth and fifth centuries) where the focus was on subduing the multifarious cultic practices of Roman antiquity and more rural paganism; and second, from the fifth century onward, of moving beyond the old frontier of Empire, to bring Christianity to areas such as the Celtic lands in what are now Scotland and Ireland, and to the Salian Franks who began east of the Rhine but who, in the fifth century, started to conquer large parts of Gaul.<sup>8</sup> 'Conversion' here meant, in the first instance at least, persuading rulers and warlords that the Christian

God trumped all other gods (and would thus likely help the ruler triumph over other rulers); the emphasis was upon Christ the King, Christ reigning triumphant. Christianity found its cultural entrance point by complementing the existing gods (here is one more God, better than the others), and then proclaiming hegemony and monovocal authority (there were no other gods, and any other cultic practices are insults to this one true God). If it worked primarily via the powerful, perhaps it was its tactics, as much as its message, that appealed to those who wished to maximize their control of resources and power. We get a flavour of its powerful, if blunt, attraction in an entry from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. In 626, King Edwin escaped an assassin sent by Cwichelm, king of Wessex, on the same night that his daughter was born. ‘Then the king promised Paulinus [missionary, future bishop of York, d. 644] to give his daughter to God, if he by his prayers would obtain from God that he might overthrow his enemy... And he went into Wessex with levies and slew five kings there and killed a great number of the people. And Paulinus baptized his daughter on Whit Sunday with eleven others, and within a twelve-month the king was baptized at Easter with all his nobility’.<sup>9</sup> Conversion is here figured initially as a kind of tactical marriage alliance: Edwin gives his daughter over to another power, to gain assistance in his martial exploits.

Bishops had always been ‘political’ players to some degree, but by the sixth century we can see them very clearly enmeshed in secular politics—arbitrating royal disputes, deploying the considerable economic power they commanded, and dispensing patronage and personal protection. Most bishops were kin to princes and kings, and there is a temptation to think of them as simply adjuncts to secular power garbed in episcopal robes. But that would be too crude a view. Without connections to secular power, they could not have operated in the times in which they lived. They mediated the numinous glow of spirituality with which royalty had started to adorn itself; but they also attempted to make ‘the Church’ something which *contained* (in both valencies of that word) secular power. The various ecclesial disputes in which bishops engaged were sometimes directly connected to issues of royal power, landholding and the like; but they were also engaged (as they saw it) in a fairly constant battle to keep their flocks on the narrow path to salvation, beset by a variety of temptations and potential disasters behind which the Devil lurked. The theological issues at stake often centred on the question of clerical authority and mediation with the supernatural, as for example in the early Donatist controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries, which held that sacraments administered by spiritually impure priests were invalid.

In strong contrast to the fairly constantly competing secular authorities, and despite such fraught theological arguments, the bishops did also manage to act together, for the wider good of the Church. They wrote to each other, both individually and collectively, seeking advice and counsel, checking with each other about matters of canonical procedure and fine points of theology and practice, periodically coalescing as a local group when attempting to influence royal policy or defend the Church from outside encroachment. There were of course also moments when bishops were in competition and conflict, and as noted above, particularly in the earliest centuries they could lead their flocks toward theologically divergent ideas of salvation. But these visible moments of strain should not disguise the extent to which there were times when they achieved a framework of communication and co-operation, first within the inherited traditions of the literate culture of Empire and its Classical rhetorical bonds of ‘friendship’ (*amicitia*), and latterly (in the post-Empire period) in the more extended networks between bishops, archbishops, and pope, attempting to wield as much collective spiritual capital as possible in their dealings with powerful kings. The bishops formed the network through which ‘the Church’ could know itself to be more than merely the local possession of particular secular patrons. If, in various parts of western

Europe, this was not much more than a hope or aspiration, it was the bishops who nonetheless strove to make it a reality.

Bishops remained extremely important throughout the history of the Church, and many of the roles and factors outlined above persisted in later centuries. But by the eighth century, a different element began to exert a further, and possibly for a time greater, gravitational pull: the monasteries. Monasticism as a mode of spiritual practice began, of course, well before the eighth century. The withdrawal from the world to the desert, first individually and then as part of a community, were practices found in the second century of the Church, and Benedict of Nursia wrote his highly influential monastic ‘rule’ in the first half of the sixth century. But during the earlier centuries, monasticism was essentially at the margins—or rather, at the difficult-to-reach pinnacle, presenting the narrowest of paths to salvation, taken by a spiritual elite who mostly separated themselves from the common herd. From around the eighth century, however, the monasteries began to move to a more central position, exercising greater influence on the ways in which the spiritual aims of Christianity reached the people as a whole, founded on the fact that they were coming also to wield very considerable economic and political influence. There were two reasons for this. One was that the monasteries began to amass land holdings which, in certain areas, grew to a considerable size, and brought with them the exercise of fundamental secular as well as spiritual lordship.<sup>10</sup> This was happening in a post-Imperial context, in which the cities—once the seat of late antique bishops and the connecting nodes of the remnants of Empire—no longer exercised hegemony. Power had moved more to the countryside: to land, and the economic and political wealth that went with land. Monasteries were not the only players in this context; there were plenty of secular lords who also sought to establish and enlarge estates. But monasteries had a particular edge over secular lords and their families: by and large, they endured. Monastic estates could agglomerate additional land as collective entities, without straining the bonds of kinship. Monastic estates did not need to will land to heirs upon death, nor choose between strategies of primogeniture or partible inheritance or marriage alliances. This in itself raised them to a different cultural and spiritual level: unlike families or even dynasties, they carried on as one identifiable entity across many generations—and through so doing, in their very persistence, they demonstrated their privileged link to the next world.

The second reason (and obviously connected to the first) is that monasteries became useful—politically and ideologically—to kings. The Carolingian kings in particular used Benedictine monasteries as a tool of empire. The relative plasticity and resilience of monastic landholding meant that Carloman (d. 754) and Charlemagne (d. 814) could endow monasteries with lands which they then intermittently re-purposed as gifts (sometimes fairly temporary gifts) for those they wished to influence or use. The monasteries could administer and husband resources. They were excellent bulwarks to place at the edges of empire: sufficiently solid, active, and impressive to act as ambassadors for imperial power, but at the same time rooted partly in the spiritual world, and nothing like as clear a threat as a military base or as complicated to protect and administer as a town. Endowing a monastery with land, a practice open to a host of lesser lords as well as rulers, could provide a sustained link between a family and a religious institution, the latter providing an eventual place of burial and prayers. There is a slight spiritual change of emphasis here also: monasteries being recognized as praying for others, particularly *named* others who made themselves *confraters*—co-brothers—to the particular establishment, or who were named in the monastic necrologies. We see the extension of spirituality as patronage, and as counter-gift to the donation of lands and wealth.



It is hard to say how much the Christianity and prayers fostered in the large monastic institutions reached out to those lower down the social scale, though we should note that there were a number of much smaller, less long-lived, foundations scattered across Europe which presumably did speak to local (if perhaps still largely elite) spiritual needs; as well as local churches, built, owned, and administered by local lords, which provided core needs such as burial and blessings, and perhaps also provided pastoral instruction if the local priest happened to be appropriately gifted and inspired. In the Carolingian empire under Charlemagne, there was at least the strong aspiration to achieve uniformity of worship, and for this to include regular ministration to the general laity; though how much this applied in practice is deeply uncertain.<sup>11</sup> To what degree monasticism, in its privileged contact with the sacred, sought to transcend or to engage with this world was much debated in all periods. In the early middle ages, the model of withdrawal—but with some spiritual outreach in the form of prayers, liturgy, and perhaps even some preaching—was predominant. In the tenth and eleventh centuries there were some changes, both toward even greater withdrawal, but also to more profound engagement. The heart of activity was initially at tenth-century Cluny, and then, in the following century, the Cistercian foundations. This new monasticism—a reformed monasticism—announced itself as very different from the Benedictine tradition (a tradition which nonetheless still persisted in the following centuries, reminding us that as we move through the medieval centuries there was increasing choice *within* Christianity). This new monasticism returned to the ideal of the eremetical withdrawal into the desert, but a largely symbolic ‘desert’, the spiritual resources of which empowered a different kind of engagement with the surrounding secular world. This brought with it a clearer spiritual independence from the secular clergy, and a strongly invigorated sense in which the reformed monasticism was forging new paths for Christianity. Benedictine monasticism, as much as it was enmeshed with the wider world, had directed itself toward an enclosed (literally and symbolically) pursuit of salvation; prayer and the hope of redemption largely for the disciplined few—who in fact, over time, had softened the edges of privation with various material comforts. By the twelfth century, we see a kind of spiritual competition conducted around ideals of asceticism, poverty, and the shared pursuit of salvation, looking ‘outwards’ beyond the cloister as much as within (and challenged to do so in part by various charismatic wandering preachers and heterodox groups, whose attraction to the people threatened the orthodox status quo). This reformed monasticism was tremendously appealing to the laity. It thus brought more endowments; and the wealth of those endowments, of course, complicated the initially simple message—a cyclical pattern which, as various historians have noted, is endemic to the very phenomenon of monasticism.

From about 700 to about 1150, monasteries exerted considerable influence within Christianity as a whole. They were useful to successive monarchs and princes; they provided networks across local and regnal borders, and sustained a sense of ‘Christendom’ that was both rooted in a particular sanctified locale, but which also transcended the local. They created libraries, shared books, and copied works in organized *scriptoria*, so that increasing numbers of texts could be found with relative uniformity across Christendom. For the earlier part of this period, Peter Brown has made the influential suggestion that post-Roman Christendom broke into a mosaic of ‘micro Christendoms’, each area having its own centre of religious gravity and believing that its version of Christianity constituted *the* authoritative tradition. That medieval Europe moved beyond this state was principally due to the monasteries: particularly by the twelfth century, and particularly with the Cistercians, they formed a web of communication larger than the sum of its parts.

Once again, monasticism continued in an important role well beyond the periodization sketched here. But beginning in what is sometimes described as the ‘long twelfth century’, other factors started to come more clearly into play, driven by a variety of factors, but most obviously by an increase in European population, a very considerable growth in the size of towns and cities, a concomitant increase in the specialization of roles, increase in commerce and travel, and the entry of new groups into the contest for status, material resources, and political power. The twelfth-century ‘spiritual competition’ over apostolic ideals, wealth, poverty, spiritual engagement, and spiritual withdrawal, involved not only the key players of earlier ages—the monasteries, the bishops, kings and other secular rulers—but an increasing number of the laity: merchants, city-dwellers, even artisans. Changes in socioeconomic context opened up the possibility of greater active involvement in the faith; but posed also important new questions about what Christianity should mean in changing times.

We see, from the eleventh century onward, more explicit and sometimes fraught ideological debate over how ‘the spiritual’ and the ‘worldly’ should interact.<sup>12</sup> The most famous is the ‘Investiture Contest’, beginning in the late eleventh century, which involved an increasingly bitter and complex argument between the papacy and the Holy Roman Emperor primarily over the right to appoint bishops. Several things were at stake. For the pope, asserting the sole right of investiture amplified the position of the papacy, in an attempt to make the pope the clear apex of the Church as a burgeoning institution. On the other side, for secular rulers, an episcopal appointment was an important and powerful political tool: a gift one could bestow upon kin or supporters, a means of influencing who wielded spiritual authority in one’s region, and potentially a source of income.

The practical outcome of the dispute had less impact than one might expect: lay rulers retained a voice in episcopal appointments, even if they gave up formal entitlement to the process overall. What mattered more were the theological and political arguments propounded during the controversy, particularly during the long conflict between Pope Gregory VII (d. 1085) and Henry IV of Germany (1050–1106). At stake there were concepts of *dominium*, of who had ‘rule’ over the other, issues which continued to exercise popes, emperors, theologians, and political theorists for centuries to come (Giles of Rome included)—and which were perhaps themselves part of a larger upheaval in how medieval societies sought to organize themselves politically across the eleventh and twelfth centuries. With regard to the Church specifically, the key outcome was not any resolution of the theoretical issue (essentially impossible in any case), but the accompanying effect on the positions of each party. In the course of the contest, the ‘clericalness’ of the clergy and the ‘layness’ of the secular powers became ever more pronounced. This was itself part of a wider, essentially cultural, move in the period, the so-called ‘Gregorian Reforms’. Whether there was anything as coherent as a programme of reform, and whether it should be connected solely or even principally to Gregory VII, is much debated.<sup>13</sup> Part of the problem (as with the later Protestant Reformation) is that later historians have, more or less wittingly, ‘bought in’ to the moral judgements connected with one side or another of particular debates, and have tended to see outcomes in teleological terms. For example, to take one issue of recurrent concern across the period, it has often seemed to past historians that it was clearly obvious and desirable that lay lords should not benefit from the tithe income of the local churches they had built on their lands, and that making the laity ‘relinquish’ parish churches (or more properly, their income) to bishops or to monasteries was therefore A Good Thing. This has slightly obscured the main changes that were occurring in these various processes: that the clergy—always ‘special’, in the sense that they alone could perform the sacraments—were being marked as very specifically *different*



to, and in certain senses *separated* from, the laity;<sup>14</sup> and that the parish (as the local church and its flock was now being understood) was part of a structure, potentially subject to ecclesiastical governance, one block in a larger sense of ‘the Church’.

The distinction between the lay and the clerical was drawn in several different areas, all arising from debates fostered in the later eleventh century, but reaching different pitches of intensity at different moments in different times and places. The pope’s argument that he alone could appoint bishops (and, at points in the crisis between papacy and empire, that he could dictate who had regnal superiority) found less dramatic echoes at the parish level, as the appointment of priests to benefices, and the income from those benefices, was largely shifted from the hands of the local lord to those of the local bishop. Part of the issue here was to do with the use of tithing income (though it is not clear how much difference it made to the parochial community to whom their tithes ultimately went), and part to do with the wider issue of ‘simony’: the buying and selling of spiritual offices, vehemently denounced by eleventh-century reformers—though often denounced so widely and in such a scattershot fashion as to lose coherence. As with the appointment of bishops, local lay powers largely held on to some aspect of patronage at the parish level, as the right of presenting a candidate to the post was often retained. But the principle of Church self-governance, ‘free’ from lay intervention (as a reformist discourse would have it) was more strongly established. The reformers would tend to present this as a triumph and transcendence of the spiritual over the ‘worldly’; but one might better see it as a rearrangement, with worldly resources now deployed within a particular ideology of spiritual values and clerical mediation, in mutually reinforcing ways.

Part of that self-governance also focussed attention on the clergy themselves. Another key ‘reform’ issue was clerical marriage and concubinage: that it really should not happen. This had been an expressed ideal in the early Church, but in practice in the central middle ages the local clergy and indeed many bishops had lived lives, including procreative lives, little different from their secular peers. Remember that the episcopate was overwhelmingly drawn from the same families as the local nobility, and wielded secular lordship over particular estates, as well as holding ecclesial office: there were clear reasons why bishops and priests would tend to act much like their secular relatives. The reformers thought this abhorrent. There were two identifiable issues: that marriage and offspring led to church property (land, benefices, and offices) turning into private, familial property; and, increasingly in the twelfth century, that the performance of the sacraments required an exemplary moral life. The issue of transcendence versus worldliness cut deep, in the increasing centrality of the sacrament of the Eucharist and the image of Christ embodied as man (as man, rather than as king), and the concomitant need for a priesthood that was able to make regular contact with the divine, to bring God into this world, but therefore be not only of this world in their own comportment and role. The Church thus attempted to sustain and burnish a kind of spiritual capital at a *local* level, across Christendom.

There was no swift or certain enactment of these reforms, though it is clear that by the thirteenth century, priests with concubines needed to act with particular discretion, and could no longer expect to pass their benefice on to their offspring. The most important outcome was the emphasis on moral rectitude for the clergy (whether realized or not): that they needed to live a different and better life than their lay neighbours, and that such a life necessitated a degree of separation from secular society. Thus many injunctions in the thirteenth century remind priests that they must dress differently from the laity, must shun taverns and gambling and other occasions of lay company, and must avoid ‘scandal’—which increasingly meant, ‘not acting like everyone else’.

These changes in the practical management of the Church, and the assertion of a more markedly ‘clerical’ identity, brought with them a shift in the lay relationship to Christianity. In the early middle ages, salvation happened (where it happened, and only for the lucky few) primarily via the efforts of the monasteries: not so much via the conversion that a few lay people made to enter a regulated monastic order, with the hope that this pious mode of life would lead to future bliss, but more importantly the efforts that the monks made via their prayers to save the souls of their dead friends. These activities continued to play a role, but during the twelfth century in particular, theologians in Paris began to get excited about what the clergy—the reformed clergy, freed in theory at least from the ties of marriage and patronage—could spiritually *do* for the souls of their flocks. This is not the first time that such ideas had been held.<sup>15</sup> But it was in this period that the ambitions took centre stage, and with increasingly concerted effort: that salvation was something potentially available to all, and that a properly educated and supported clergy could bring spiritual ‘reform’ to the laity as a whole, via the worship and ministrations based in the parish church (rather than the more remote monastery or cathedral). Moreover, it was a period in which ‘the laity’ were themselves changing: growing very considerably in number, moving into rapidly expanding towns and cities, and developing energetically new forms of commerce and mercantile activity, which required particularly nuanced approaches to their spiritual care.

Thus, whilst in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the cultural shift was predominantly to separate the identities of priests and lay people, the later twelfth century was to bring them into a different conjunction, with much more of an interest in, and role for, the non-elite laity. Episcopal statutes throughout the thirteenth century emphasize the involvement of the clergy in the lives of their flock: the necessity of preaching regularly, of not only bestowing the sacraments but explaining regularly the fundamentals of faith, of caring for the sick and the elderly, and—ideally—of taking control of marriage, which came to be considered a ‘sacrament’ as this period went on. Lay people themselves were to play an active role in their faith and their salvation: as the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) enjoined (making mandatory what had been partial prior practice), all people were to confess at least once a year prior to receiving the sacrament of the Host. They were to support the parish priest materially, who would in turn minister and preach to them. And they were to see themselves as ‘Christian’ as distinct from non-Christians (the same council imposing distinguishing signs, and various restrictions, on the Jews).<sup>16</sup> The swift success of the new mendicant orders demonstrates the degree of enthusiasm with which the laity embraced these reforms; and the outward facing mode of monasticism which those mendicants adopted (peripatetic, focussed on preaching and hearing confessions) emphasizes the degree to which the centre of ‘gravity’ for Christianity—in terms of where we find new developments, the deployment of resources, and the focus of contemporary debate—was no longer with traditional monasticism but in the parishes and dioceses and cities and towns.

Some historians have argued that these developments constitute a ‘monasticization of the laity’—the extension of ‘discipline’ from the cloister to the world at large. This speaks well to the ambitions and motivations of theological reformers, but it may not quite capture the degree of agency from the lay perspective. The reforms of the eleventh century and the division of clergy and laity had, as one unintended consequence, opened up the possibility of lay-directed movements in the pursuit of piety. The notion of ‘confraternity’ had existed in early monasticism—as noted above, one could make oneself a ‘co-brother’ of a particular monastery. But by the twelfth century, and ever more beyond, we find confraternities and guilds under lay direction, increasingly deploying substantial wealth and collective patronage, forging their own connections to the numinous, and developing their own notion of ‘discipline’, which sat within the world rather than stepped away from it.<sup>17</sup>

The papacy played a key role in these developments (Innocent III above all), and some accounts of the development of Christianity would place the popes centre stage throughout the period sketched here. However, whilst the intensification of the parochial system, the reform of the clergy, the development of the mendicant orders, and the focus on the *cura animarum*, can be read as being in line with something like a papal ‘policy’, none of it happened simply by hierarchical *fiat*. The engines for change and development came from intellectual cultures (particularly centred on the University of Paris in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries), episcopal governance, socioeconomic growth, and from the engagement of the laity themselves. This is not to say that the developments were all bottom-up or driven solely by enthusiasm: there is a more complex process at play between the sporadic excitement generated by more or less unruly modes of ‘reform’ (some shading into what opponents would label heresy), the disciplinary programme of faith widening its ambitions, and the negotiations that thousands of individuals made in their understandings of and responses to the spiritual landscape. Even as ‘heresies’ were denounced, and increasingly persecuted, by orthodox authority across the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the influence they wielded should not be underestimated: the combination of active pastoral involvement (typically involving peripatetic preachers, proclaiming and embodying an apostolic ideal), ideas about poverty, charity and spiritual ‘purity’, and the opportunity for lay people to choose the recipients of their spiritual engagement and donations, were aspects of faith that all ultimately flowed from the heretical groups (the Patarenes, the Cathars, and the Waldensians in particular) to the orthodox mainstream, adopted as part of ‘reform’.

By the later thirteenth century, strongly in theory and at least intermittently in practice, the Church saw its major role as providing for the spiritual care and governance of the laity: communicating the fundamentals of Christian belief via preaching, instruction, and encouragement, ensuring that all Christians in all parishes could receive baptism, confirmation, communion, and the last rites, and taking an increasing interest in the moral behaviour and spiritual purity of the laity, via archdeaconal and episcopal visitation of parishes, church courts, and in some times and places the use of inquisition into ‘heretical depravity’. These aspects continued throughout the remainder of the middle ages, and laid the foundations in various ways for both Protestant and Catholic post-Reformation faith. But across the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, lay and ecclesial relations underwent a further transformation, with the renegotiation once again of secular and ecclesiastical authority.

One could point to 1303 as a key date, that being the year in which Philip IV of France’s councillor, Guillaume de Nogaret, seized Pope Boniface VIII in Anagni, intending to drag him to Paris for a political show trial. But it emerges perhaps most clearly toward the end of the fourteenth century, as the papacy split into schism (with two, and then three, competing popes backed by different factions), consequently dividing the allegiances of the various European kingdoms. We have seen considerable conflict, including violent conflict, between the papacy and secular authority in preceding centuries, but by the fourteenth century the issues were different. On the one hand, prior to the schism, the Church was a demonstrably unitary and hierarchical entity, administering systems of canon law and ecclesial governance in much the same fashion across Europe; in 1300 the pope had been able to prompt mass pilgrimage to Rome by announcing a jubilee indulgence of sin to all who visited its shrines, demonstrating among other things that the papacy had a voice and connection to the ordinary laity well beyond northern Italy. We are thus well beyond the ‘micro-Christendoms’ of the early middle ages. On the other hand, ‘the Church’ was also being pulled and tugged at by the forces of what Susan Reynolds has called ‘regnal

solidarity': not exactly 'national identity' and still less modern 'nationalism', but nonetheless a tendency to associate the interests of religion and the regnal state.<sup>18</sup> The original issue behind Philip IV's conflict with Boniface VIII was clerical taxation, in the context of the costs of war with England: both Edward I of England and Philip wanted to be able to tax the clergy in their kingdoms, not because of some throw-back to the period before the Investiture Contest, but because both felt that access to the wealth of the Church in their kingdoms would be to the benefit (as they saw it) of their foreign and domestic policies. Thus the burgeoning ambitions of the late medieval state found themselves repeatedly butting up against the Church's claim to supranational authority. The conflict between Philip IV and Boniface VIII produced a sort of 'pamphlet war' of polemical claims about the power relationship between papacy and royal power, couched in increasingly universalist and abstract terms (Giles of Rome, whose work opens this chapter, was one key contributor). A couple of decades later political rhetoric again erupted in the lengthy and vicious quarrel between Pope John XXII and the Visconti dukes of Milan. These wars of words were prompted by specific tussles; but they provided the roots of a long trajectory of political debate which reached fruition in the early modern period, framing the question of 'imperial' and 'papal' power as a key issue in European political theory.

The association of religion with the state took other forms. In the Iberian peninsula, following the massed forced conversions of Jews in the late fourteenth century, the secular powers began to see the maintenance of religious identity as part of their regnal duty. The sharpest point in this process began in 1480, when the joint Catholic monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella, created the Spanish Inquisition. But the context for that institution arose from much earlier concerns about faith, identity, and sedition in the region, related to the lengthy history of Jewish and Muslim communities living under Christian rule and (in the south) vice versa. There were of course earlier periods in which secular authorities had invested effort into the promotion of Catholic orthodoxy—this being a particular feature of the Carolingian empire for example—but the experience in some areas of Europe in the late middle ages was arguably of a different order. Princes were concerned not only with the promotion of Christianity, but with rooting out perceived 'threats' to orthodoxy, to policing the borders of faith, and increasingly to supporting the Church in monitoring the practice of Christian faith in detail. At a parochial level, as noted above, belief was much more *governed* in the late middle ages than in earlier centuries; and although, via practices such as diocesan visitation, this governance was largely internal to the institutional structure of the Church, it nonetheless operated in negotiation (and sometimes in close co-operation) with the structures of the secular state.<sup>19</sup>

In some parts of Europe (England, France, Spain, Poland) the late medieval state and the late medieval Church usually walked in close concert. It's notable that as medieval statecraft and institutions developed, higher clergy were often directly involved in governance. No Thomas Becket figure would appear in the late middle ages, not necessarily because no king would dare to kill another bishop, but because no bishop was sufficiently foolish not to realize that they were part and parcel of the systems of governance. Elsewhere, however, religious enthusiasm and something like 'national' identity could produce cleavage rather than connection: most notably in late medieval Bohemia, where the religiously radical ideas of Jan Hus (c.1369–1415) were enthusiastically received by the Czech community, who appear to have found in them a 'national' religion, and a symbolic separation from the faith of the unpopular, German-speaking nobles who ruled the region. In slightly less dramatic tones, powerful lay patrons could promote and protect radical religious ideas, as was the case with John of Gaunt's patronage of John Wyclif in late fourteenth-century England (Wyclif's radical theology feeding into the ideas of Jan Hus,



and fomenting England's own home-grown heresy of Lollardy). In many cities and towns, the powerful merchant classes who tended to gain oligarchical rule arrayed themselves in pious garb, via membership of religious guilds, and increasingly directed elements of local religion through the promotion of particular feasts, celebrations, and the commissioning of religious objects and art in guild and parish churches.<sup>20</sup> These latter developments—secular groups enthusiastically directing expressions of pious enthusiasm—have been seen as evidence for the vitality of the late medieval Church and the investment of the laity in medieval Catholicism. But they are very often also demonstrations of political and economic power in conjunction with faith: not only pious enthusiasm, but the confident assertion of (local) authority, wealth, and prestige in the pursuit of salvation on its own terms. This was, if anything, fed rather than challenged by the demographic crises of the fourteenth century: the cultural impact of the effects of plague is still difficult to determine, but for those among the ordinary people who survived the depredations of the initial outbreak, the mid- and longer-term effects seem to have included a rise in economic prospects and a growth in expectation of political agency. The 'secularization' of later medieval religion (as it has sometimes been seen) is perhaps part of a wider shift to a 'popularization' in later medieval society more generally; that is, a growing role played collectively by 'the people'. This does not imply a medieval society which embraced democracy or equality. Hierarchies very much persisted; but they were being re-negotiated, with merchants, townspeople, and peasant farmers all, in different ways, flexing economic and political muscles.

All of these developments—the Great Schism, the growth of what start to look like 'national' churches, the intermittent success of radical theological ideas, the secularly-directed enthusiasms of civic religion—meant that the late medieval Church's claims to catholicity—universalism—were placed under considerable strain. In its best attempts to soothe these tensions we again see the importance of princes. The conciliar movement of the fifteenth century, which formed as a means to address the schism (but also wider issues of governance, faith, and reform), argued that councils of bishops and theologians could reform the Church, including the papacy, by making all subject to collective authority. The arguments were of course primarily conducted within the framework of canon law—but the conciliar model of collective authority was essentially one which had recurrently arisen within secular contexts, and the practical political power wielded by the Council of Constance (1414–18) was heavily dependent on the patronage given to it by King Sigismund of Hungary.

There is a strong argument for seeing the fifteenth century as the beginning of an age of reform, one which would stretch then into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as the Christian faith split itself into Protestant and Catholic churches. 'The Reformation', in that sense, might not be seen as so sharp and decisive a moment in western history; rather, the important changes that took place across these centuries, whilst punctuated by particular moments of rupture, emerged from tensions and a dynamic already present in the later middle ages. One might point to the continued importance of royal, civic, and national secular power in those processes of reformation: that arguments about theology, salvation, and faith led to huge political divisions within Europe (the effects of which are still felt today) was due to the investment that secular powers made in these debates. In either case one might thus argue that 'the middle ages' may not be the periodization which best helps us to understand what did and what did not change across these latter centuries.<sup>21</sup>

## HISTORICIZING CHRISTIANITY

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As I noted earlier in this chapter, there are different histories one could tell. But what indubitably changes over time is the nature of the surviving evidence. There is much more textual evidence surviving for the later period than prior to the twelfth century. Monasteries produced and kept records in a way that rural churches did not. Bishops may, in some regions, have exercised quite close pastoral interest in their dioceses from an early period; but only from the thirteenth century onward do we find much written record of episcopal visitation, intervention in tithing disputes, prosecutions for moral crimes in church courts and the like. The papal curia in the later middle ages intervened in matters of high politics, but also responded to a host of local petitions and issues; and because the papacy kept its records well, the web of connections is more easily visible to us than other earlier possible networks. There are very important archaeological and material sources that can speak to us throughout the period, particularly precious for the earlier centuries but mined in increasingly imaginative ways for the later middle ages also.<sup>22</sup> There are moments in the earlier period when interior reflection on spirituality and piety become visible—we have, after all, Augustine’s *Confessions*, and a variety of letters reflecting spiritual struggles—but the later period again renders richer resources, in the form of mystical treatises, didactic literature, and religious poetry. The histories that we tell are dependent on the materials we can use; and here, even for the periods of more scant evidence, the historian must make choices, both methodological and analytical.

In a wonderfully thoughtful essay on how we might think about ‘Christianization’ in late antiquity and the early middle ages, Peter Brown noted that even in the fifth century ad, the princes of Ravenna would take part in the emphatically non-Christian festivities on the kalends of January, with people dressed up as Roman gods, enacting a procession to try to ensure a year of abundance—all much to the disapproval of the local bishop. What Christianization meant in that time and place, Brown notes, was complex: not only in terms of what it contained (how much Christian and how much preceding culture), but how it was judged by those around.<sup>23</sup> The issue in fact pertains throughout the middle ages. The Catholic historian Jean Delumeau provocatively argued that the people of the middle ages were never really Christianized;<sup>24</sup> more recent work might suggest (with Brown) that the key question is rather what *counted*, in a particular period, as ‘being Christian’, and for whom. Secular rulers a thousand years later than those discussed by Brown also still took part in what could be seen as non-Christian festivities and practices—the use of divination, holding Mayday feasts and rituals, the use of symbols and literary models drawn from Classical antiquity—whilst rituals of blessing and apotropaic ‘magic’ in the late middle ages made abundant use of Christian prayers and symbols, but fitted hardly if at all with explicit Christian theology. To say that these practices rendered such people as not really Christian is unhelpful if we wish to understand them and their world—for they undoubtedly thought themselves to be Christian, and the practices and beliefs they display, though at the time sometimes contested regarding their legitimacy or efficacy, nonetheless were drawn from and operated within the overall cultural frame of Christianity. It may be rather more useful to realize, as Brown suggests, that judgements about what really ‘was’ or ‘wasn’t’ Christian were made at the time also, and were moral judgements (and, one might add, political positions) rather than cultural-anthropological diagnoses—that is, they were primarily judgements about who was a ‘good’ Christian. This lends a further level of complexity to many of our textual sources: criticisms, reprimands, denunciations, moral tales warning of misbehaviour, and prosecutions for the same, can all cast useful light on wider practices and cultural mores—but they are all *positioned* rather than objective mirrors to reality, and thus are themselves engaged in an ongoing struggle over what it mean to ‘be Christian’.



In this volume, the chapters that follow all ultimately pursue different aspects of that issue. The thematic arrangement, which groups chapters under the headings of ‘Methods’, ‘Spaces’, ‘Practices’, ‘Ideas’, ‘Identities’, and ‘Power’, aims collectively to bring into view not only aspects of the history of medieval Christianity, but to make clear the ongoing work of interpretation necessary within the field, and the different methodologies and sources available. Other themes recur between chapters: the ways in which religion interacts with secular ideology, the importance of gendered ideas and gendered differences within Christianity, the possibility of resistances within orthodoxy, the ways in which the emotions are engaged and deployed in the experience of the sacred, among many others. Across the chapters one finds a Christianity which is extremely material—the relations between monasteries and their landscapes, the activities and complications of the Church acting as secular ‘lord’ (as addressed in the Giles of Rome passage with which this chapter began)—but also of course spiritual and abstract—the theology of death and salvation, the mystical connection with the holy. As some of the contributors explicitly argue, there need be no analytical disjunction between the material and the spiritual, the worldly and the numinous, for the means of reflection and affect which brought people to belief were embedded in the material experience of worship, in the world in which they lived, in the economies and politics of their particular time and place. And as noted at the outset to this chapter, at the very heart of Christianity lies the issue of the connections between this world and the next; these would be issues understood by all those who lived during the period under study here. Thus, although beyond this chapter we relinquish the attempt to provide one singular narrative history of medieval Christianity, the contributions seek nonetheless more truly to *historicize* the topic: to see medieval Christianity, in its shifting, multifaceted complexity, as of its time; or rather, of its changing times.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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With considerable thanks to Victoria Howell, Stephanie Ireland, John Sabapathy, and Simon Yarrow.

## NOTES

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1. Giles of Rome, *On Ecclesiastical Power*, ed. and trans. R. W. Dyson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 68–69, translation slightly amended.
2. R. Braidotti, ‘In Spite of the Times: The Postsecular Turn in Feminism’, *Theory, Culture and Society* 25 (2008), 1–24.
3. See chapters by Bagge and by Remensnyder, this volume.
4. See chapters by Forrest and by Cushing, this volume.
5. David M. Gwynn, ‘Episcopal Leadership’, in S. F. Johnson, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 876–915.
6. K. Bowes, *Private Worship, Public Vales and Religious Change in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); K. Cooper, *The Fall of the Roman Household* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
7. P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Late Antiquity* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), 8, 38–41, 95.
8. See chapter by Bagge, this volume.
9. *The Laud Chronicle*; G. N. Garmonsway, ed. and trans., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 2nd edn (London: J. M. Dent, 1972), 25.
10. See chapters by Davies and Dameron, this volume.
11. See chapter by Nelson, this volume.
12. See further chapter by Moore, this volume.
13. Gerd Tellenbach, *The Church in Western Europe from the Tenth to the early Twelfth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), particularly 157–184.
14. See further chapter by Miller, this volume.
15. See chapters by Nelson and Hamilton, this volume.
16. See chapters by Remensnyder and Lipton, this volume.
17. See chapters by Terpstra and Clark, this volume.
18. S. Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900–1300*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).
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22. For example the recent use of 3-D computer reconstruction to map and explore late medieval religious buildings: see work by archaeologists and historians at the University of York (<[www.christianityandculture.org.uk](http://www.christianityandculture.org.uk)>).
23. P. Brown, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 15.
24. J. Delumeau, *Le catholicisme entre Luther et Voltaire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971); see comments in chapter by Biller, this volume.

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# PART I

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# METHODS

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# CHAPTER 2

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# HISTORIES AND HISTORIOGRAPHIES OF MEDIEVAL CHRISTIANITY

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JOHN H. ARNOLD

A great many things keep happening, some of them good, some of them bad.

[Gregory of Tours (c.538–594), *Histories*, prologue.]

## PREMODERN HISTORIES

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‘Other writers of history record the victories of war and trophies won from enemies’, wrote Eusebius of Caesaria (c.260–340 *ad*) in the introduction to book 5 of his *Church History*; ‘...but our narrative of the government of God will record in ineffaceable letters the most peaceful wars waged in behalf of the peace of the soul, and will tell of men doing brave deeds for truth rather than country, and for piety rather than dearest friends’.<sup>1</sup> The written histories of medieval Christianity began in conjunction with the rise of the religion itself. Indeed, the works written by the early Christian historians—Eusebius of Caesaria, Rufinus of Aquileia (c.340–410 *ad*), and later Theodoret (c.393–457 *ad*), Augustine of Hippo (354–430 *ad*), and Orosius (c.375–420 *ad*), among others—were not minor appendages to the faith, but aimed to provide essential foundations for their Church. These histories were, of course, utterly partisan, written to demonstrate the revelatory force and power of a new view of existence (as Eusebius outlines above, in his rhetorical counterpoint between martial secularism and conversion to faith). But they were also fundamental attempts to make ‘Christianity’ an historical entity, in the sense of relating its development across time, but just as importantly (from their viewpoint) in attempting to demonstrate the unfolding revelation of God’s plan via the messy interplay of human events, and to elucidate the complex relationship between human time, historical time, and the eternal time of divinity. They provided, therefore, not only a means of legitimating the authority of Christianity, against preceding and competing ‘pagan’ and Jewish faiths, but also set out the means by which a Christian perspective interpreted the passage of human affairs.

The most frequently noted change between an ‘antique’ and a ‘Christian’ viewpoint on history is from seeing time as cyclical and eternal, to seeing time as linear and developmental (moving from the Creation to the eventual Apocalypse). The shift is not in reality absolute: antiquity did not lack any notion of linear development, nor did the concept of cyclical time disappear in the middle ages. But in any case, the clearer change is in the accompanying reworking of conceptions of human endeavour. The multifaceted notions of ‘Fortune’ and ‘Fate’—of key importance to classical historians—continued within medieval historiography, but were relegated to positions within a Creation ruled by God. For early Christian writers it was fundamentally important that human beings exercised free will. Individuals were not ‘fated’ to certain ends (as might be seen to be the case in some aspects of classical philosophy, or more importantly, as was implied by common habits of divination and astrological forecasting); they had a meaningful role to play in the world, but ultimately in service of God. Thus a Christian historiography was strongly implicated, from the very beginning, in issues of politics, morality, and human experience.

These early histories were therefore concerned with legitimating the rise of the Christian Church; to demonstrate the truth of Christian teaching around morality, free will, and God's grace via historical incident; and (in line with the purposes of ancient historiography) to provide a storehouse of good and bad examples—interpreted within a Christian framework—for the guidance of later readers. In various histories there was also the concomitant desire to demolish counter-claims by other strands of Christianity, such as Eusebius's attack upon Gnosticism in his *Church History*. Finally, the histories attempted to transmit key *moments* of authoritative legitimation, by copying and thus preserving certain documents; thus, in book 10, Eusebius provides copies of the imperial decrees of the emperors Constantine and Licinius concerning religious liberty in the Roman Empire.

Broadly speaking, these aims and tendencies continued throughout the religious histories written in the middle ages. Following the expansion of Christianity, and the move beyond its more uncertain and perilous early centuries, historians of the early and high middle ages tended to produce histories which consciously outlined 'the Church' within a particular region, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of Britain* being a prime example for the early middle ages, and for slightly later centuries, the various 'deeds of bishops' histories, each of which pertained to a particular area. The purposes of such works remained similar to those of earlier histories: to demonstrate how God's plan was unfolding, to provide moral example, and to legitimate the (localized) Church edifice. In areas where Christianization was relatively recent, it would continue to be necessary to echo Orosius's fifth-century history and write 'against pagans', in establishing Christianity as *the* faith held within a particular kingdom. Some historians also developed the rhetorical tactic (borrowed in part from the exegetical exercise of reading the Old Testament via the New) of smoothing the transition between a 'pagan' past and a Christian present by depicting the 'Christian' virtues held by earlier rulers from a pre-Christianized period, or emphasizing that all, even pagans, were a part of God's greater providential plan.

By the eleventh century, with the partial exception of some chroniclers writing in a northern European context, historians were no longer driven by the primary need to legitimate the Christian faith *tout court*, as the Church was the hegemonic religion across western Europe. The purposes of writing history of all kinds, secular as well as religious, continued to be to provide good moral example and indicate the outlines of God's purposes. Robert of Torigny, in the introduction to his *Chronicle* (which covers events from the reign of Henry I of England up till 1182), positions himself as the latest runner in a kind of Christian historiographical relay race, begun by Eusebius and continued—following the chronicles to which Robert had access—by Jerome (fourth century), Prosper of Aquitaine (c.390–455), and Sigebert of Gembloux (c.1030–1112). Having established these bona fides, and noting that his history does not cover such a large geographical area as those of earlier writers, Robert justified the work in familiar terms, arguing that a record of good and bad past examples provides models for emulation or avoidance.

So there was considerable continuity. But the hegemony enjoyed by high medieval Christianity also presented a different opportunity. Very broadly speaking, late antique and early medieval chronicles depicted an historical process whereby a new Christian Church and society superseded an older, pagan world—much as the New Testament superseded the Old. This fundamental historical belief continued into the middle ages, but with the pagan past more of a distant memory, the contrast of 'good' and 'bad' example came not so much from pagan/Christian antitheses as from the moral behaviour of present, Christian rulers and people. Thus Guibert de Nogent (d. 1124) wrote an account of the uprising of the Laon commune which emphasizes the moral failings of the local lord, and demonstrates the ungodly—because socially disruptive—behaviour of the rebellious townspeople. By the

thirteenth century there were still histories of the continuing development of ‘the Church’ in specific places, and there were histories of secular rulers written by monastic chroniclers and framed within a moral Christian interpretation; but it was much rarer to attempt to write a history of ‘the Church’ in general (even if in practice it was only the ‘Church’ within a specific kingdom). The last major medieval works to claim the all-embracing title *Historia Ecclesiastica* were written by the Norman chronicler Orderic Vitalis, who died c.1142; and by Bartholomew (‘Ptolemy’) of Lucca, whose *Historia Ecclesiastica Nova* takes the narrative up to 1294. Other ecclesiastical historians tended to be focussed on a specific group within the Church: the history of their own religious order, for example. Historians writing in the later middle ages increasingly focussed on national and civic themes, with occasional forays into world history. All were still framed by Christian belief and a Christian view of time and morality, but none were attempting to write a history of the Church or the Christian faith overall.

That position changed radically with the Reformation. The struggle to assert a ‘true’ Christian tradition, as in the early centuries of the Church, re-opened the desire to produce histories of Christianity itself. These works were, of course, strongly polemical. For sixteenth-century Protestant authors, such as John Foxe, John Bale, and Matthias Flacius Illyricus, the point of historical writing was to demonstrate the corruption of the Catholic church, and to link Protestant faith back to the early Church and to those who had challenged orthodoxy in previous periods. For Catholic writers, such as Caesar Baronius (commissioned by the papacy in 1571 to produce the massive *Ecclesiastical Annals*) the purpose was to demonstrate the validity of the developments in Christian tradition in the medieval period, and thus the spiritual legitimacy and essential importance of the Catholic inheritance from the past.

The history of religion in the early modern period was thus strongly marked by antagonism: one author writing ‘against’ another, one account of the development of Christianity matched against a competing narrative. But whilst this historiographical combat engendered some notable distortions of emphasis and interpretation, it also encouraged many of the methodological tools on which later academic history rested: the careful collation and comparison of primary source materials, the analysis of documentary style, language and what a later age would call ‘diplomats’, and the key insight that in order to understand the past one must develop a sense of how the past saw itself—that past *cultures* need to be historicized, as we might now put it. From both Catholic and Protestant sides some major collaborative projects—driven by confessional conflict but guided by developing scholarly practice—produced substantial editions and collections of medieval primary source materials. Thus it is to the Protestant view of medieval religion that we owe considerable amounts of information about medieval heresies; and to the Catholic defence of its faith that we owe the massive collections of materials on medieval saints and Patristic writers. These materials are not free from error or without their own problems; but the very fact that they were collated and edited has provided a foundation for much modern historiography.

There were also some less welcome inheritances from the early modern period. Confessional allegiance to Protestantism or Catholicism continued to inform interpretation for a very long time afterward, not always with productive results. The Protestant accusation of Catholic ‘superstition’ set up a notion of ‘good and worthwhile’ versus ‘bad and foolish’ faith and religious practice, the resonances of which extended beyond points of specific theological dispute to a more general sense of religious validity (or lack thereof). With the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, whilst confessional tensions continued, the intellectual critique of ‘superstitious’ religion often took medieval Christianity as the

epitome of foolish credulity, which modern belief in Reason and science had transcended. Here ‘Enlightened’ voices from both Protestant and Catholic countries combined in their disdain for the religion of the middle ages, again leaving us with a confusing interpretive legacy. We have thus the magisterial account provided by Edward Gibbon (1737–94), where the picture of a somewhat surprising triumph of Christianity after the fall of the Roman Empire is clearly tinged with authorial regret. An essential difference for Gibbon between his ‘now’ and their ‘then’ was the credulity of the ordinary believer: the early Christians had an ‘unresisting softness of temper’; they ‘perpetually trod on mystic ground, and their minds were exercised by the habits of believing the most extraordinary events’.<sup>2</sup> Theological developments later in the middle ages, such as the doctrine of transubstantiation, were thus seen similarly, as a triumph of credulity over sense.

## MODERN HISTORIES

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Professional, academic history, housed in a university setting and more or less bound by a shared set of working standards and practices, was a product of the nineteenth century, and appeared first of all, and most influentially, in Germany. But whilst one of the key figures—Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886)—wrote among other things a history of the Reformation and a history of the popes, the nineteenth century more generally marked the beginning of a bifurcation between ‘religious history’ and ‘political history’. The linkage of historiography to national sentiment in the nineteenth century brought with it a focus on the histories of rulers, governments, constitutions, and politics. Religion was not excluded, since the post-Reformation religious identities of different kingdoms were seen as very much part of their national inheritance. But the history of medieval religion in itself was now clearly a subfield, and its pursuit tended to be marked not only by the confessional allegiance of the historian but by their national identity also. It is instructive to compare, for example, two histories of medieval inquisition produced shortly before and after the turn of the twentieth century. Henry Charles Lea, an American businessman and non-professional historian, published his three-volume *History of the Inquisition in the Middle Ages* in 1887. It is a magisterial work, which ranges across Europe, drawn from a vast array of archival materials (transcriptions of which Lea commissioned from a range of local scholars). The judgements are essentially Protestant and humanist, but the methodology is sound, and the perspective is that of an American viewing ‘Europe’ as a whole, concerned above all with issues of religious liberty. In 1909 Thomas de Cauzons, a French clergyman, published his response: *Histoire de l’Inquisition en France*. It is a very interesting rejoinder, which treats Lea’s work respectfully, whilst demurring from his judgements and defending the medieval Church from a modern Catholic standpoint. What we may note is, however, not simply the continuance of Protestant/Catholic disagreement (albeit conducted in polite and scholarly terms), but geographical scope: the American writes of Europe, the Frenchman writes of France. And de Cauzons’ perspective—that one should see inquisitorial behaviour in the light of the culture of its times, and that one should note the national context of its deployment—speaks to a continuing concern in France of that period over the ‘national’ interpretation of its Catholicism.

As we see with Lea, religious history was not only practised by academics in a university setting. There is a wealth of historiography produced within Christian churches, from the extraordinary amount of antiquarian study undertaken in the late nineteenth century by Anglican vicars, German Lutheran pastors, and French *curés* with rural livings, to the rigorous continuations of the editorial works of the Bollandists and Maurists by members of

other Catholic orders. Much of this kind of historiography was essentially directed toward editing or compiling materials, but it also produced syntheses on some fascinating areas which had caught the attention of a particular historian: the study of church bells, for example, or the analysis of belief in saints' miracles.<sup>3</sup> The professionalization of history associated with Ranke—the 'scientific' turn to history then taken—has been seen as particularly concerned with placing at its centre the critical study of primary source documents. The degree to which Ranke could claim to have innovated in this regard has been much debated, and it is particularly obvious with religious history that the use of archives and the practice of source criticism long pre-dated his efforts. However, it is perhaps the case that professionalization brought a greater expectation of scholarly debate in the place of polemical dispute. This is not to say that polemics disappeared (nor that polemic was the only mode of historical discourse prior to the nineteenth century), and certainly is not to claim that modern historians operated free from any personal confessional identification. But it is to note that in general, by the beginning of the twentieth century, historians of religion were more confidently able to think critically about their 'own' religious inheritances, and to write not only in the context of confessional battles for The Truth of their particular faith. However, the histories written were for the most part very much histories of 'the Church' as an institution, and framed by certain teleological assumptions: that one saw 'faith' as something bestowed from the top of a hierarchy downward, that 'the Church' was always in the process of becoming a monolithic, largely uniform entity capable of formulating and implementing policies, and that what mattered in the Christianity one saw in the medieval centuries was that which most clearly foreshadowed the Catholic church of the early modern and modern age.

Having arrived, in this necessarily brief narrative, at the twentieth century, let us pause for a moment and reflect on certain of the legacies from these past attempts to write the history of medieval Christianity (or facets thereof). I have already mentioned the tendency, in the context of late nineteenth-century nationalism, for modern historiography to focus on national lines (a tendency which continues today, though now due more to the difficulties involved in reading across a range of contemporary secondary literatures in various modern languages). One accompanying element has left a very lengthy, and not always clearly recognized, legacy: the degree to which different nations have inherited rather different 'grand narratives' around the theme of medieval religion. The differences are, of course, primarily linked to the various national Protestant and Catholic Reformations. In Britain, the break from Rome in the mid sixteenth century has tended to link a change in theology with a flowering of national sovereignty (imagining a medieval past where 'the Pope' was oppressively powerful), overlaid with a misleading conflation of religious Reformation and future scientific Enlightenment. The medieval past, in this narrative, is thus figured as 'foreign' on multiple fronts. American historiography and American confessional commitments are much more varied, but tend to include a basic sense of 'religious liberty' as a fundamental good—and where the medieval past was, for obvious reasons, primarily associated with an 'Old Europe' which could at times be admired but which was, above all else, distant. In Catholic France, however, the Reformation inserts no clear 'break' in the narrative of the *ancien régime*; thus a medieval Church can be seen in continuity with the present, so long as the primacy of French self-determination is recognized within it, with the papacy held at a certain distance. For Italians, following the nineteenth-century Risorgimento, a commitment to a modern secular state or a commitment to a papally led Church could seem like a clear and inescapable binary choice—and one which could be projected back in time. Germany emerged from the Reformation period divided confessionally (divided within different versions of Protestantism as well as between



Protestantism and Catholicism), and perhaps as a consequence ‘Church History’ remained a more clearly separate discipline from other kinds of historical study, conducted often within theology faculties, theology being a key part of its ambit, and still very strongly marked by confessional loyalties and ongoing arguments about faith. Similar points could doubtless be made with regard to the newly burgeoning academic historiographies produced now in Spain, Poland, and Scandinavia. Professional historians did not necessarily always give voice or even tacit assent to these received stories of the past; but they did, and to some extent still do, frame the ways in which historical analysis was presented.

In the first half of the twentieth century, as academic history developed in America and Europe (following the lead set by Germany in the mid nineteenth century), medieval history often played an important role, but the study of religion was not predominant within the field. The development of the medieval state and its constitutions were the bedrock of much training, and the areas of cutting-edge development tended to be around economic and social history. Thus Eileen Power’s pioneering 1922 book on medieval English nunneries focussed particularly on their economic contributions and on the social history of women’s lives, with the religious element somewhat sidelined. On the other side of the coin, scholars based in theology rather than history produced works in which spirituality and ideas held centre-stage, with little developed sense of social or political context (one thinks of H. B. Workman’s *The Evolution of the Monastic Ideal* (1913)). The early twentieth century saw some key wider works which grappled analytically with ‘religion’ (including medieval religion) as a topic: most famously Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905; English trans. 1930), but also William James’s *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), and Ernst Troeltsch’s *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (1911; English trans. 1930). But it would be fair to say that they did not influence the historiography of medieval religion until later decades. The same is partly true of a genuinely pioneering medieval work, [Herbert Grundmann’s \*Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter\*](#) (1935, revised 1955), which was only translated into English in 1995 under the title *Religious Movements of the Middle Ages*. Grundmann’s work, in this volume and other essays, was extraordinary in its ability to look at medieval religion free from the value-laden frames that much other scholarship had inherited. He pointed out the confluence of aims and inspirations in both orthodox and heretical ‘movements’ in the eleventh through thirteenth centuries, and within those developments thought hard about the particular role that women played in the developments of medieval faith. In these and other areas, he provided powerful tools for thinking about religious belief from the ground up rather than within the expected boundaries of later institutions; though his influence beyond Germany was not great until later decades.

Much academic study elsewhere was, in the first half of the twentieth century, rather less inspired. Historians studied the institutional developments of the Church—the papacy, the spread of parishes and dioceses, relations between ‘Church’ and ‘State’, and the growth and spread of the monastic orders—providing solid foundations to later study, but taking their subjects often rather clearly ‘as given’, following teleological tracks to their post-Reformation fulfilment (whether Protestant or Catholic) and working within a largely anachronistic national frame. The Church was seen unproblematically as a powerful ‘institution’, and where issues of belief and culture were noted, it was as evidence for their assumed strength and simplicity—the middle ages as an ‘Age of Faith’, whether as something to be nostalgically celebrated or contemptuously condemned for its pre-modernity. The first volume of the *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* (1950) promisingly asked ‘what is included in the term *ecclesia*?’—but the response is instructive: the study of the Church should embrace issues such as New Testament studies, the study of the liturgy,

and the history of the Church as an institution. These things did happen, it is admitted, in wider contexts: 'Being in the world the Church is inevitably involved in political, constitutional, social and economic issues. Such issues, however, will only be dealt with in so far as they are indispensable for a proper understanding of the Christian Church'. A door is opened here, but not very far, and with a clear sense that quite a lot of what pertains to religious history is unproblematically separate from everything else.

## FROM ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY TO LIVED RELIGION

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The major change in this historiography, a shift played out across the middle decades of the twentieth century, was from studying religion primarily via its theology and its formal institutions, to looking at religion as part of the world in which it flourished. This can be seen as one strand in a set of wider changes in western historiography in general, where economic, social, and cultural factors began to be treated more prominently, and where the role and experiences of the masses was seen as an important part of the story. In English historiography, the key movement was associated with the British Communist Party, leading to the founding of journals with broadly left-leaning allegiances: *Past & Present* and *History Workshop Journal* most prominently. Medieval religion was not of much interest to these founding fathers (with the partial exception of Rodney Hilton's work on popular uprisings), but the methodological and interpretive developments they pioneered did feed into subsequent generations of study.<sup>4</sup> In France, and with particular influence on our field of study, the key development was that which came to be centred on the journal *Annales*, founded by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre in 1929. In *Les rois thaumaturges* (1924), his study of the 'royal touch' which cured scrofula, Bloch had demonstrated how one might bring together the study of politics, magic, and belief. Collectively the early *Annales* group—strongly socialist but not doctrinally Marxist—sought to bring society and economy into the centre of historical study, and to connect intellectually with other disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, psychology, and economics. For them, religion was more clearly an important element within the various historical strands they wished to knit together: religion as the culture and *mentalité* of a past age, accorded quite considerable power as a context for social and political action.

Alongside the early *Annales* we find a different but somewhat parallel strand in the study of religion, strongly rooted within Catholic intellectual culture and internal discussions within twentieth-century Catholicism. The key figure here is Gabriel Le Bras (1891–1970). In the 1920s he worked at the University of Strasbourg (in the Institut de droit canonique), where Bloch and Febvre were colleagues, as was the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (who had close connections with Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss). Le Bras brought together a number of key connections: a very serious interest in sociology, an appreciation of the expanded view of history sought by the *Annales* school, a profound knowledge of law (particularly canon law), and his own devout Catholicism. There have been, and indeed still are, historians who see 'the law' as kind of sacred abstraction, the history of which self-evidently determines the essence of past societies. For Le Bras, it was clear that 'law' must be understood in regard to the lived experience of society; and thus that canon law, the law of the Church, had to be investigated in connection with the experience of *la religion vécue*—'lived religion'. He was interested not simply in understanding how laws were intellectually formulated, but in asking 'why, for whom, for which society, in which social conditions were they made, and in what measure did that society receive them, and apply

them, and re-form them'.<sup>5</sup> In the grand series of publications he launched as editor (*Histoire du droit et des institutions de l'Eglise en Occident*, 18 volumes published from a projected 35), and in his own contributions to medieval history, Le Bras pursued 'law' as not only the explicit rules laid down by authority, but also the set of social expectations that governed society—the religious aspects of society in particular. Thus despite the title of his two-volume *Institutions ecclésiastiques de la Chrétienté médiévale*, we find a profound analysis of religion, society, and culture, rather than the traditional kind of 'institutional' history of the Church.

The focus on *religion vécue* was part also of pastoral theology and reform within twentieth-century Catholicism itself. There was sociological work—religious sociology (*sociologie religieuse*) rather than a sociology 'of' religion—that, among other things, undertook statistical analysis of contemporary lay Catholic practice, to try to understand to what extent ordinary Catholics were engaged with their religion. And there was pastoral theology which increasingly placed the Catholic laity at the heart of the Church, within which (and of particular interest to medievalists) we find the Dominican cardinal Yves Congar writing about the role of the laity in the present and the past, and encouraging historical reflection on their role, a task developed for the high middle ages particularly by Etienne Delaruelle.<sup>6</sup> The more radical currents in Catholic thought in the 1950s, leading eventually to the reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), encouraged similar elements of reflection elsewhere. The Oxford don, W. A. Pantin (another devout Catholic), whilst expending much energy on editing documents relating to monastic history, also wrote in the 1950s a history of the English Church in the middle ages that emphasized the importance of the 'literate layman' to its vitality. Another Dominican theologian, Marie-Dominique Chenu, reflected on the changes in twelfth-century thought that refigured, as he saw it, the relationship between man, the natural world, and Christian spirituality; this being part of a wider '*nouvelle théologie*' that sought to consider how Catholicism should relate to the modern world around it, with quite radical consequences in some cases.<sup>7</sup> Also at Oxford was Richard Southern, a high Anglican, who clearly felt a very strong affinity with medieval intellectuals and theologians, but whose *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (1970) was quietly insistent that the first part of the title—society—mattered very considerably if one wished to understand how religion developed across the period. (A few years earlier, Southern had contributed a chapter on the 'dark ages' to a book on *The Layman in Christian History*, part of an ecumenical project from the 'World Council of Churches').<sup>8</sup> Southern's analytical focus was rooted in the world of intellectuals and ideas much more than in the socioeconomic view of the British Marxist Historians group, and he originally planned his book as but the first volume to be followed by another more focussed on the spiritual aspects of medieval religion. Nonetheless, he communicates powerfully the importance of thinking about 'the Church' as something more than its formal institutions, and thus opens the door to an analysis which places at least some of the laity centre-stage, and which sees religion as intimately connected to the world in which it lived. In this he had in fact been preceded by a few years in the final work of Margaret Deanesly, a scholar who is now known best for her foundational study of the English vernacular bible, but who also wrote a notably thoughtful account of religion in its social setting in her *The Pre-Conquest Church in England* (1961), which reflects quite beautifully in its final pages on what 'the church and the litanies and the mass and all that went with them' meant to an ordinary anglo-saxon villager.<sup>9</sup> Deanesly had worked at Manchester and then the University of London, was a devout Anglican, but was not (as far as I have been able to ascertain) part of



or particularly influenced by any particular historiographical movement; a reminder that individual scholarly inspiration and insight underpin the wider currents of interpretation.

So the clear and really fundamental shift that took place across the twentieth century—from treating the history of religion as self-evidently the history of the institutional Church, to placing the experiences of all medieval Christians, including the mass of the laity, more centre stage—arose partly from wider theoretical shifts in historiography, partly from the politics of modern Catholicism and ecumenicalism, but partly also (as with Deanesly, and others whom one might mention from earlier ages) from the imaginative intellect of particular scholars. For the next generation of *Annales* historians and others, the change of scope was heartily embraced; but the interpretation of the laity became more fiercely contested.

At stake were issues of structure and agency. For most of the historians discussed above, ‘the Church’ was seen, at least for the period of the Investiture Crisis onward, as a developed entity, a structure in-and-of itself. Thus as the laity were brought more prominently into the story, the question most often asked was how effective or otherwise the Church had been at transmitting its programme of faith out beyond the clergy; how ‘good’ it was at being an institution. The uncertain term ‘Christianized’ is sometimes here brought into play, meaning either a question of catechetical rigour (did ordinary Christians know the right prayers, perform the correct acts of worship, ‘believe’ in at least this sense), or else a more diffuse sense of cultural hegemony (did most people have recourse to Christian ideas and symbols in daily life, relinquish pre-Christian patterns of festivity and supernatural belief, generally ‘behave’ like a Christian). For John Moorman, writing on religion in England in 1953, by the end of the middle ages the Church was deeply embedded in everyday life: ‘the power of the Church weighed very heavily on the ordinary man’, and ‘in his own inner life the average Englishman of the later Middle Ages was undoubtedly deeply religious’ (even if, Moorman then adds, also sometimes superstitious and falling into ‘false emphasis’ in his beliefs). For Gabriel Le Bras, in the conclusion to the first volume of his *Institutions ecclésiastiques* (1959), the question of inner belief is put to one side and the focus is instead on the explicitly structural. The Church, he argued, had succeeded as a disciplinary and ordering structure within which salvation could be supplied to the laity: ‘[A]ll the West was brought together in these centuries in a visible society which was educated, subdivided and fixed into place. The condition of each Christian, the structure of the Church, were defined with perfect rigour’. But for Jean Delumeau, a decade and a half later, the laity of the middle ages were never truly Christianized: only after the reforms of the Council of Trent and its renewed programme of pastoral instruction and discipline did a properly (Catholic) Christian culture take hold of Europe, and a fully Christian set of beliefs embed itself in the ordinary household.<sup>10</sup>

The interpretations thus varied, but the point is a near unanimity to the broad shape of the analysis: the Church is the structured, active force; the laity are subject (more or less effectively) to its powers. This analytical outline tends to be preserved even when the Church is seen in more anthropological terms, as the major cultural expression of the society of its time. Thus even as the post-war *Annales* historians brought the laity ever more prominently into view, and drew connections between socioeconomic context and modes of religious expression (as for example in the work of the US historian Lester K. Little, much influenced by the *Annales* group), Christianity and the Church tended still to be depicted as the structure within which the laity were acted upon and acculturated. Jacques Le Goff, the most influential of all the later *Annales* medievalists, wrote of Christianity as a powerful ideology, something which structured at a profound level the *mentalité* of medieval society. Although at points he focussed on lay activity and sketched ‘folkloric’ culture as distinct

from orthodox religion (as in a brief but influential article on folkloric culture arrayed against clerical culture in the early middle ages, and his discussion of the move from ‘Church time’ to ‘Merchant time’ with the introduction of civic clocks), the recurrent sense in his work is of Christianity as a hegemonic cultural force, overarching and to a large degree determining the lives of ordinary people. In the landmark *Annales* publication edited by Le Goff, *La nouvelle histoire* (1978), Michel Vovelle writes of ‘a world where religion forms the framework for collective life’.<sup>11</sup> In one sense, religion is thus hugely important—but the *annaliste* delight in the power of *mentalités* tends to place ‘religion’ paradoxically as both central and marginal to the ‘new history’ project: accorded almost overwhelming contextual power, but therefore somewhat unexamined as a thing in itself, it received no further detailed discussion in that collection of essays.

The *Annales* group had been, from an early period, much influenced by anthropology; but anthropology itself did not remain static, and developments in that field also helped to prompt revaluations of the role of the laity. Very broadly speaking, anthropological study in the 1960s and 1970s began to move from interpretations of how societies functioned as collective structures to focussing more on the power-relations and resistances within societies, and the more shifting and labile ways in which social and cultural structures formed and re-formed (two key contributors to the anthropological debate being Clifford Geertz and Pierre Bourdieu).<sup>12</sup> Part and parcel of these developments was a concern to try to see all cultures, including local cultures, in their own terms, rather than as ‘primitive’ beliefs yet to reach the heights of civilization. Some of this fed into historical study, with two overlapping vectors: to impart some sense of agency to the broad mass of the laity, and to consider whether there were other competing or intertwined ‘cultures’ that were not subject to the hegemony of the Church. The early modernist Natalie Zemon Davis provided a still-powerful critique on the former point, arguing forcefully that even those who had brought the laity into view—Etienne Delaruelle, Jean Delumeau, and others—tended to ‘evaluat[e] lay piety primarily in terms of its deviation from one historical norm or religious ideal’, rather than looking *with* the laity, as active participants rather than ‘passive receptacles’.<sup>13</sup> At stake is not simply how one feels about the laity (whether one accords them some measure of intelligence and agency, or treats them as simple-minded and passive) but how one conceives ‘religion’ itself: as an independent top-down set of ideas and structures, or as something built also from the bottom up as it is enmeshed with its social context. An expression of the second vector came from Jacques Le Goff’s pupil, Jean-Claude Schmitt. Writing on the posthumous publication of a collection of Delaruelle’s essays, Schmitt similarly pointed to the tendency to treat the laity as ‘naive’, ‘primitive’, and ‘pre-logical’, but argued also that one should investigate a separate and autonomous ‘folkloric’ culture of the laity, which was sustained by the closeness of the natural world to medieval people, and which was not dictated by Christian belief systems.<sup>14</sup> Here ‘Christianity’ is one powerful, potentially colonizing, force in tension with other cultural systems and values.

Both of these vectors—the laity as active participants in religion (including orthodox religion) and the laity as carriers of a potentially oppositional culture to mainstream Christianity—can be seen in the work of the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>15</sup> Recent commentators have sometimes forgotten just how much focus on orthodox religion there was in key collections of essays such as *La religion populaire en Languedoc* (1976), *La piété populaire au moyen age* (1977) and *Faire croire: modalités de la diffusion et de la réception des message religieux du XIIe au XVe siècle* (1981). But it is true that the works which created the greatest reverberations were on heresy (in part, at least) and on what might be labelled

folklore: Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's study of a small Pyrenean village, drawn from inquisitorial registers, being the most famous example (*Montaillou* (1975)), and Schmitt's study of the folkloric tales of martyred dogs (*The Holy Greyhound* (1979)), along with methodologically influential works by early modernists such as Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms* (1982) and Giovanni Levi's *Inheriting Power* (1988). A figure of particular interest in this milieu is the Russian historian Aron Gurevich (1924–2006). His access to archives was limited due to his location and his lack of political favour in his own country, but he made contacts with Le Goff, Schmitt, and others. In his own work Gurevich in part amplifies the sense of an oppositional 'folk' culture and in part acts as a constructive critic of the Annales work, arguing most forcefully for the complex interrelations of 'official' and 'popular' cultures (drawing inspiration from the ideas of the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin).<sup>16</sup>

Other anglophone historians also took considerable inspiration from anthropology, but sat at a critical angle to the predominantly French currents, the two most influential writers being Peter Brown and John Bossy. Both, in the 1970s and '80s at least, drew upon a broadly-speaking functionalist interpretation of religion (seeing religion as a key component in how pre-modern societies managed to function, particularly through assuaging innate tensions). But both also brought a strong sense of process and fluidity to their analyses: they tried to understand how religious cultures shifted as the social and political relations which drew upon them changed, whether looking to the role of the 'holy man' in late antiquity, or the practice of baptism across the Reformation period. For both, the point was to look not to the 'margins' (the heretic, the witch, the superstitious and 'folkloric') but to see the orthodox 'centre' as the product of much more than the creation of the theology and structures of the institutional Church.

Where to look—at the orthodox 'centre' or at those on the margins—was the focus of much debate from the mid-1980s onward, with effects that have lingered for several decades thereafter. In a hugely influential article, John van Engen attacked what he then saw as the overly schematic 'two cultures' view of the Annales group, arguing that it accorded far too much importance to a few unrepresentative figures and movements (heretics, superstitious peasants, and the like), that it fantasized a cultural gulf between clergy and laity, and that it frequently reduced religion to something determined by material conditions. Against the general inheritance of functionalist approaches, he argued that 'Historians of religious culture must take "religious man" seriously, just as economic historians take "economic man", or political historians "political man", seriously. Anything less will ultimately fail to do justice to the phenomena under investigation and, in particular, fail to account for the dynamic inherent in people acting on religious conviction'.<sup>17</sup> Van Engen's positive desire was to see the agency of the laity explored not only in regard to the notionally 'folkloric', or in ways that 'resisted' orthodox culture, but as active participants in orthodoxy itself (a task he has pursued through his own studies of the 'New Devout' in the late middle ages). The laity as participants in, and in some ways the active shapers of, orthodoxy is a theme which speaks more and more eloquently in subsequent work. Some of this, fairly specifically following van Engen's call to arms, emphasizes the religious motivations of the laity—as in Daniel Bornstein's study of the popular movement of the Bianchi, or Augustine Thompson's study of religion in the Italian city states. Others have developed lay 'agency' in a slightly different way, with some greater emphasis upon material conditions, such as Marcus Bull's study of crusading knights, Katherine French's work on parochial religion, or Walter Simon's account of Beguine lives and practices in the late medieval low countries.<sup>18</sup> Of course the study of heresy, witchcraft, the 'marginal' and so forth has continued as well; and the substantive work done by Annales scholars has



demonstrated a more nuanced approach than is perhaps evident in either their early ‘call to arms’ publications, or denunciations of the same. Thus, reading [Jean-Claude Schmitt’s \*Les revenants\* \(1994\)](#), for example, one finds a very subtle approach to medieval Christian culture, belief, and the folkloric.<sup>19</sup>

At the end of the twentieth century, then, the discussion of medieval religion held society and culture at the heart of our understanding of the medieval Church, even whilst disagreeing on what kind of ‘culture’, how exactly religion related to society, and what constituted ‘the Church’ in any particular time and place. Study of the institutional Church has in recent times begun to reappear, considerably reinvigorated by a more socially informed notion of what an ‘institution’ might be and how it might operate.<sup>20</sup> A variety of tools and techniques, some drawn from the *Annales* and social history traditions more widely, have been brought to bear, including statistical analysis (of wills, of miracle stories, of sermon exempla), prosopography and network analysis (of monastic donors, for example), and linguistic/discourse analysis (of theological and pastoral concepts for instance). And the discussion of ‘culture’ has flowered into many different directions, drawing increasingly upon literary, art historical, archaeological, and—most recently—musicological expertise.

In the 1990s, and as part of wider developments in the study of history in general, the focus on culture led also to more reflection on issues of gender, the body, sexuality, medicine, social status, and a more nuanced approach to cultural ‘resistance’ than simply one folkloric culture opposed to one clerical culture. The exploration of culture has sometimes taken us further into the worlds of the laity (as with, for example, work on miracle stories by Michael Goodich, Robert Bartlett, Didier Lett, and others), sometimes into the world of the intellectual elite (as in Caroline Walker Bynum’s important and influential *oeuvre*), and sometimes to a very productive mixture of both (as with Miri Rubin’s work on *Corpus Christi* or Megan McLaughlin’s study of early medieval prayer).<sup>21</sup> Areas which have tended to restrict discussion to their highly technical areas, such as study of the liturgy, sermons, theological argument, and the workings of canon law, have opened out their expertise into wider fields of discussion. At the same time, and just as importantly, many of the prominent historians in the field do not work *only* on the topic of religion: thus Bartlett has written on intellectual culture, European politics, and Anglo-Norman England; both Bynum and Rubin have worked on the history of the body; both Goodich and Lett have published on orality and the use of legal testimony, and the latter has studied family structure and marriage, among other topics. Discussion of religion no longer needs to stay limited to an enclosed sub-discipline.

As we move toward the present moment in which this chapter is written, it becomes harder to try to describe ‘the field’ in the manner I have essayed for earlier periods—harder because the lack of distance makes patterns more difficult to discern, because personal interest distorts what one sees, but also because there is so much work being done, across so many different countries, that the sheer volume overwhelms any convincing attempt at summary. In various of the chapters that follow in this volume, the specific historiographies associated with particular topics are outlined more effectively than I can hope to cover in these pages. Let us conclude, then, by reflecting on the current direction of travel, and where we may yet wish to go.

## WHERE NOW?

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Christianity, however, was never an abstract concept, a pure philosophy: acceptance implied a new way of life and the incorporation of Christians into a particular society. The civilization into which the Christian faith was introduced helped to shape the forms of Christian thought, life and worship in different societies, the essentials in all cases being the same.

[Margaret Deanesly, *The Pre-Conquest Church in England* (1961), 1]

We have become collectively adept, in the last few decades, at exploring part of what Margaret Deanesly so succinctly sketched above, namely that across differences of time and place, medieval Christianity varied. The chapters in this volume demonstrate a number of such inflections: the Christianity of early medieval monasteries, reworking the agricultural, political, and spiritual landscapes around them; the Christianity of late medieval mystics, finding high affective and embodied devotion within themselves; the Christianity of various competing groups across the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, each attempting to lay best claim to the apostolic tradition of poverty and preaching; the Christianity of city dwellers, finding focus both in collective public rituals and domestic meditative practices; the Christianity of the Iberian peninsula, for most of the period inevitably felt in contrast to (and sometimes conflict with) the competing religions of Judaism and Islam; the Christianity of northern Europe, adapting to very differently structured societies; and so on and so forth.

However, we have perhaps not yet been so good at working out how to bring these different areas of study into dialogue. There are methodological issues, particularly when one contrasts earlier and later periods. The sources of late antiquity differ from those of the period c.600–1100, though scholars of both eras are much more used to drawing upon archaeological findings than those who work on the later middle ages. Documentary materials after 1100—and even more so after c.1250—are vastly greater than for earlier periods, and can tend to demand a different approach. Nonetheless, dialogue is of course possible, and the periodizations we have tended to inherit do not have to imprison us. Peter Brown performed a great service in taking his *Rise of Western Christendom* (1996) from the ‘late antique’ period he has done so much to establish into the early middle ages; though not so very many colleagues have yet followed in breaching the uncertain boundary that follows the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century (leaving aside the many of us who wrench Augustine out of his time and place, in order to claim him as ‘medieval’). There is an even more blurry line between ‘early’ and ‘high’ or ‘late’ medieval study, most often hovering roughly around the year 1100 as a watershed demarcating different historiographical comfort zones. Again, a few particular scholars have helped to bridge this unintended gap: most recently Sarah Hamilton, in her work on religion and the people 900–1200.<sup>22</sup> Trying to work ‘across’ the Reformation is a more familiar project, though is perhaps most often performed by early modernists looking ‘back’ than medievalists pushing forward; and in anglophone academia, has perhaps focussed more on trying to understand changes (and some continuities) between medieval Catholic and early modern Protestant religion, rather than the continuities (and some changes) between pre- and post-Tridentine Catholicism.<sup>23</sup> There is abundant work here yet to be done, not simply on establishing factual detail, but in trying to communicate better what is at stake in discussions of religion in different periods, to open up these issues to longer perspectives. There are good reasons, for instance, why counter-Reformation historians largely tired of debates about ‘acculturation’ into religion (in part because they underplayed the extent to which Europe was already Christianized by the sixteenth century); and yet issues of building, maintaining, and extending the cultural ‘reach’ of Christianity continues to intrigue both medievalists and early modernists, who nonetheless do not often find themselves in direct dialogue on the subject. Early medievalists have done wonderful work on the complex ways in which

political tactics, kinship strategies and spiritual ideals could weave together, whereas later medievalists have on the whole tended to see ‘politics’ and ‘religion’ as self-evidently separate entities.<sup>24</sup> There is also comparative work yet to be done within our traditional periods of study: Robert Brentano’s *The Two Churches* (1968; 2nd edn, 1988), which looked in detail at the institutional and social structures of the Church in thirteenth-century England and Italy, remains pretty much the only truly comparative study, yet surely invites further, similar investigations.

In recent years, there has been ever more nuanced and insightful work into the nature of medieval piety, the feel and experience of medieval faith. This has been notably interdisciplinary in nature, coming from literary scholarship, archaeological study, art history, and most recently musicology, bringing a focus on the senses, the emotions, the interaction between people and material culture, the experience of moving within sacred spaces, handling holy objects, reflecting inwardly on the divine (and all of these being areas where there are ample opportunities to engage with similar discussions in early modern study). Part of the impetus in these areas can be traced back to the overall shift described above in twentieth-century historiography, becoming ever more ‘cultural’; though it might be noted that in contrast to some of that earlier work, the more recent focus on the experience of belief has often taken historians and others back to normative sources, imagined audiences, and quite often the socially or spiritually elite. Whether these histories ‘work’ for the great mass of the laity is not yet as well explored; and whilst they stand upon foundations laid down by the anthropologically inspired work of the 1970s and 1980s, they might benefit from further engagement with more recent developments in that field, in terms of the relations between culture, materiality, and power.

Earlier in this chapter, I quoted John van Engen’s injunction to take ‘religious man’ seriously. This is quite surely something that subsequent work has done. And yet the problem, it seems now to me, is that ‘religious man’ (as then adumbrated by van Engen) was imagined to stand somehow distinct from ‘political man’ and ‘economic man’; to be a figure untethered other than by an aspirational link to the spiritual and the numinous. But, as Margaret Deanesly realized back in 1961, ‘religious man’ was never only and purely that: people experience and pursue their religion within lives which are simultaneously social, economic, political, and cultural. The work of studying *la religion vécue*, ‘lived’ religion, is perhaps then still to be completed: to think about religion as something truly ‘lived’, with all the complexity that that implies. ‘Lived’ means that we must pay attention not only to society and culture, but to movement through space and time; to explicit and embedded political currents; to the contexts of production and use and interpretation of the material objects and spaces through which so much religious activity is undertaken; to not just ‘emotion’ as an interesting category for analysis, but the means by which *affect* is produced or induced in human actors; to structuring principles of economic, political and cultural power, and to resistances to that power.

Writing in the early twenty-first century, it is clear that religion matters: not just that it matters personally to some people, but that the way in which it works within people’s lives and societies and politics matters globally. The Grand Narratives of Enlightenment and modernity that inform western politics tend still to rely upon a received notion of ‘the middle ages’ as a monolithic, undifferentiated, ‘age of faith’. It falls collectively to historians of medieval religion to bring the study of our period into dialogue with these wider debates—to produce what Michel Foucault might have called a ‘critical and effective history’ of religion—so that current understanding of religion does not rest upon a fantasy of a medieval past, but upon real understanding of its complexity and its various ongoing legacies.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## CHAPTER 3

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# RELIGION, BELIEF, AND SOCIETY

## *Anthropological Approaches*

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SIMON YARROW

### INTRODUCTION

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HISTORY and Anthropology have always occupied overlapping territories, though not always harmoniously.<sup>1</sup> Historians have disdained anthropologists' tendency to proceed too hastily from the particular to the grand explanatory framework, to build interpretive castles in the air. Social anthropologists have been amused by historians' obsession with the particular, with its privileging of words, and with the reification of 'facts' and 'causes' such that antiquarian anecdote is often mistaken for insight. But in concentrating on divergences in disciplinary method and approach, both have tended to obscure the more important differences that open up in their respective encounters with their subjects of study. This chapter shall explore the insights to be had from comparing shifts in emphasis over recent decades within and between each discipline, in their common pursuit of explaining the 'others' that represent their respective subjects.<sup>2</sup>

The subjects of Anthropology and History—living people, observed in their interactions by anthropologists via predominantly oral contexts in the field; the long dead, whom medieval historians attempt to access through the written remnants of the archive—classically imbued these sibling disciplines with monocular vision, one focused on questions of structure and function, the other on origins and change over time. But approaches combining both synchronic and diachronic axes have always existed. They took off in the 1960s, in part because, in the progress of decolonization and globalization, history *happened* to Anthropology and its theory and conduct of fieldwork; and in the case of History, because it has always required some context against which to identify fact. In recent decades, moreover, though their encounters with branches of critical theory—often corralled under the rubric of post-structuralism or postmodernism—shook the scientific foundations of both disciplines, historians refused to be stirred. The disciplinary and epistemological introspection brought on by postmodernism transformed and fragmented anthropology in ways that historians might be forgiven for not noticing, so exercised were they with their own postmodern turn which, with characteristic pragmatism, they used more to elaborate new subjects than to ruminate upon theoretical problems. This is not to deny the sophistication of some historians in addressing the more challenging theoretical issues, but most have pulled back from the disciplinary extinction that the most pure form of postmodernism would appear to presage. Whether in frequent self-analysis or discreet silence, both disciplines have thrived in pluralist conditions. At a time of revived interest in religion in medieval historiography,<sup>3</sup> renewed potential exists for historians to consider more closely Anthropology's contributions to the subject.

This chapter will thus consider how anthropological theories and methods have fed the historical imagination and how they might continue to inform its understanding of religion, belief and society in the middle ages. Common grounds and convergent paths through and across postmodern terrain shall be explored. I hope to show that anthropological influences

in this area can protect historians—in both their commitment to learning the languages of their sources, and in engaging philologically and sympathetically with them—from the dangers of too literal, narrow, and theological an approach to the history of medieval Christianity, in which confessional and historical truth-claims have previously been confused. Indeed, medieval Christianity is so historically and ideologically enmeshed in matters of religion, belief, and society, that it would be foolish not to attempt some critical reflection on these terms.

## EARLY INHERITANCES

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Concepts of religion are the products and projects of particular historical moments. Distinctions between ‘religion’, ‘belief’, and ‘society’ as evolving social science concepts, as words with normative medieval meanings, and—in both these instances of usage—as words with meanings that changed relative to each other, are worth remembering at the outset. The predominant medieval meaning of *religiosi*, for example, to designate those living according to a religious vocation or rule, is well known.<sup>4</sup> John Bossy has reminded medieval historians that ‘society’ (*societas*) meant not the abstract totality of human relations (Society) or some qualified part thereof (‘Medieval Society’, ‘English Society’), but those charitable human associations in which Christianity bound the faithful.<sup>5</sup> This chapter will chiefly be concerned with the boundary between the ‘etic’, analytical uses of these words, as discrete from their ‘emic’ (‘native’ or contemporaneous) meanings, especially since in historical writing this boundary is often left undiscussed.

A mood of confessional moderation characterized modern English treatments of our key words, well into the 1960s. In France, History’s closer proximity to philosophy, ethnology, geography, and linguistics exposed it early in the twentieth century to more technical uses of these terms, uses that might broadly be labeled structural-functionalism, variants of which flourished in social anthropology from the 1910s to the 60s.<sup>6</sup> A central theme, explored in various ways, was that human activities, institutions and conceptual categories act as determining structures, relating to society as if they are functional components of an organic whole—what Marcel Mauss (1872–1950) called the ‘total social phenomenon’. On this basis the customs and norms of interaction such as religion or belief, marriage traditions, concepts and categories of kinship, systems of exchange and land tenure, all became the interrelated subjects of a scientific method known as ethnography. Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) was one of the most influential early advocates of a functionalist definition of religion. He offered a positive evolutionist explanation of religion as those sacred activities by which believers collectively represented and reproduced themselves *to* themselves. Functionalism entailed the notion of a sacred/profane binary which mutually underwrites shared perceptions of social reality. So, for Durkheim, religion is usefully thought of not as a failed empiricism, or an innate religious predisposition (as would be the case for Emmanuel Kant or William James); rather, whilst the notion of a metaphysical referent is left unexplored, the social is seen as the key. Durkheim identified totemism as the archetype of this religious mechanism that—through a kind of sacred indexing—reified ‘Society’ with an almost autonomous, all-pervading control over individuals’ actions.<sup>7</sup> Members of the *Annales* school of history applied these approaches in their radical reconfiguration of the geographical and chronological scale of their subject. Marc Bloch’s *The Royal Touch* (1924) is the oft-cited example of its early adoption in French historiography. Bloch (who attended Durkheim’s lectures, and was related to Mauss) went

beyond the question of the efficacy of collective belief in royal thaumaturgy, to explore its social and perceptual implications in a manner clearly influenced by both anthropologists.<sup>8</sup>

Until the 1960s the history of medieval Christianity in England followed a different course, its subjects being biographies of great men, surveys of monastic institutions, the religious and the laity, and most studied of all, thanks to the Whiggish legacy of Bishop William Stubbs (1825–1901), the constitutional relationship between Church and State in its full sepia glory.<sup>9</sup> The philosophical lineage of understandings about religion and society came broadly from David Hume (1711–76). Hume's *Natural History of Religion* was among the first to define religion in terms of its distinct origins and history through a natural science of man, that is, without any recourse to the supernatural or theological grounds upon which the Christian religion itself presented answers to these questions.<sup>10</sup> He defined religion as those historically enduring survivals of human attempts to comprehend the unknown, the more monotheistic intellectual efforts at this periodically undermined by the superstitious and polytheistic tendencies of the masses.<sup>11</sup> The Victorian anthropologists Edward Tylor and James Frazer reiterated Hume's negatively framed, intellectualist treatment of religion as the misguided spiritual rationalization of the unknown by primitives. Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942), a pioneer of ethnography who made his intellectual home in England, similarly treated primitive religion as a psychological crutch, though he also thought his ethnographic subjects equally capable of engaging technologically with the world.<sup>12</sup>

The unspoken juxtaposition of 'primitive religion' with the 'religion of the masses', an effect of the common law marriage sketched above between whiggish and evolutionist orthodoxies, thrived in the New Jerusalem of postwar England as the story of 'the religious and the laity'. It reached its apogee in R. W. Southern's *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (1970), where the medieval Church is portrayed in benign paternalistic terms as a 'compulsory society' in which the wretched and ignorant are guided by the pastoral care of its clerical hierarchy.<sup>13</sup> The consensus was only seriously interrupted by structural-functionalist anthropology and its *Annales* variations in the 1960s. It is true, as Michael Bentley comments, that confessional historiography beyond that period 'remained pervasive in departments of medieval history, which always attract those with pre-Reformation sympathies',<sup>14</sup> but equally the case that many with such sympathies took to the new learning with great effect.

## HISTORICAL ADOPTIONS

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A general characteristic of the influx of any theory across disciplines is a process of selective appropriation and adjustment in which nuanced debates in the discipline of origin are eclipsed by the practical contexts into which the receiving discipline weaves these theories. From the 1960s to the late 1980s many historians of medieval Christianity were enthusiastic readers and adapters of anthropological approaches to religion, belief, and society.<sup>15</sup> What chiefly impressed them was Anthropology's scientific illumination of the dynamics of stateless societies. Anthropologists used these to rather static ends, whether, like Durkheim or Claude Levi-Strauss, to pare religious belief systems down to their totemic or binary concentrates, or to present societies as self-regulating structures as in the case of Max Gluckman's article on the 'Peace in the Feud' published in an early issue of *Past & Present*.<sup>16</sup> But functionalism encouraged historians to explore the place of religion and belief in social and political change. The regional study and the extended moment of

transformation became important new narrative forms, piloted by *Annales* in the forties and fifties and emulated widely thereafter.<sup>17</sup> Marcel Mauss's ideas on gift exchange, on the body and selfhood, and Jack Goody's on marriage, kinship, and literacy, Walter Ong's on orality and literacy, and Mary Douglas's views on symbolism, pollution, and social stratification informed the most influential works of medieval history of that generation.<sup>18</sup>

Well into the 1990s History borrowed from Anthropology new heuristic frameworks, vocabulary and concepts such as ritual, dispute-processing, charisma, and the sacred and profane to think about conversion, heresy, asceticism, pilgrimage, monastic patronage and popular religious beliefs and mentalities afresh. Bookending the medieval period came similarly expansive and anthropologically informed studies by Peter Brown on the early cult of saints, and Keith Thomas and Bob Scribner on different aspects of popular religion across the Reformation. Three particularly innovative readings of medieval Christianity to emerge in the 1970s and 1980s, practically generating almost from scratch new fields of enquiry, are examples of the use of functionalism to interrogate extended moments of transformation. Peter Brown's work on the ordeal in the twelfth century, and the holy man and cult of saints' relics in Late Antiquity, showed how the ordeal represented not backward religion but a subtle social mechanism of the small community eclipsed by the legal apparatus of the late twelfth century church. His studies of the holy man and the cult of the saints' relics in late antiquity, showed how the holy man in his renunciation of the world, became an important mediator and mechanism for fostering social order within it.<sup>19</sup> R. I. Moore was among the first to take seriously the historical role of 'the crowd' in relation to religious institutions, and to elaborate a history of heresy that looked beyond the doctrinal accusations of the clerical elite of the twelfth century to the social and political upheavals that fostered resort to them as a rhetoric of pollution and 'othering'.<sup>20</sup> Lester Little and Barbara Rosenwein opened up new vistas on spirituality and monastic patronage, the former exploring the social meaning of Benedictine and Cistercian and Mendicant spiritualities, his student Rosenwein powerfully reinterpreting the archive of Cluny through her own readings of Mauss on gift exchange. Karl Leyser's reading of ritual theory led to new ways of explaining Ottonian history of sacral kingship as a carefully orchestrated series of ceremonies that linked the emperor politically via his imperial church system to the duchies of Germany.<sup>21</sup>

## THEIR WORDS OR OURS

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The work of these and other early adopters of anthropology in identifying new methods, subjects and perspectives on religion, belief and society, has frequently been challenged, criticized and refined, often by the original authors themselves. It has rarely been ignored. New contributions have built on these foundations. Some historians have voiced methodological reservations about anthropology, and others have delved further into post-structural anthropologies. Both disciplines have weathered postmodern crosswinds that have marked the landscape, Anthropology during the 1970s and 1980s, and History a decade or so after. In the process, their common goal of explaining 'the other', and with this, their standing as social sciences, has come under scrutiny.

For historians, two questions of method have been put in relief by this convergence: first, to what extent and on what terms can *our subjects'* ideas and beliefs be recovered untainted by the method of recovery, and how is whatever is recovered made meaningful to *us*; second (and these days an issue for anthropologists as much as historians), how do we



explain the relationship between religious beliefs, meanings or ideas, and causation or change over time?

The first of these I shall discuss in terms of emic and etic perspectives, our receding confidence in both the possibility of making authoritative claims for the former, and in the scientific credibility of the latter. In History this is encapsulated in the language of anachronism and in the case of the second question, in terms of teleology and how the cultural is made to mesh with the social. Behind all these sets of terms lies the question long debated in philosophy and more recently in postcolonial theory, of the politics, methodology and efficacy of *cultural translation*.<sup>22</sup>

The social anthropologist Godfrey Lienhardt was one of the first to address the challenge of 'making the coherence primitive thought has in the languages it really lives in, as clear as possible in our own'.<sup>23</sup> His friend and colleague Edward Evans-Pritchard was similarly dissatisfied with structural functionalist treatments of this problem. Ironically, just as historians had turned in the early 1960s to anthropology for its scientific rigour, Evans-Pritchard moved in the opposite direction and made the case for a more historical treatment of religion by anthropologists.<sup>24</sup> His advocacy of history stressed the need for greater emphasis on the theological and lived aspects of religious belief over its psychological and social functions, whether understood in Durkheimian, Malinowskian, or Humean terms. In his Thomas Aquinas lecture, given in 1959 at Blackfriars, Oxford, he argued that anthropologists inherited from the social sciences an intellectually intolerable disregard for religion, an understanding of which on its own terms was crucial for the future of the discipline. Paying them a compliment that might have caused even the most empirical of historians to blush, he remarked that 'History shows us that the socially most efficient peoples were and are, the most religious...'.<sup>25</sup> Evans-Pritchard effectively broke through the evolutionary barrier separating primitive religions from Christianity, the former typically treated as threads and patches of exotic superstition about witchcraft, fetish, taboo and magic, the latter given by anthropologists a distinguished but largely ignored status as revealed religious truth.

Commentators dispute how far Evans-Pritchard ventured from the path of structuralist analysis, which he never disavowed, onto a new road of hermeneutic and interpretive method.<sup>26</sup> His desire to give full empathy to the inner coherence of native cultures in terms that resembled a theological worldview certainly helped anthropologists to attune their 'religious ears', but his own motivation to do so came not from relativist inclinations but from the faith of a convert Catholic. His Oxford lecture ends with a remarkable warning. Anthropologists must begin to take religion seriously in their ethnographies: 'the choice is between all or nothing, a choice which allows no compromise between a Church which has stood its ground and made no concessions, and no religion at all'.<sup>27</sup> His fellow convert, Godfrey Lienhardt's *Divinity and Experience, The Religion of the Dinka* was an even more sensitive exercise in cultural translation. Another of Evans-Pritchard's students (and another Catholic scholar), Mary Douglas, intuitively regarded native beliefs as part of revealed religion. Her works on religious symbolism of the Old Testament and on African religions are among the most widely read of anthropological elaborations of the relationship between religious symbolism and social structure by historians.

The historian John Bossy arrived at a remarkably similar conclusion to that of Evans-Pritchard in his lively critique of Durkheim, an affirmation of the historian's principle that 'words matter'. He traced the evolving meanings of the words 'Religion' and 'Society' to their roots in mid-seventeenth century philosophy, rejected as anachronism Durkheim's derivation of Religion from Society, and restored religion, or rather the Church, (a word he

rather tendentiously substitutes for religion at the end of his article) to its rightful position as arbiter of society. For Bossy the dilemma of cultural translation was easily remedied through the historian's confident employment of philology. It is not clear, however, from his charge of anachronism, whether this is an argument against all etic terms or for the privileging of certain emic ones. He asserts that 'the objection that those we write about must have had the thing though they did not have the word is surely an invitation to mis-description; I do not think it would be acceptable in the case of "state" or "property"'.<sup>28</sup> And yet, this caveat could arguably be leveled at Bossy's own attempts in another article, 'The Mass as a Social Institution, 1200–1700', to claim the mass as 'one of Weber's universalizing moments'.<sup>29</sup>

For those increasing numbers of people attempting to understand whether commensurability is possible in the matters of cultural translation, the fact that both Evans-Pritchard and Bossy appear to cite 'the Church' as ultimate arbiter of their method is a matter of concern. Both men elide, without demonstrating any such commensurability, understandings of *ecclesia*, first, as the entirety of the faithful, and secondly, as a hierarchical institution claiming universal and apostolic authority in religious matters. In this one rhetorical step questions of power and authority and its social articulation are removed from the equation.

The lacuna of cultural translation was, however, impossible to smooth over in the anthropological field. As Evans-Pritchard predicted, the implications of the discovery of what Marshal Sahlins called the 'historical relativity of our native anthropology',<sup>30</sup> caused controversy and dispute among anthropologists in the 1970s and 1980s, though his own confidence that History would solve the matter was quickly superseded by the very kind of debate he warned against (namely, over whether traditional ethnography was fatally compromised by its complicity in colonialism). Thereafter, the issue of how we render others' beliefs in our own terms resurfaced in a steady stream of disciplinary soul searching by representatives of its different strands.<sup>31</sup>

## POST-STRUCTURALISM

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In the decades after 1966, scholarly understandings of religion, belief, and society were shaped by three key post-structuralist interventions. Clifford Geertz focused on the question of cultural context, whilst Talal Asad and Pierre Bourdieu offering contrasting perspectives on the subject of change over time. Geertz famously introduced his own approach to cultural translation in his 1966 publication *Religion as a Cultural System*, directed, he later recalled, to 'upending the complacencies at once of structuralism and functionalism'.<sup>32</sup> His cultural definition of religion combined three premises: first, that religion addresses intellectual, physical, and moral problems of existential meaning; second, that those meanings are autonomous, that they arise out of social use, not inward conviction or cognitive hard-wiring, and finally, that meaning is materially embodied in symbols, acts, and rituals. Together, these defining aspects of religion provided a model *of* reality, or a worldview, and a model *for* reality, that is, an ethical alignment to the world. Geertz's definition framed religion within a communicative model of culture assigning to it mediation of the emotional and intellectual aspects of human understanding. In this and a series of related articles Geertz proceeded to compare the *religious* perspective (vivid realism) with other types of subjective disposition oriented toward: the *scientific* (profound scepticism); the *aesthetic* (appreciation of surface, form, and substance); and the

*commonsensical* (naïve realism). Geertz's definition is a useful composite of familiar remnants of preceding ideas and definitions, retaining mystical elements in its enunciation of a religious disposition with corresponding referents, and building on Malinowskian psychological functionalism and structural symbolism. It has offered historians a useful articulation of religion, belief, and society as an interpretive endeavour that promises through the practice of 'thick description' (as Geertz termed his method of close-reading and multivalent contextualization) an accommodation of analytical with participatory perspectives.

Geertz's definition has endured in both disciplines, arguably on account of its utility and scope. Historians have used it to very different ends, as for example, in the contrast between John Bossy's masterpiece of thick description, *Christianity in the West, 1400–1700* (1985) which in charting the shift of Catholicism from a 'horizontal communal' to 'vertical interiorized' social formation replaces Weber's protestant narrative with a new route to modernity, and Miri Rubin's cultural ethnography of the *Corpus Christi* ritual, which builds in part on the communicative dimension of Geertz's definition of religion, and explores the contested and discontinuous relationship between religious symbols and peoples' religious dispositions.<sup>33</sup>

But the very flexibility of Geertz's definition has laid it open to criticism on different fronts. The philosopher, historian and social anthropologist Ernest Gellner mounted an increasingly impatient critique of Geertz and his followers, considering them to be excessively charitable toward the inherent power they invested in culture. He regarded thick description as a form of self-indulgent, interpretivist glossing, its two hallmarks being a concern to demonstrate maximum empathy and plenty of what Tom McCaskie has neatly called 'handwringing about the authorial "I"'.<sup>34</sup> Gellner insisted that people are not concept-fodder and that religious ideas have histories that need tracing in relation to material interests and social contexts, and that these are most accurately surveyed from Reason's perspective, the *etic* perspective exclusive to social science methodology. Gellner drew historians' attentions to the weak and unclear role Geertz assigned to social and material factors in his cultural definition of religion. Patrick Collinson similarly called historians back to the fundamental Weberian observations that 'Material without ideal interests are empty, but ideals without material interests are impotent'.<sup>35</sup> We shall see shortly how incongruous Gellner's defence of functionalism and social science categories seemed in anthropological circles of the 90s (even if not seeming so in historical ones).

Our third anthropological interlocutor, Talal Asad, offered a test of historians' commitments either to Geertzian cultural exegesis or Gellner's unapologetical structural ethnocentrism in the radical departure he staged from structural functionalism in the mid 70s. Asad, the social anthropologist turned Foucauldian interpreter of religion, has had less influence on historians than Geertz in spite of himself paying historians the compliment of publishing articles on medieval Christianity. Asad began to cut ties with British social anthropology with a book he edited in 1973, *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, in which he abandoned the possibility of scientific observation in ethnography, seeing it rather, in ways popularized later by Edward Said in his book, *Orientalism*, as an instrument of colonial domination.<sup>36</sup>

Asad's trenchant critiques of Geertzian interpretivism and of the functionalism championed by Ernest Gellner offer for historians an instructive, if perhaps sometimes indigestible, triangulation of postmodern anthropological approaches to religion, belief and society. In his contribution to the landmark collection of anthropological essays of 1986, *Writing Cultures*, produced largely by American anthropologists (caricatured by Gellner as 'tortured Hamlets') interested in taking the literary and postcolonial insights of Geertz to

their logical conclusion, he held up to scrutiny the concept of cultural translation, as discussed by Gellner, in a paper on Geertz.

Asad shared Gellner's suspicion that Geertz offered little more than a secular gloss on theology. One of the clearest statements of his own position is found in his critique of Geertz's definition of religion as a cultural system: 'Religious symbols...cannot be understood independently of their historical relations with non-religious symbols or of their articulations in and of social life, in which work and power are always crucial...'.<sup>37</sup> Where Asad departed from Gellner, however, was in his contention that '*both functionalism and interpretivism are equally externalist* (his italics)'.<sup>38</sup>

Asad's radical contribution to our understanding of 'religion' and 'belief' is that these terms have no meaning outside western discursive strategies, that they have no trans-historical analytical utility, and that it follows that the history of 'religion' and 'belief' is necessarily an archaeological study of the changing configurations of their definitional content in historically situated modes of discourse. In other words, Asad concentrates on the difference implicit in anthropological efforts at cultural translation, and interrogates the terms on which 'the other' is authorized. Implied in this statement is a further idea that we might expect to find religion always already implicated in other discourses, through which other forces and currents of power/knowledge flow.

Asad is less appealing to historians than Geertz. His reflexive and discursive technique appears to discount anything that might resemble what historians have learned from other social scientists to call 'agency', unless by agency we mean the serial condition of diversely derived constraints and opportunities in which 'an agent's act is more (and less) than her consciousness of it'.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless his insight restores a degree of open-endedness and contestability to all those diverse fragments of acts that might be called religious practices, by situating individuals in the struggles and capabilities that power engenders. If it is pessimistic about cultural translation, it nonetheless enriches any historical narrative we might care to build out of assumptions about individual and group intentionality. If it denies historians too easy a distribution of motivation, identity or intention among individuals (rendering a scheme of causation driven by human intentions and events—the very stuff of conventional history—unworkable), then we can at least see in his methods ways of tracing the kinds of parameters within which people might have pursued different strategies and tactics of action. For some this is too pessimistic a view, in which Religion becomes an accumulation of authorizing discourses and the study of History a sort of 'episteme-hopping' through an endless western discursive archipelago. The approach seems to enact its own kind of externalism grounded in extreme scepticism as the only guard against the power/knowledge effects of modes of representation.

Historians with reservations about anthropology renewed their vows to philology and broadly two-tier ideas of belief in the face of what they had felt in functionalism to be the reduction of religious meanings to social structures, and the subordination of beliefs to the material or functional effects to which they contributed. In his 1980 article on the Byzantine saint, Henry Chadwick observed, 'we are tempted either to tell the stories of their mortifications and then, as was said of Lytton Strachey, ostentatiously refrain from laughing, or we go in search of trendy non-religious explanations of the social needs that created them'.<sup>40</sup> John Bossy's insistence on staying true to *their* words, made in his critique of Durkheim's anachronism, might be met with the objection that historians in fact use words like 'state' and 'property' all the time as the means of gaining analytical purchase on their subjects. In his own mingling of emic and etic terms in other articles Bossy is in the very best of company. Carlo Ginzburg has noted that even Marc Bloch was capable of stating that 'like linguists, historians should refrain from replacing interpretations given in



the past, with our own', before then unselfconsciously framing his discussions of serfdom in the language of class. The lesson? Even, and perhaps especially, in the most admired and seminal examples of the genre, anachronism is the little leaven in the rhetorical lump of historical narrative. As Ginzburg goes on to write, 'a critical, detached attitude can be a goal, not a starting point'.<sup>41</sup> When they have defined and explained the ideas, doctrines, and beliefs to their philological satisfaction, can historians committed to literal emic understandings have exhausted all the possible meanings and uses that the words of their sources contained? Ginzburg outlined a method, that of 'the case', in which etic frameworks are openly applied, tested and breached by emic evidence, such that the latter gradually modifies and takes over but does not wholly eclipse the former in the business of historical explanation.

A particularly successful illustration of the notion that 'we must give language privilege but not determination',<sup>42</sup> is an article by Kate Cooper on the *gesta martyrum* literature of the fifth and sixth centuries, a genre of hagiography purporting to record as exemplars the tribulations of the Church's early martyrs. Cooper reads them not for 'reliability' with reference to reality (or even metaphysical verities) but for the work they do *toward* fixing meaning by referencing other texts and through their use in different contexts of reception. Cooper makes the point that stories of late antique conversions are probably not historical accounts of conversion but pious literary inventions of what such encounters might have been like, framed according to the retrospective sensibilities of their authors and their projected audiences. Cooper goes on to cite sociological studies of Baptist conversion in 1960s North America to suggest that more important than instruction in religious doctrine in the early stages of conversion is sociability: converts are first social and then religious, and then back date their religion in personal narratives of revelation.<sup>43</sup> This insight echoes Evans-Pritchard who, despite securing a theology for his natives, noted of himself that, 'If one must act as though one believed, one ends in believing, or half-believing as one acts.'<sup>44</sup> It is a conundrum most profoundly interrogated by Rodney Needham in his *Belief, Language and Experience*, which reflects, among that of others, on the work of Evans-Pritchard and Ludwig Wittgenstein.<sup>45</sup>

Moving from these issues of cultural translation to those of change over time, Robert Bartlett's *Trial by Fire and Water* made the case that functionalism enabled historians to hammer their evidence into preconceived structural part-whole relationships, and for the building of historical causation out of a more empirical understanding of the ordeal, ceding back to belief a discrete historical role in the process. Another objection to functionalism, when used to chart change across extended moments of historical transformation, was its tendency to treat change as a sort of slow motion transformation from one structural set of tendencies to another, and as if the evidence were being dragged in one direction like a magnet applied to iron filings. Peter Brown, for instance, described the rise of the cult of saints 'as part of a greater whole—the lurching forward of an increasing proportion of late-antique society toward new forms of reverence', whilst David Nirenberg, building on R. I. Moore's work, adduced by literary critical means evidence that persecuting societies don't only form, they cyclically ebb and flow.<sup>46</sup> Anthropologists during the 1970s and 80s historicized their own discipline with theories of structural dynamism. Victor Turner for instance built on Van Gennep's notion of the *rites de passage* through an elaboration of a theory of symbols as, in Ortner's words, 'operators in social transformations'.<sup>47</sup> Marshall Sahlins' idea of the 'structure of the historical conjuncture', famously expounded in the case study of Captain Cook's encounters with the native Hawaiians, addressed similar issues.

If anthropologists have turned to history partly to escape the sensitive issues related to cultural translation, medieval historians for their part have arguably become increasingly sensitive not just to questions of anachronism but to that of teleology. For those who would still like to do change over time and might otherwise feel limited by Geertzian and textual approaches to the thick description of religious cultures, is there an alternative to Gellner's return to structural functionalism?

## MATERIALITY AND EXPERIENCE

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A final major anthropological development of the 1970s and 1980s to influence historians' uses of our key words is social practice theory, most famously associated with the work of Pierre Bourdieu, out of which theories of materiality and embodiment have recently developed, particularly in the history of religion. Bourdieu's practice theory emphasizes everyday change over time released in the embodied experiences of individuals. It sees their actions as emerging out of institutionally pre-existent social arrangements of space and behavior, known as fields. These fields foster dispositions, sensitivities, orientations to, and ways of discerning the world. They are constitutive of social reality but are also susceptible to rule-governed creativities, the cumulatively transforming, everyday influences of individual actions. This approach shifts attention from the more symbolic and communicative focus of Geertz, which tends to interpret actions, images, rituals, and objects as if 'texts' to be 'read', and concentrates on peoples' actions as discreet from and only partially captured in language.

In such a configuration of religion and society, belief becomes the sum of peoples' practical expertise across a range of niches of religious *habitus*. Religion becomes not a discrete cultural system but continuous with, and for the purposes of persuasion, often antagonistically oriented against the most dominant aspects of other forms of social practice. The historical anthropologist John Comaroff neatly sums it up as 'a shifting semantic field, a field of symbolic production and material practice empowered in complex ways'.<sup>48</sup>

Some of the historical questions that proceed from this are at what point variations in practice break out of *habitus* and transform or modify it, and how we are to characterize such practices and relate them to intentionality. It seems sensible to suggest that people put surpluses of potential meaning into practice (that is they often talk past or misunderstand each other, or deliberately behave ambiguously) only some of which is selected and transmitted, and that intentional actions can also be freighted with impersonal and unarticulated meanings and power-effects, which can lie dormant until picked up in subsequent inter-subjective or textual practices. The study of religious practice in this light challenges historians to return to their sources and look for the logic of a range of forms of non-textual expertise conducted across the most diffusely spread of social niches.

The 'new materialist'<sup>49</sup> trend in the history of religion gradually percolating into medieval historiography over the last decade or so is an aid to this end. The new materialist paradigm involves a study of the relationships forged through lived religion between humans (as units not of mind but of 'embodied intelligence') and objects (as 'inanimate agents') and invites examination of the links, nodes, and flows of material activities that constitute medieval religious belief. It provides exciting opportunities for historians pursuing a social practice approach to religion, belief and society by stimulating historians, archaeologists, art historians and anthropologists in a conversation about embodiment and



object-, in varied configurations with, textual-oriented religious practice.<sup>50</sup> Thus for example Thomas Csordas's work on the phenomenology of embodiment (explored via fieldwork on modern evangelical religion) takes us further than Hume's notion of religion as misinterpreted sense perceptions or Descartes' formulation of the body as an inert container for the mind, and even attempts to escape Foucauldian readings of the body as having discourse written onto it. He sees the body as a 'pre-objective' multifaceted way of 'being in the world' (*Dasein*) that brings its own determining potential to religion, at the point where sensation and culture meet. These insights inevitably complicate and test historical method by simultaneously opening up new spaces for historians to contextualize evidence and drawing our attention to the limits of what can be captured in language and paradoxically the surpluses that can be retrieved from careful readings of texts. Any such method would require, as Csordas observes, the 'examination of the relation between the semiotic notion of inter-textuality and the phenomenological notion of inter-subjectivity'.<sup>51</sup> In other words, perhaps more than anything else, anthropology helps historians to expand their historical empathies, by drawing them up short against the false friendship of their sources, and inviting them to reflect beyond their own closures and susceptibilities in their historical judgments of other humans.

This challenge need not deter historians from more imaginative readings of their sources, the reward of which is the avoidance of an unconscious reproduction of the closed accounts literate elites give of social distributions of motivation and entitlement. Texts are prescriptive, use the language of exclusion, contain inconsistencies in their attempts to manage insoluble tensions, they are polemic and reveal fragments that fail to confirm or extend their claims. Recent examples of historians combining reading strategies gained from the linguistic turn with hermeneutic strategies (gained from anthropology) are provided by John Arnold's work on the materiality of unbelief, and Caroline Walker Bynum's on Christian Materiality.<sup>52</sup> One of the most consistently effective of historians to have opened up worlds of medieval religious experience, Walker-Bynum has argued that the actions of people in the past leave their traces in and beyond the linguistic utterances of our sources, and that we must find ways 'to ferret out slippages and silences, unconscious inconsistencies and contradictions, that reflect that subterranean place where lie the assumptions that undergird acts as well as ideas'.<sup>53</sup> In our efforts to do just that John Arnold has counseled caution against too great a readiness to think that we can 'resummon and understand past individuals, because we are on "their" side...in emphasizing, perhaps, a number of reading *strategies* rather than claiming an epistemology—we may save ourselves from colonizing the subaltern subjects of the past'.<sup>54</sup> Gabrielle Spiegel expounded this theme of historian as necromancer in her recent presidential address to the American Historical Association, in which is concluded: 'Our most fundamental task as historians, I would argue, is to solicit those fragmented inner narratives to emerge from their silences. In the last analysis, what is the past but a once material existence now silenced, extant only as sign and as sign drawing to itself chains of conflicting interpretations that hover over its absent presence and compete for possession of the relics, seeking to invest traces of significance upon the bodies of the dead'.<sup>55</sup>

## CONCLUSION

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In this investigation of the way that anthropology might feed the historical imagination, it may seem to some historians that a theoretical sledgehammer has been taken to crack an

empirical walnut. For those accustomed to see a correlation between medieval religion and its metaphysical referents predicated on ecclesiastical authority and apostolic continuity the challenge of cultural translation is less troubling than for those for whom religion's true historical significance is contingent on social and political as well as ideological claims. In addition to the methodological investigation this facilitates into the history of religion, are two further benefits historians might derive from reading anthropology. First, the place medieval Christianity occupies in western historical metanarratives becomes open to review in the light of the assumptions and uses anthropologists bring to it. Traditional *evolutionist* and *modernizing* narratives have been shown to be two sides of the same coin, one looking back upon societies doomed never to become anything more than partial achievements of full human potential, the other looking forward to the achievement of one particular society uniquely favoured by historical destiny. A third metanarrative is that of the *genealogy* or *archaeology* of discourses of knowledge/power, Asad suggesting that Renaissance man was the original western colonial. The question is then raised whether medieval authorizing discourses are victim or precursor of western forms of power/knowledge, immune from or a site of postcolonial rumination? Perhaps a fourth metanarrative, that of *development*, an ambiguous term used primarily of non-Western world regions entangled as a consequence of colonialism and globalization in the modernizing narrative but who, however developed they may be, are doomed to be constantly 'developing', better describes our traditional treatment of Medieval Christianity.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps Medieval Christianity, beyond its confessional variants, is an important place where we rehearse our anxieties about reality and representation and what has passed for one or the other at different times ever since in our ethnocentric historiography.

A second perspective that anthropological readings open up on medieval Christianity results from the deconstruction of Natural Religion as a scientific category of analysis. As we have seen, John Bossy got there under his own steam by a different route long before the growing field of the anthropology of Christianity began to examine the theological roots of social science. It is in large part an exercise in reflection upon the theological residue left on western analytical concepts, parameters and paradigms of 'Religion and Belief' better to understand and break free of traditional accounts and offer a postcolonial understanding of Christianity in all its global niches.<sup>57</sup> Anthropologists of Christianity are clearing a space where comparative world religion once was, for new approaches to the study of 'religious' styles that may come to have some bearing on the history of the global middle ages.

Anthropology has long provided a useful series of categories, terms and concepts for historians to use, and we must not be afraid to explore their provenances and adapt them to suit our own disciplinary conditions.<sup>58</sup> It seems pretty undeniable to suggest that medieval Christianity cannot be properly understood by historians unless in its relationship to a plethora of other social, political, and economic activities. This is not to say that religion had no independent historical influence, but that it is impossible to measure the relative motivations of individuals, and difficult to imagine a scenario in which religious reasons can be shown historically to have proceeded solely from religious causes. To take such a line is truly reductionist. The emphasis lies in giving due weight to how religious practice bristles and cracks, not with a mystifying energy but with an awareness of the social forces that accompany it.

# NOTES

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# CHAPTER 4

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# MATERIAL CULTURE AND MEDIEVAL CHRISTIANITY

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BETH WILLIAMSON

AN extraordinary reliquary triptych, in the possession of the Church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome, provides—quite literally—an object lesson in the complexity and richness of the ideas embedded within and embodied by the material culture of medieval Christianity. The micromosaic at its centre (13 × 19 cm) depicts the image of the Man of Sorrows, the dead Christ, eyes closed, with his head inclined towards his right shoulder. His hands are crossed at the wrist and held up in front of his chest, making visible both the side-wound and the wounds in the hands. This mosaic has long been famous as the most prestigious, and most highly prized, example of the Man of Sorrows image type which became popular in Italy and beyond during the fourteenth century. The mosaic was associated with the legendary vision of the Crucified Christ that Gregory the Great was supposed to have received while celebrating the Eucharist on Good Friday in Santa Croce (see [Figure 4.1](#)).



**Figure 4.1** *Man of Sorrows*, micromosaic (multicoloured stones, gold, and silver), Byzantine, c.1300; case with relics (wood and metal), Italian, c.1380

Basilica di Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, RomePhotograph © Archivio Fotografico Soprintendenza Speciale per il Patrimonio Storico Artistico ed Etnoantropologico e per il Polo Museale della città di Roma

But beyond the importance of the mosaic as a visual record of a miraculous event, the whole material ensemble here raises other important issues and questions with respect to the intersections of medieval Christianity and material culture. An attempt to see the object materially—seeing it, that is, as a whole (rather than simply focussing on the iconography of the central image)—opens up new questions, provides new avenues of enquiry, and makes new connections between the ontologically related, but separate, categories of ‘image’, ‘object’, and ‘relic’. Although the mosaic was accepted as a true representation of the appearance of Christ at the altar on that Good Friday in Rome, it was in fact made not in Rome in the late sixth century, but probably in Byzantium around 1300. Nonetheless, its perceived antiquity, and its close connection with such an important event, cemented the prestige of the object once it was brought to Rome in about 1380. As the legend told that Gregory the Great had ordered the mosaic to be made, it gained further prestige through this association, and served as more than just a representation of an event, but almost as a relic

of that event. In some versions of the legend, Gregory made the mosaic himself, and in respect of that belief the mosaic became a relic of Gregory, touched by him, and constructed by him. Most materially charged of all was the strand of this latter legend that propagated the belief that Gregory had made the mosaic using fragments of the bones of martyrs. In such a process (no matter that this was an imagined technique), relics of the saints had themselves formed a precious image, become part of a splendid, visually arresting, and holy object, rather than—as was the case with most relics and reliquaries—merely being enshrined within it.

So the Santa Croce reliquary raises a variety of fascinating issues and questions in relation to the ways in which material objects could perform, and dictate thought and behaviour for medieval Christian believers. That such issues and questions can be raised by material objects seems second nature to us now, and thus to ask ‘Why should one consider “Material Culture” as a category of inquiry in relation to medieval Christianity?’ would now seem almost absurd or perverse: why *wouldn’t* one do so? And yet, until relatively recently, the study of medieval Christianity did not routinely or necessarily involve a consideration of the buildings, painted images, furnishings, textiles, or other material accoutrements connected with Christian devotion and practice. An examination of the material culture of medieval Christianity could encompass any created object or building, not just whole and surviving artefacts, but also fragmentary remains and archaeological traces thereof. A study of this nature clearly cannot hope to address all of that material. But it is vital that these conjunctions of medieval Christianity and material culture are considered, given how important visual, material, and even spatial ways of approaching the sacred were in medieval Christianity. This chapter will concentrate first on historiography and methodology, and on theoretical trends around the analysis of material culture itself. This will provide an indication of how the subject areas involved have arrived at a particular moment at which the examination of medieval Christianity in connection with material culture is replete with new possibilities. The chapter will then turn to the analysis of some specific instances of material culture, examining the ways in which their materiality operates and is deployed, to demonstrate some possibilities of a material culture perspective.

Early academic studies of Christianity focussed concertedly upon the development and organization of the Christian Church, and of official doctrinal developments and controversies.<sup>1</sup> The discussion and analysis of church buildings, furnishings, wall-paintings, altarpieces, mosaics, manuscripts, textiles, glass, metalwork, and sculpture, was, for the most part, left to archaeologists, architectural historians, and art historians. Although some branches of art history sought to investigate art in the context of the cultures that produced them, many art historians, right up to the 1970s or so, still concerned themselves mostly with visual form and the chronological development of style, and with the identification, attribution, and dating of art works. They did not routinely investigate images and objects in the context of the cultural practices which occasioned their making and usage.<sup>2</sup> For reasons of conventions and concerns internal to both the disciplines of history of art and religious history, then, the material culture of Christianity was not often taken seriously as part of an analysis of Christianity itself, and of its history. In fact, in medieval history more generally, art, architecture, and other material objects were not usually seen as legitimate objects of enquiry, and certainly not as reliable historical evidence.

In recent decades, though, histories of Christianity, and collections of anthologies or methodological handbooks have normally included one or more chapters on images, objects, buildings and/or other artefacts, treated in the context of Christian belief, practice, and experience, and for some historians the use of visual and material culture in their work

has become much more common. History of art developed in parallel, and after the emergence of the ‘social history of art’,<sup>3</sup> ‘the New Art History’,<sup>4</sup> and methods influenced by reception theory,<sup>5</sup> art historians began to take a new interest in the reciprocal relationships between the viewer and the work of art. Thus they considered not just what images and objects depicted, but how they operated, and what effects they had on the observer. Objects that had previously been dealt with primarily as milestones in a canon of ‘great art works’ began also to be subjected to academic treatments that looked especially at the social, cultural, and religious contexts of these objects, and at the ways in which they were used. So, for example, Duccio’s *Maestà* (Siena, Museo dell’Opera del Duomo, 1311), once the high altarpiece of Siena Cathedral, was no longer discussed just in terms of its style, design, and authorship, but also for what it signified for the Sienese people, how it related to an overall programme of Marian imagery in the cathedral, and how it was the inspiration for other related images across the city.

With this shift in interests and concerns in mind, let us now sketch out some of the roles which material culture played in medieval Christianity. The earliest Christian images are found in the catacombs in Rome, probably dating to around the third century. But material culture was important in Christianity from much earlier than that. The tombs and burial places of the early Christian martyrs became the central locations of Christian observance from the deaths of the first martyrs. On the anniversary of the martyrs’ deaths, Christians met at the tombs to remember the dead, and to share a eucharistic meal. Thus tombs, and altars which came to be placed on or above tombs, were central to Christian practice from its very inception, whereas the status of pictorial images in early Christianity was problematic. After periods of controversy and then acceptance, and then periods where the role of images was again questioned (as in the iconoclastic controversy of the eighth and ninth centuries), images came to attain an approved role in Christian practice. Other instances of material culture, on the other hand, remained embedded within medieval Christianity without interruption. Altars, reliquaries, liturgical vessels, priestly vestments, scrolls and books, candlesticks and croziers all played a role throughout the middle ages.

From the start, as we have seen, altars had had a connection with the cult of saints. Consecrated altars had contained either full bodies of martyred Christian saints, or, later, small relics of the saints. From the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries onwards, an association with the Eucharist, and with the eucharistic body of Christ, became another very important focus for the material culture of the altar. Increasingly altars were adorned with painted altarpieces depicting images relating to Christ or the Virgin Mary. Altars never lost their association with the cult of saints, however, and metalwork altar frontals, or painted altarpieces depicting the saints, and statues of the saints, continued to be displayed in connection with the altar, especially on chapel altars or side altars, or as subsidiary panels of high altarpieces. Altarpieces represent a category of object that has been especially susceptible to the newer approaches within art history, with altarpieces from many regions of medieval Europe being subject to studies that have focussed upon their relation to the ritual performance of the mass, as manifestations of the cult of saints, and in relation to the personal or institutional politics of patrons.<sup>6</sup>

Images and objects also proliferated outside the context of the liturgy of the Eucharist and the other ritual practices of the church. Large-scale narrative cycles of mosaics and paintings increasingly adorned the walls of the major Christian churches. Early concerns about the role of images in Christianity were countered using the dictum of St Gregory the Great (590–604), who wrote to Bishop Serenus of Marseille that ‘[w]hat writing does for the literate, a picture does for the illiterate looking at it, because the ignorant see in it what they ought to do’; and furthermore that ‘[p]ainted likenesses [are] made for the instruction



of the ignorant, so that they might understand the stories and so learn what occurred'.<sup>7</sup> There has been much scholarly discussion of the nuances of these statements, and the meaning of 'literate' in this context, and it has been acknowledged that narrative images (the category of image to which Gregory was referring) did much more than merely inform those who could not read. The largest and most splendid narrative cycles occurred in the major churches in Italy, and served the communities of clerics (among whom there were varying levels of literacy) as much as, if not more than, the laity. Narrative imagery clearly fulfilled other functions, meditative and devotional, as well as didactic.<sup>8</sup> Increasingly, with the interest in investigating images within the context of their relationship with human agents, and in terms of their uses and functions, it has become clearer that it is misleading to assume that categories of image based on design or appearance map on to categories of use.<sup>9</sup>

Many types of painted images and objects could be used as the focus of private devotion of individuals, or of the corporate devotion of communities. The category 'devotional image' used to be reserved for small-scale, usually privately owned images and objects. It is true that prayer books, and small painted panels or carved objects that could be held in the hands all served individual Christians as foci for their devotions. But larger images, such as the sculpted images of patron saints that would be found close to many altars in English parish churches, or the carved wooden depictions of the Virgin as Throne of Wisdom, with the Christ Child on her lap, could also be used as a focus for devotion. Indeed, so could large altarpieces and crucifixes on or above altars, or on screens (which are discussed in more detail below), or even large-scale narrative or stained glass cycles.

All these types of image, and others, have been increasingly looked at in terms of their use and function within the theological, devotional, social, and cultural practices of medieval Christianity, and images or objects as used in devotional practice have come to form the centre of many stimulating and valuable studies.<sup>10</sup> There is however still much to do in considering the differences between the appearance and use of images in different religious contexts. Paul Binski heralded this problem in relation to the English parish church, and notwithstanding some recent helpful studies and research projects, much new research is still needed on the material culture of parish churches across Europe.<sup>11</sup> There are important visual, material, and functional differences between aspects of material culture such as screens in cathedrals, mendicant churches, monastic churches, and parish churches, and, again, despite some recent pioneering work, research on some of these questions is, in many respects, still emerging from its infancy.

## **BUT WHY MATERIAL CULTURE? DEFINITIONS**

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By this very brief review of the various changing academic relationships between art, history, and critical theory, and some of the roles that images and objects played in Christian practice, we have established how it is that art objects came to be understood as legitimate objects of enquiry in relation to studies of medieval Christianity. However, this chapter deliberately does not concern itself with 'art' but with 'material culture'. So what does it mean to eschew the term 'art', in favour of the term 'material culture'?

The term 'material culture' was first encountered in English in the nineteenth century, where it was very closely linked with anthropology, and the ethnographic study of artefacts.<sup>12</sup> Particular branches of archaeology adopted it also, and it came to the fore in particular in the work of archaeologists who were especially interested in the relationships

between artefacts and human beings, or artefacts and social relations.<sup>13</sup> Aspects of material culture studies were taken in different directions with Thing Theory,<sup>14</sup> and Actor-Network-Theory,<sup>15</sup> which both, in different ways, and with different emphases, stress the agency of objects: that is, that rather than thinking only of what people do with objects, we need also to think of how objects do things to and with people. Material culture studies thus became a large and diverse field. As Christopher Tilley has put it ‘Material culture studies constitute a nascently developing field of enquiry which systematically refused to remain enmeshed within established disciplinary boundaries’, which refused to work within the conceptual parameters of a subject-object dualism (with the assumption of subject superiority and agency), and which insisted on taking materiality seriously.<sup>16</sup>

These latter points are important for us here, and return us to the question of what a material culture approach to medieval Christianity could do for the field. In the context of the relationship between material culture and Christianity, this could entail widening the field of enquiry, so as to consider not just paintings, illuminated manuscripts, sculpture, and stained glass, or other traditional objects of art-historical study, but also buildings, pavements, altars, and screens. Indeed an approach to medieval Christianity informed by material culture studies would conceivably encompass all the created material objects that were relevant to the belief structures and practices of medieval Christianity. A consideration of material culture in relation to medieval Christianity could also encompass the created environment of the monastery, cathedral, parish church, or private chapel, and the interior and exterior fashioned spaces within which much religious activity took place. It could perhaps also consider represented objects, such as the extensive representations of objects and buildings owned by Jean, duc de Berry in the Calendar pages of his *Très Riches Heures* (Musée Condé, Chantilly, 1412–16 and 1485–89); or even imaginary spaces, such as the imaginary ecclesiastical spaces depicted in Jan van Eyck’s *Madonna in a Church* (Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 1437–38), or on f. 14v of the *Vienna Hours of Mary of Burgundy* (Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, cod. 1857, late 1470s).

A material culture approach also eschews not only disciplinary boundaries, and subject-object dichotomies, but also the hierarchies of media. For a long time in traditional history of art approaches the types of media most highly prized in post-medieval, even post-Renaissance art (i.e. painting and free-standing sculpture) were projected back on to the medieval world, so that these hierarchies were imposed there too. Medieval art historians interested in the relationship of images and objects to social and cultural history have done much to redress these incorrect and misleading categorizations and hierarchies, rehabilitating media that were of huge value in the middle ages, such as tapestries and metalwork. But once every category of object, every type of made thing, including the paved floor of a church, or seats, stairs and doors, is included within a material culture approach to medieval Christianity then the hierarchical boundaries *really* break down.

However, to adopt the term ‘material culture’ is to do more than expand the categories of objects to be considered. It also implies, at least in some academic deployments of the term, an expansion in methodological and theoretical terms. To consider the methodological freight of the term ‘material culture’ in relation to medieval Christianity, it will be useful first to look at the journey that the academic analysis of medieval religious images and objects has taken, from these objects being considered as ‘art’ to being considered as instances of ‘material culture’. It will be worth taking a brief detour via the term ‘visual culture’, which represented an earlier widening of the set of objects considered by art historians and historians, and a corresponding widening of the methodological frameworks used in considering this expanded field.

Despite the fact that medievalists on the whole seemed to adopt ‘visuality’ and ‘visual culture’ rather later than their modernist colleagues,<sup>17</sup> there was nonetheless a recognition among many medievalists that the term ‘art’ was just as unsuitable for many of their objects of study as it was for the forms of visual representation that modern and contemporary specialists were now including in their studies, such as screen-based media, advertising images, posters, and video games. ‘Visual culture’ operated partly as a term to describe ‘things made to be looked at’, rather than things that necessarily had (or were bestowed with) some inherent claim to be regarded as ‘art’. Besides denoting a widening of the class of objects worthy of academic study, for many academics the term also occasioned an expansion of method. ‘Visual culture’ encouraged the investigation of ‘the visual’, and considerations of the cultural nature of seeing and looking. Art historians and historians started to consider ‘looking’ and ‘visuality’ in new and focussed ways. The study of observers’ encounters with objects was placed in the context of philosophical theories of sight and seeing, and optical theory, as well as theological and literary discourses concerning vision.<sup>18</sup> For a while, this newly-focussed interest in sight and seeing, and in the operations of historicized visuality, produced an extraordinarily dominant strand in the scholarship dealing with medieval religious images, objects, and buildings. The rich references to sight and seeing (and to light and enlightenment through light or seeing) in the Bible, in key theological works, and in medical, philosophical, and physiological texts, confirmed that this was an important strand of cultural history for religious historians, and historians of religious art, to be mining.<sup>19</sup> This further bolstered a concentration on visual culture in relation to medieval Christianity, not just with medieval theology and religious practice as an explanatory ‘background’ to visual culture, but with the relationship working the other way, with visual culture as a useful prism through which to view questions of theology and belief.<sup>20</sup>

All of this interest in the visual, both in art history and visual culture, and in medieval cultural and religious history, was characterized as a ‘visual turn’, along the lines of previous ‘turns’ in the humanities, such as the ‘linguistic turn’, or the ‘cultural turn’. Lately, under the influence of ideas and approaches taken partly from archaeology and anthropology, a new turn has been taking place: a ‘material’ turn. The material turn takes insights gleaned from the visual turn and moves on beyond it, into related but expanded territory. Where ‘visual culture’ widened the scope of the objects that might have been considered within ‘history of art’ or ‘art history’, to encompass objects that might not be considered as ‘art’, material culture allowed the field of enquiry to be widened still further. Now all artefacts could be considered within the network of relationships between the human religious subject and the material world in which s/he operated. After several years of intense interest in visuality, the International Medieval Congress at Kalamazoo hosted many sessions in 2011 and 2012 with a focus on ‘touch’ and ‘materiality’.<sup>21</sup> In 2012 there was an especially strong strand of sessions focusing on materiality and touch, with sculpture emerging as a key medium for exploring these issues. The establishment of ‘The Material Collective’, a collaborative group of scholars in art history and visual culture, also in 2012, attests further to this current interest in materiality.<sup>22</sup>

Here we must pause for a moment, and consider the relationship between ‘materiality’ and ‘material culture’. While material culture of course focuses upon the materiality of made objects, it also goes wider than that, to focus upon relationships between humans and objects. In turn, ‘materiality’ goes wider than the consideration of made objects. In the context of a study of medieval Christianity and ‘materiality’ in general, additional aspects that might be considered could be the materiality of human bodies (and the materiality of

the human body of Christ), philosophical and theological concepts of matter and reality, and sacramental notions of matter and reality, among others. One might also consider ‘eco-materiality’, that is to say aspects of the materiality of the world, such as fire, water, earth, and landscape.<sup>23</sup> For the purposes of this chapter though, the focus is on made objects and fashioned spaces, as they were used, practised, and experienced by human beings in the context of medieval Christianity. What a material culture approach offers at this particular moment in the development of scholarship is the opportunity to consider ‘materiality’, and ‘object-ness’, the nature of objects, especially—in this context—created objects in the context of medieval Christianity and, crucially, in relation to human religious devotees. The other major opportunity at this stage is to consider the ‘agency’ of objects. Works of art, images, art objects, and other types of material culture have not often enough been understood as potentially having a constitutive role within medieval religion, rather than a reflective role.<sup>24</sup> Even where images and objects have been understood as very clearly embedded within the belief structures and socio-political conditions of medieval religion, they were, until fairly recently, still more often understood as ‘illustrating’ religious beliefs, rather than having had an active part to play in changing or defining religious belief or religious practice.

To explore how a material culture approach might expand both the type of object examined in connection with medieval Christianity, and the methods with which they might be analysed, but also the kinds of questions we might ask about medieval Christianity, let us consider, as examples, screens and balconies. For example, the *Westlettner* (western choir screen) of Naumburg cathedral (c.1250) has, at the centre of its central doorway, a stone sculpted figure of the crucified Christ, and above that, six stone sculpted panels depicting narratives of the gospel events leading up to the Crucifixion. In earlier art-historical scholarship, this screen would have been dealt with—where it was paid any attention at all—almost entirely in terms of the composition, style, and technique of the sculptures thereon, and assessed in terms of how these sculptures fitted in to a wider German, or European sculptural style of that moment. However, Jacqueline Jung’s work on Naumburg, and other sculpted screens, has demonstrated that we can, and should, consider the screen in wider terms than that.<sup>25</sup> Jung has examined the style of sculpture not just in terms of its place in a development of sculptural style, but also in terms of the semiotic ‘language’ of the sculpture’s style, to understand it as a ‘specialized visual rhetoric’, conveying particular, locally inflected messages by the ‘rustic’ style of the sculpture, that can be understood as a ‘visual vernacular’.<sup>26</sup> Even further beyond this, though, by taking seriously the relationship between the screen’s materiality and the viewer’s physicality, Jung has also shown how the screen acts to condition the viewer-user’s experience. The figure of Christ at Naumburg hangs on the trumeau in the middle of the screen’s central doorway, close to the ground, rather than high above viewers’ heads as would have been usual for screens at the time.<sup>27</sup> The close physical relationship thus achieved between the figure of Christ and the human observer (or perhaps it would be better to call that human an interlocutor, or interactor) causes the observer to become a witness to the Crucifixion.<sup>28</sup> Entering through the screen’s doorway into the special space of the west choir, the observer passes under, and close to the figure of Christ. If the doorway to the left of the trumeau is chosen the viewer passes beneath the obvious and open side wound. The head of Christ tilts to his right, to the left as we look at the doorway, and so, one could argue (though it could not be proved) that a devotee keen for interaction with the figure of Christ might choose—indeed might be encouraged by the sculpture’s form to choose—entry through the portal via the side that afforded the best view of Christ’s face and redeeming wounds. Despite the presence of the



side wound, which was inflicted by the Roman soldiers after Christ was already dead (John, 19:34), the eyes of the Christ figure are open, and thus the human observer becomes observed, and the normally accepted dichotomies between subject-observer and object-image break down.<sup>29</sup> We see, through this analysis, that the relationship between human and sculptural figure can be understood as complex and multi-layered, and that properly considering the materiality, the physical presence, of the screen at Naumburg (and especially, here, the sculpted figure of Christ), rather than just its appearance, provides a fruitful set of avenues along which one can pursue the interaction of material culture and medieval Christianity.

## EXPERIENCE

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Questions of experience, and how one might approach medieval experience of religion and worship, have been of considerable interest to the scholarly community.<sup>30</sup> Scholarly interest in belief within the study of medieval Christianity has widened into an interest in praxis, in the physical engagement with ritual, liturgical, and devotional practices. Art historians have become interested not just in the ways in which images and objects could work upon a beholder intellectually, creating or reinforcing a set of beliefs, for instance, but also in the ways in which medieval religious subjects interacted with objects, buildings, and spaces physically. Performance and performativity have become key terms of analysis in the study of medieval religious belief and behaviour.<sup>31</sup> Insights from the study of rhetoric and preaching have been used by historians and art historians to consider an expanded set of ways in which objects can affect the experience of the viewer or user. A carefully constructed speech or sermon could work upon a listener, effecting assent, belief or compliance, according to the composition of the different elements by the writer. The arrangement and selection of elements within the speech in careful sequence could lead its hearers to a particular conclusion, or a particular mental, emotional or devotional state. This concept of 'leading' gives rise to the term '*ductus*' to describe the way a speech leads its hearers to the desired end. Scholars interested in the intersections of material culture and Christianity have been exploring the concepts of rhetoric and *ductus*, analysing the ways in which the range of experiences of medieval religious devotees could be conditioned by the specific ways in which objects, buildings, and spaces suggest certain modes of behaviour.<sup>32</sup> A particularly rich and suggestive recent engagement with the concept of *ductus* as part of an analysis of the material culture of medieval Christianity has been Paul Crossley's work on Chartres.<sup>33</sup> In this study Crossley states his aim 'to move from the cathedral as text to the cathedral as experience',<sup>34</sup> and to that end he traces the way in which the different aspects of the cathedral, including its architecture, sculpture, metalwork, stained glass, as well as its liturgical 'theatre', work together. Images and objects (in this case often images and objects relating to the Virgin Mary), and the concepts to which they refer, interact, and play off one another, to lead the human devotee along particular paths in the cathedral's interior and exterior spaces. This creates a 'holistic' experience, so that devotees are both instructed, and certain kinds of intellectual, emotional, and devotional experiences are induced. Chartres, perhaps because of the helpful conjunction between surviving material and textual evidence, has been the recipient of treatments of this nature from a variety of viewpoints, including that of Margot Fassler, a musicologist who has proceeded from her deep understanding of the liturgy at Chartres to analyse the ways in which such orchestration of experience in relation to a cathedral's material culture (and its liturgical and



devotional culture) contributes to—indeed constructs—a community’s understanding of its own history and identity.<sup>35</sup>

## RELICS AND RELIQUARIES

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Relics and reliquaries have attracted much attention in the fields of medieval art history and the history of medieval Christianity in recent years, and a number of exhibitions and publications have focussed upon them.<sup>36</sup> Reliquaries manifest a particular and eloquent connection between visibility, materiality, and material culture. Therefore, I will end this chapter by exploring a material culture approach to reliquaries, with the hope that it might enlighten our understanding of the ways that they were used and appreciated, but also further enliven our understanding of medieval Christianity itself. The reliquary with which this chapter began, that held at the Basilica di Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome, contains, as we have seen, a small mosaic image of the Man of Sorrows. This was regarded as a representation of the apparition of the crucified Christ to Gregory the Great. The vision was supposedly a response to Gregory’s prayers for a sign to convince a member of the congregation who was sceptical about the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The image came to be viewed as a *vera icon*, a true image of Christ. It was probably at the monastery of St Catherine’s at Sinai during the fourteenth century, having somehow made its way there from Constantinople during the early part of that century. The image was then given to the church of Santa Croce in the 1380s, by Raimondello Orsini del Balzo, count of Lecce, in recognition that the church where the original vision had taken place was the ‘proper’ place for the image-relic.<sup>37</sup> Relics often participated in a centrifugal process, whereby they were disseminated far and wide, taking a piece of a holy body, a holy place or a holy object to another place, and thus spreading the aura of that holy object far beyond its original location. Here, though, the object that was regarded as a relic was conscientiously returned to its apparent place of origin, thus reuniting a charismatic object with a sacred place.

The nexus of ideas generating the notion that the mosaic was itself made up of physical relics of the martyrs is especially interesting from a material culture perspective. The connection between bones (or relics, bodily and otherwise) and stones (in reliquaries, or, in this case, as the constituent parts of an image that later became understood as a relic), is one that has been explored in various ways by art historians and historians interested in material culture and Christianity in recent years.<sup>38</sup> The very obvious materiality of stones and gems seems to have been used to draw attention to the relics’ preciousness, standing in, with their own brilliance, for the visual splendour that the relics themselves lacked. And yet, in the kind of paradox typical of medieval patterns of thought, the viewer was both drawn in to, and challenged to look beyond, the gorgeousness of the reliquary’s materials, to appreciate the real value inherent in the visually unprepossessing relics themselves.

The Carthusian monks of Santa Croce enhanced their mosaic icon-relic still further, soon after they acquired it, by creating a new case, a wooden triptych, on a wooden, brass-covered pedestal, to keep and display the mosaic. When the doors are opened, the triptych reveals a stunning ensemble, with the Man of Sorrows mosaic, surrounded by a gold and silver frame studded with coloured stone (23 × 27 cm with frame), in the centre of the middle panel of the triptych. This is then surrounded by 153 compartments cut in to the wood of the triptych’s three panels. These compartments contain silk-wrapped relics, with

paper identification labels. The mosaic becomes a completely different object when seen in this particular material context.

It has been displayed in several exhibitions recently, both in Britain and the USA.<sup>39</sup> As a result the object has become much better known to students of medieval art and medieval Christianity. These exhibitions, and photographs in their catalogues, have presented this object to view differently from the ways in which it was previously best known. When the image has been discussed in the past, in the context of devotional images, and the image type of the Man of Sorrows, it has sometimes been illustrated in isolation, with the wooden triptych, and the frame, cropped out of the picture.<sup>40</sup> This practice belies and masks the powerful interplay between the bodily relics, potent scraps of materiality encased in their silk wrappings, and the mosaic. The mosaic became a relic by being a visual and material witness to an event in which the image of Christ appeared during the consecration, the very moment of making-real in the liturgy of the Eucharist. The relics and the mosaic thus harmonize with one another, the sheer number and variety of the small relics representing the whole company of saints, while the mosaic was thought of as a relic of a marvellous Christological event. In concert they enhanced one another's legitimacy, acting together as a powerful piece of devotional technology, dazzling the viewer with their collective variety, and with the beauty of the object as a whole.

This impulse towards collecting a variety of relics, and placing them in a material context in which both visual representations and precious stones play a crucial part, is seen in the patronage of Charles IV of Bohemia, the Holy Roman Emperor (1316–78). The walls of his Chapel of St Wenceslas at the Cathedral of St Vitus in Prague, and of his Holy Cross Chapel at his palace complex at Karlstein, are encrusted with gold, and precious stones, with the stones arranged in patterns to form large crosses throughout.<sup>41</sup> The Chapel of St Wenceslas was the burial place of the ancient Bohemian saint-king, and housed the tomb-altar of St Wenceslas, on top of which stood a magnificent gold reliquary bust of the saint, on which the Crown of the Bohemian kings would be placed. Charles had had this crown made, and the crown itself, like the chapel walls, was encrusted with huge precious stones and jewels, pearls, rubies, and sapphires.<sup>42</sup> But Charles's 'bones and stones' aesthetic came into its own at Karlstein. There, in the Holy Cross Chapel, the lower walls were encrusted with gold and precious stones as in the Wenceslas Chapel. The rest of the walls, from floor to ceiling, and even the window embrasures, are filled with 130 panel paintings representing saints biblical and medieval, Bohemian, Imperial and international.<sup>43</sup> Almost all of these panels contained a recess within the wood, to hold a relic of the saint represented in the painting. Relics were also placed in a niche in the altar wall, including the most precious of relics, those of Christ's Passion. Thus images and relics worked together here too, to bring the actual presence of the saints into Charles's company. Costly and prestigious materials—gold, jewels, stones, and, in the ceiling, tiny mirrors in star-shaped recesses—worked together to create an overwhelming impression of preciousness, and closeness to heaven, evoking the description of the Heavenly Jerusalem in Revelation 21.

The intensity of the combination of vast numbers of relics, precious materials, and images, here—and also in the Santa Croce in Gerusalemme reliquary—attests eloquently to the material sensibility of medieval Christianity. It shows that we need to take seriously not only the spatial context and placement of the material objects associated with medieval Christian belief and practice, but also their materials, their combination and juxtaposition with other objects and images, and their visual and physical interaction with the human devotees. The Prague of Charles IV offers a particularly rich case study for a 'material culture' approach to medieval Christianity, for his whole city, its urban topography, as well

as the church, palace and monastery spaces, was designed to be ‘practised’. The specific spaces discussed here are just microcosmic examples of his material-sacral approach. Charles’s city was specially conceived to activate historical and theological significances and devotional impulses on the part of a human being—principally Charles himself, and the line of Bohemian-Imperial kings that he hoped would come after him—interacting with the material culture of the city, all of which took on a sacred purpose for Charles.<sup>44</sup> As we have seen, these and other material objects hold within themselves the physical traces of belief and devotion, and communicate the active relationships they have with human religious devotees. They are thus absolutely crucial, powerfully expressive evidence for the historian, who must learn not just to read, but to look, and even touch, experience, and inhabit the material culture of medieval Christianity.

# NOTES

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1. See [Arnold](#), this volume.
2. See Eric Fernie, ed., *Art History and Its Methods: A Critical Anthology* (London: Phaidon, 1995), 10–18.
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4. See, among others, A. L. Rees, and Frances Borzello, eds., *The New Art History* (London: Camden Press, 1986); Jonathan Harris, *The New Art History: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2001).
5. See David S. Areford, ‘Reception’, *Studies in Iconography* 33 (2012), 73–88.
6. Beth Williamson, ‘Altarpieces, Liturgy, and Devotion’, *Speculum* 79, no. 2 (2004), 341–406.
7. Lawrence Duggan, ‘Was Art Really the “Book of the Illiterate”?’, *Word and Image* 5, no. 3 (1989), 287–251.
8. Hans Belting, ‘The New Role of Narrative in Public Painting of the Trecento: Historia and Allegory’, *Studies in the History of Art (Washington National Gallery)* 16 (1985), 151–168.
9. [Williamson](#), ‘Altarpieces’, 379–383; Joanna Cannon, ‘Beyond the Limitations of Visual Typology: Reconsidering the Function and Audience of Three Vita Panels of Women Saints c. 1300’, in Victor Schmidt, ed., *Italian Painting of the Duecento and Trecento* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 291–313.
10. On devotional images, see, e.g., Erwin Panofsky, ‘Imago Pietatis: Ein Beitrag zur Typengeschichte des “Schmerzensmanns” und der “Maria Mediatrix”’, in *Festschrift für Max J. Friedländer zum 60. Geburtstag* (Leipzig: E. A. Seemann, 1927), 261–308; Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-Up in Fifteenth-Century Devotional Painting* (Åbo: Åbo akademi, 1965); Hans Belting, *The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages: Form and Function of Early Paintings of the Passion* (New Rochelle, NY: A.D. Caratzas, 1990); Henk Van Os, *The Art of Devotion in the Late Middle Ages in Europe, 1300–1500* (London: Merrell Holberton, 1994).
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12. Victor Buchli, ‘Introduction’, in Victor Buchli, ed., *The Material Culture Reader* (London: Berg, 2002), 1–22, at 2.
13. See Carl Knappett, *Thinking Through Material Culture: An Interdisciplinary Perspective* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2005); Dan Hicks and Mary C. Beaudry, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
14. Bill Brown, ed., *Things* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004).
15. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Carl Knappett, *An Archaeology of Interaction: Network Perspectives on Material Culture and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
16. Christopher Tilley, ed., *Reading Material Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), vii.
17. For a treatment of the term ‘visuality’ as it pertains to the medieval, see Alexa Sand, ‘Visuality’, *Studies in Iconography* 33 (2012), 89–95.
18. See, among others, Jeffrey Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998); Robert S. Nelson, *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 197–223; Evelyn S. Lane, et al., eds., *The Four Modes of Seeing: Approaches to Medieval Imagery in Honor of Madeleine Harrison Caviness* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).
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20. For the Beatific Vision controversy, see Christian Trottman, *La Vision Béatifique. Des disputes scolastiques à sa définition par Benoît XII* (Rome: Ecole Française de Rome, 1995). For images produced in relation to the Beatific Vision controversy, see: Beth Williamson, ‘Site, Seeing and Salvation in Fourteenth-Century Avignon’, *Art History* 30, no. 1 (2007), 1–25; Lucy Freeman Sandler, ‘Face to Face with God: A Pictorial Image of the Beatific Vision’, in W. M. Ormrod, ed., *England in the Fourteenth Century, Proceedings of the 1985 Harlaxton Symposium* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1986), 224–235.
21. <[http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/medieval\\_cong\\_archive/47/](http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/medieval_cong_archive/47/)>, accessed 5/7/13.
22. <<http://thematerialcollective.org/>>, accessed 5/7/13.
23. See the special issue, dedicated to ecomaterialism, of the journal *postmedieval* 4, no. 1 (2013).
24. cf. [Palazzo](#), this volume.
25. Jacqueline E. Jung, ‘Beyond the Barrier: The Unifying Role of the Choir Screen in Gothic Churches’, *Art Bulletin* 82, no. 4 (2000), 622–657, figs. 5, 11, 15, 16, 17; and Jacqueline E. Jung, *The Gothic Screen: Space, Sculpture, and Community in the Cathedrals of France and Germany, ca. 1200–1400* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
26. Jung, ‘Beyond the Barrier’, 647–648.



27. Jung, 'Beyond the Barrier', 631.
28. Jung, 'Beyond the Barrier', 632.
29. Jung, 'Beyond the Barrier', 632.
30. See, e.g., Rachel Fulton, 'Praying with Anselm at Admont: A Meditation on Practice', *Speculum* 81, no. 3 (2006), 700–733; Mark Cruse, 'Matter and Meaning in Medieval Books: The Romance Manuscript as Sensory Experience', *Senses and Society* 5, no. 1 (2010), 45–56; Giselle de Nie and Thomas F. X. Noble, eds, *Envisioning Experience in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Dynamic Patterns in Texts and Images* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).
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33. Paul Crossley, 'Ductus and Memoria: Chartres Cathedral and the Workings of Rhetoric', in Carruthers, ed., *Rhetoric Beyond Words*, 214–249.
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40. E.g., van Os, *Art of Devotion*, fig. 51.
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# CHAPTER 5

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# MEDIEVAL CHRISTIANITY IN A WORLD HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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R. I. MOORE

IT is easy to see world history from the perspective of medieval Christianity. We have been doing it since the twelfth century. The difficulty is not to. 'Christianity' for the purposes of this discussion is taken to be the Latin version defined in 1215 by the canons of the Fourth Lateran Council, which reigned triumphant in western Europe for the following three centuries and continues to be habitually regarded, even outside the Roman Catholic church, as the norm towards which earlier forms progressed, and from which others have deviated. Both form and status had been largely established between 1048 and 1215, when the complex series of interdependent changes usually characterized as papal, or Gregorian, 'reform' greatly enhanced uniformity of doctrine, discipline and practice in the Roman Church.<sup>1</sup> In the process, that Church separated itself decisively not only from its own western European past, but from the Christianities of the Greek, Slavonic, Caucasian and biblical, then Muslim lands. Separation demanded denunciation as well as renunciation, not least because the manifest superiority of those other traditions in chronological continuity from and geographical proximity to the birth of Christianity itself, and in their command of its cultural heritage, was inescapable. The Latin Church, like all rebellious youngsters in search of autonomy and identity, had no choice but to denounce its elders as decadent and corrupt, no longer deserving the authority or even the respect to which their seniority might otherwise have laid claim.<sup>2</sup> In due course its picture of the world beyond its own mental horizons and ecclesiastical frontiers as the playground of schismatics, heretics and pagans was inherited by its own rebellious descendants, Protestant and secular, to feed nineteenth- and twentieth-century accounts of world history in which 'European hegemony' or 'the rise of the west' was attributed both directly and indirectly to the special qualities and character of the Christian religion in its western manifestations.<sup>3</sup>

To reverse the process by trying to view medieval Christianity itself in the perspective of world history consequently means confronting a series of circularities more conducive (as Gibbon remarked of Sultan Amurath II's exchange of his throne for the life of a dervish)<sup>4</sup> to the giddiness of the head than the illumination of the spirit. 'Religion'—conceived as rooted in personal conviction, and thence as shaping personal life and thought, social forms including codes of behaviour, family structures, acculturation and education, law, political institutions and objectives, modes of expression and communication—has played a crucial conceptual role in most versions of the game of civilizations that has been world history since Gibbon's time. But only since Gibbon's time or thereabouts has the word religion acquired its commonest modern sense of a system—any system<sup>5</sup>—of belief or worship. It is a commonplace that it meant nothing of the kind in the middle ages, when *religio* denoted a devout demeanour and way of life, usually under a monastic or other rule, without necessary reference to a particular set of teachings or beliefs.<sup>6</sup> For Zwingli and Calvin true faith was a necessary part of 'true religion', but the abstraction—'a religion'—became possible only as the multiplicity of faiths was recognized, slowly and reluctantly, as an inescapable reality. Only then, as John Bossy has put it, did 'a word (Christianity) which until the seventeenth century meant a body of people (become), as most European

languages testify, an ‘ism’, or body of beliefs’.<sup>7</sup> For the great system builders of the nineteenth century, orientalists and theologians as well as historians, religion in this sense was fundamental to every organized society. So it was both possible and necessary for them to discover that the civilizations of Asia were founded on appropriate ‘isms’ of their own: Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and so on, in effect modelled (albeit unwittingly) by the discoverers on the most familiar and elaborate of such constructs, medieval Latin Christianity.<sup>8</sup> Through the sociology of Max Weber even more than the metaphysics of Otto Spengler, Arnold Toynbee and Karl Jaspers, religion and civilization became, and have largely remained, Siamese twins in the discourse of world history, sadly incapable of viewing one another with detachment.

For this reason to attempt to compare medieval Christianity with other ‘world religions’ would be not so much like nailing jelly to the wall as nailing it to a row of other jellies. I hope instead to avoid those circularities by eschewing religion itself as an analytic category, and with it the bundling implicit in ‘isms’: the expectation of necessary or general connections between, for example, traditions or sacred writings—itself a dubious category—personal beliefs and social practices. Instead the discussion that follows will have particularly in mind texts and their uses by learned elites; rituals and their uses, again especially by learned elites; and popular practices invoking gods or the supernatural. It will try to treat them as discrete entities rather than as parts of necessarily connected systems, or of ‘a religion’ assumed *a priori*. The categories, obviously, are not logically distinct or mutually exclusive. Each overlaps with the others, and aspects of pilgrimage, for example, might be considered within all three.<sup>9</sup>

The settled parts of Eurasia at the end of the first millennium CE had a great deal in common with each other. In India, southeast Asia, China and Japan, as in Christendom east and west, religious life revolved in large part around temples and monasteries.<sup>10</sup> The terms in themselves reflect no obviously clear-cut categorical distinction, for the extent to which their custodians were organized into disciplined, regular communities varied greatly in practice even where, as in western Christendom, they were in principle defined by a clearly articulated code. (Somewhat paradoxically, I use the term ‘western Christendom’ to refer to the part of Christendom before the mid-eleventh century which became decisively ‘Latin’ thereafter.) Wherever such institutions were found they acted as hubs of elite society. They offered legitimacy and enhanced prestige in return for patronage and protection, and provided mechanisms to facilitate the articulation and support of local hegemonies and kinship structures, and to negotiate the resolution of rivalries and the construction of neighbourhood solidarities. Such influence rested not merely on religious claims, but on the indispensable role of these institutions in the expansion of cultivation and the steadily increasing intensity and efficiency of agrarian production which drove and sustained the immense and permanent extension of complex, sedentary society in first millennium Eurasia.<sup>11</sup> It made them a material as well as a spiritual link between the working population and the elites, and the source of new wealth, and therefore of power, even to the point where they became central to the political fabric, and their superiors prominent among the most powerful figures of their day.<sup>12</sup> Hence the apparent paradox that temple and monastery architecture flourished especially in periods of perceived political decline, as in tenth- and eleventh-century Francia or south India, when increasing agrarian productivity enabled emerging local elites to assert themselves against the claims of central authority, generating the competitive patronage of which spectacular religious building was the most dramatic manifestation.

The central Islamic lands, however, did not conform to this pattern, largely because Islam was from the beginning so firmly a religion of cities, neither shaped by the life and rhythms of the countryside nor usually much interested in adapting to them. The Muslim calendar, for example, remained and remains lunar, and therefore incompatible with the pattern of the seasons. The place of the mosque in the life of believers, and of the cities, is probably without parallel, but with no sacramental structure and no concept of priesthood it did not generate directly, at any rate at a formally recognizable level, the institutions and community structures associated with the great churches in Christendom, or with the temple cultures of east, southeast and south Asia. The high level of urban and administrative continuity from both Romans and Sassanids ensured that (as in the Byzantine world) the power of taxation and with it of control over infrastructure remained, broadly speaking, in the hands of the secular authorities, upon whose initiatives the construction and maintenance of roads and irrigation works, for example, mainly depended.<sup>13</sup> To this, at least as much as to doctrinal or ideological considerations, must be attributed the enduring distance between religious and civil authority in the Muslim world.

Popular religion everywhere was strongly focussed on holy men (rightly or wrongly, holy women, though often influential, are usually represented both in sources and modern historiography as much less pivotal) and holy places, the latter often the tombs of the former, or associated with them in other ways. How saints, sufis and other mystics acquired and exercised influence in every tradition has been widely and classically discussed.<sup>14</sup> The custodians or guardians of shrines have received much less attention, but their role in moulding, sustaining and disseminating tradition, and hence in licensing or blocking innovation, was more enduring. Their influence was given a supra-local, tending to a cosmopolitan, character by pilgrimage, the most universal and the most under-studied of religious institutions. Missionary zeal is usually presented, almost tautologically, as the first expression and defining vehicle of the rise and diffusion of the so-called universal religions, around the middle of the first millennium CE.<sup>15</sup> No doubt it was, but all of those religions, old and new, were sustained in concrete form by pilgrimage, whose routes and networks, like those of the railway in the nineteenth century, spread with ever-increasing density across the map of Eurasia—and which, like the railway, necessarily touched every kilometre that they crossed, changing old communities and creating new ones at the regular stopping places that they required for rest and refreshment. Its indispensable consolidating and acculturating effects are obvious enough to the briefest contemplation, but there is a dearth of specific comparative study. Yet if any single institution ‘made’ the Eurasian middle ages, creating the infrastructures of enduring cosmopolitan cultures, it was pilgrimage.

The transformation of Eurasian societies from around the millennium (with all the qualifications, here and hereafter, necessarily attendant on any chronological generalization across so large and various a canvas) appears to arise from economic integration on the one hand, and political disintegration on the other. The appearance is deceptive, for both the emergence of regional power centres in what had been the territories of the Tang, Chola, Abbasid, and Carolingian empires and the increase in surplus and circulation arose from the expansion and intensification of agriculture and the increase of exchange in the preceding centuries. But from around 1000 both agrarian and commercial growth accelerated so dramatically as to be conventionally described as revolutionary in character and impact at both eastern and western ends of the Eurasian landmass.<sup>16</sup> The focus of long distance trade changed from the overland (‘the silk road’) to the maritime routes and the volume and variety of exchanges increased exponentially at all levels, both within and between the Eurasian civilizations, assisted by analogous and almost simultaneous technical maritime



developments in several regions, such as those of the dhow, the junk and the cog in (respectively) the Indian Ocean and the China and Baltic Seas. By the middle of the thirteenth century the economies of the entire territory, including not only the Mediterranean but much of sub-Saharan Africa, had become so closely and regularly linked as to constitute, it has been persuasively argued, a single 'World System'.<sup>17</sup>

This development rested everywhere on continuing expansion of the area under cultivation, and on sustained improvement of agricultural output. Contrary to the orientalist stereotype, it seems that productivity—not just production—continued to grow in most regions, though in different ways and for different reasons. For instance, the central Islamic lands were heavily dependent on a fragile ecological balance, and therefore on very particular and complex technologies, whereas northern Europe, northern India and Japan remained relatively rich in virgin land for most of our period. Burgeoning wealth both supported the emergence of new structures of power, more locally but also more solidly-based than previously, and also attracted external predators, giving rise in either case to the regionalization which was the political hallmark of these centuries. Everywhere new regimes were shaped by the varying patterns of interaction between the two forces. The beginning of western Europe's 'take-off' has long been associated with the cessation of external invasion after Otto I's defeat of the Magyars at the Lechfeld in 955 and the conversion of Slavs and Scandinavians to Christianity in the decades which followed,<sup>18</sup> but no such good fortune attended the more mature civilizations. By the middle of the eleventh century the habitual reliance of Muslim potentates on Turkish mercenaries recruited from the steppe had given way to regimes formed by such mercenaries on their own account. When Tughrul took Baghdad in 1055 and his successors seized Syria, Palestine, Egypt and Anatolia over the next two or three generations, they inaugurated a long tradition of domination throughout the central Islamic lands by regimes which varied greatly in power, range and efficiency, but were consistent in imposing arbitrary rule and heavy tributary burdens on populations from which they were alien and aloof. Similar regimes were established on the Indian sub-continent following the sacking of Somnath by Mahmud of Ghazni in 1025. The period of the Song dynasty (from 960) was that of China's most startlingly precocious achievements in technology, urbanization and social organization, and the most splendid flowering of its high culture. But it was also dominated from beginning to end, and ultimately destroyed, by the military, economic and cultural problems posed by the relations between 'Chinese' and 'non-Chinese' peoples, whose towering landmarks were the over-running of north China by the Jurchen in 1126 and the establishment of a Mongol dynasty, after a generation of devastating warfare, in 1279.

In the course of this transformation clerical elites, and with them high cultures, were renewed and reconstituted in many ways and to greatly differing extents. Nevertheless some common patterns can be discerned.<sup>19</sup> Almost everywhere in the citted world these elites had by the thirteenth century reshaped themselves to become (at least in terms of their own self-image, but also to varying degrees in reality) more sharply differentiated both among themselves and from the rest of society, while at the same time entrenching their position and role more deeply and tenaciously. They had done so in large part by canonizing their classical texts, both sacred and profane, and by institutionalizing their mechanisms of recruitment and reproduction through the construction and reconstruction of educational systems to consolidate their monopoly of exposition and interpretation. The new systems of thought whose foundations were laid in these ways provided sanction for both cultural and governmental authority, and the bases of controllable mechanisms of recruitment to the clerical elites themselves. This discussion must be confined to a few examples, regrettably

the most obvious, but in principle at least the comparison seems capable of much wider application.

The emergence of a concentration of teachers at Paris in the first half of the twelfth century far larger than any other in Europe permitted the standardization of the curriculum in the liberal arts. Its completion, to the collective satisfaction of the masters, became the necessary qualification for teaching, formalized when the bishop of Paris was forbidden both to grant his licence to teach to anyone whom they had not admitted to their ranks, and to refuse it to anybody whom they had.<sup>20</sup> Increasingly thereafter the Master's degree became a passport to positions of influence both in the Church and in secular government, though rapidly surpassed in the latter by the similar and broadly contemporaneous development of legal studies at Bologna.<sup>21</sup> In the thirteenth century and beyond every European monarch saw a university as an essential adjunct of his dominion, and the universities collectively acted not only as the training grounds of Europe's rulers, but as the arbiters and guardians of its high culture.<sup>22</sup>

The Chinese scholar-gentry (*shih*) provides, perhaps, an even clearer example.<sup>23</sup> It became, as in principle the sole avenue of recruitment to the imperial bureaucracy, the means by which the newly installed Song dynasty sought to free itself of dependence on the elite of its predecessors through the familiar device of identifying and promoting 'new men'. By 1046 degree holders occupied about 57 per cent of positions in the imperial service, and a much higher proportion of the most powerful and prestigious—though we cannot be sure how many of these graduates were really new men, and how many were the sons and grandsons of old ones securing their customary position by discarding their former claims and rhetoric, in order to adopt those of the new regime (much as in Latin Europe ostensibly new social groups—knights, masters, bourgeois—were heavily drawn from the younger sons of old noble families).<sup>24</sup> At any rate a substantial hereditary element was rapidly reintroduced to the competition for office by means of the *yin* privilege, by which officials who had themselves passed the examinations were permitted to nominate protégés to the status of degree holders, so that the proportion of posts held by those who had actually earned their degrees had fallen again to 45 per cent by 1119 and 27 per cent by 1213. This did not, however, undermine the popularity of the examinations. On the contrary, while the number of positions available remained more or less constant, that of candidates rose so rapidly that a pass rate of about 50 per cent in 1023 had fallen to 10 per cent by 1093, 1 per cent in 1156 and 0.5 per cent in 1275.<sup>25</sup> The explanation seems to be that the imperial bureaucracy was not the only source of employment and influence. To become educated to the extent of sitting the examinations (which presupposed the support of family or patron for many adult years) was in itself a certificate of status and even a degree of competence; the rewards of failure, correspondingly, were those of participation in the establishment and consolidation of local and regional elites.<sup>26</sup> As Yuan Ts'ai put it towards the end of the twelfth century:

[I]f the sons of gentlemen (*shidaifu*) have no hereditary stipend to maintain them and no permanent holdings to depend on, and they wish to be filial to their parents and support children, then nothing is as good as being a scholar. For those whose talents are great and who can obtain advanced degrees, the best course is to get an official post and become wealthy. Next best is to set up as a teacher in order to receive a tutor's pay. For those who cannot obtain advanced degrees the best course is to study correspondence so that one can write letters for others. Next best is to study punctuating and reading so that one can be a tutor to children. If they are not able to be a scholar then they may do anything that can provide support without disgracing their ancestors—become a doctor, a Buddhist or Daoist priest, farmer, merchant or craftsman of some sort.<sup>27</sup>

This system produced an imposing central authority whose elaborate and sophisticated procedures concealed the essential fact that real power remained even more firmly where it had always been, in the localities, with the gentry families which actually controlled the land. The families which established their positions at this time were able to sustain them for the remainder of the *ancien régime* (that is, until early in the twentieth century) provided that they could, in practice as well as in precept, maintain sufficient access to the ultimate source of patronage by supplying a successful candidate for the imperial service once in every three generations.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, since the imperial bureaucracy itself controlled the examination and with it the goals and curriculum of education at every level throughout the empire, the canon of writings and approved interpretations, established in the century or so before the Mongol conquests and known today as neo-Confucianism, dominated traditional Chinese literary culture in much the same way that scholasticism did that of Latin Europe, and for even longer.<sup>29</sup>

The analogy can be extended, but not indefinitely: the extent to which the influence of neo-Confucianism should be understood in opposition to that of Buddhism or Daoism, either intellectually or socially, has been radically and powerfully challenged, on the ground (among others) that it depends too much on antitheses derived from European models.<sup>30</sup> Neo-Confucianism underpinned and sustained the legitimacy of the new governing elite, articulating the codes which regulated personal conduct, and relationships within the family and between the individual and the state. The change of regime in 906 enabled Confucianism to supersede Buddhism, already under attack, as the dominant influence at court. Neo-Confucians engaged with metaphysical and cosmological issues which traditional Confucians had avoided, and criticized both Buddhist and Daoist teachings. But Confucianism neither made exclusive truth-claims in anything like the manner of the religions of the book, nor aspired to a monopoly of ritual practice even among the elite, let alone at a popular level. The immense array of locally practised beliefs and rituals in traditional China does not appear to be susceptible to analysis in terms of conventional social categories or conventional assumptions about the nature of relations among elites, or between elites and communities on the one hand, hierarchy and bureaucracy on the other. Indeed recent studies suggest that the tendency of the *literati* to form themselves increasingly into regionally—rather than imperially—oriented elites after 1126 was mirrored in a revival of enthusiasm, at all social levels, for local deities and cults.<sup>31</sup>

Even though the modes of cultural transmission and patterns of intellectual and spiritual authority in the Islamic world could hardly have been more different, similar tendencies are visible in the period on which we focus, between the middle of the tenth and the middle of the thirteenth centuries *ce.* As Lapidus puts it,

Scholars and mystics, who in the imperial (Abbasid) age had been the informal spokesmen of Islam became the heads of communal organizations. They encouraged the conversion of Middle Eastern peoples, standardised Islamic religious teachings, articulated an Islamic social and political ethic, and organised schools of law, Sufi orders and Shi'i sects. Despite political fragmentation a new form of Islamic state, community and religious orthodoxy came into being.<sup>32</sup>

It continued to be the case, as it always had been, that anybody could teach who could find pupils, and that students went from one master to another, learning from each what he had to teach and securing his *ijāza* (certificate) to that effect. The only constraint on teaching was the prohibition of heresy, and since there were no bishops to identify and proscribe it that responsibility fell upon anyone who assumed in this respect the Koranic duty of 'commanding right and forbidding wrong'. However, the tumultuous proliferation of scholarly and legal networks to which this informality had given rise in the early Islamic

centuries now gradually gave way to four major traditions of legal interpretation, the Hanafi, Sharfi'I, Hanbali and Maliki. Each, with the partial exception of the Hanbali, acknowledged the orthodoxy of the others, but had visible though certainly not fixed or exclusive regional predominance,<sup>33</sup> and by the eleventh and twelfth centuries most jurists were identified with one or another of them. These developments were increasingly underpinned by the widespread foundation of *madreseh*, charitable institutions providing support for scholars and space for teaching. The madrasa differed from the emerging universities of Europe, to which it has often been likened,<sup>34</sup> in having no collective identity or institutions—no curriculum of studies, no mechanisms for licensing teachers or acknowledging students. Nevertheless, it might be committed by the terms of its endowment to the support of a particular school or tendency of thought, and the provision of regular maintenance for a number of teachers in one place tended to encourage more comprehensive and continuous instruction. A parallel development among the *sufis* was fostered by increasing regard for personally transmitted traditions, in principle traced from pupil to master back to the time of the Prophet, which promoted growing dominance among them of orders that seem to derive mainly from the influence of particularly venerated eleventh- and twelfth-century masters. Thus, though affiliations and loyalties among all these groups were always fluid and religious authority correspondingly dispersed, during this period, to quote Lapidus again, 'the schools of law and the sufi orders were the backbone of larger-scale but diffuse communities that gave people a common law, common authorities, and common facilities, such as mosques, schools and charities...'.<sup>35</sup>

The remarkable continuity of the Byzantine state, and especially the ability of the imperial administration, despite the acute difficulties of the seventh and eighth centuries, to maintain control over a substantial empire-wide tax base,<sup>36</sup> and the social and cultural as well as political dominance of the imperial capital and its nobility, ensured a corresponding continuity in matters of religion. Skilfully deployed, as it occasionally was, the spiritual prestige of the Patriarch of Constantinople might carry considerable political clout, but he remained for the most part an imperial subordinate with a very limited capacity to direct the destinies or command the resources of the Church. The unchallenged hierarchical principle sustained theological and liturgical unity. It was embodied and proclaimed in the supreme mastery of ritual and public ceremony that moved the emissaries of Vladimir of Kiev to recommend him to convert (c.987) to Greek rather than Latin or Slavonic Christianity because 'they led us to the place where they worship their God [Haghia Sophia] and we knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth'.<sup>37</sup> It is less clear what might have made for change, had anyone desired it. The Comnenian emperors of the twelfth century apparently tried to reinvigorate their governmental machinery by supporting advanced teaching in Constantinople and thus creating a cadre of new men, but without much effect.<sup>38</sup> It does not appear that the Patriarch had in practice much power or inclination to influence the bishops whose superior he was, or to order, regulate or 'reform' the monks who were sometimes venerated as saints and often resented as corrupt and parasitical. Dioceses were small, and bishops correspondingly humbler figures than their western counterparts. There is little to suggest that they attached much importance to provision for public worship. There were village churches, but it is doubtful whether they were systematically established, for private ones, often very small, are much more in evidence and by no means restricted to the wealthiest families; while large, central places of communal worship—equivalent to the mosque, or to the parish churches familiar in parts of the west even before the transformation of the eleventh century, and ubiquitous after it—were rare. The sacraments played a correspondingly less prominent and less regular part in



the lives of the faithful, and the penitential structure was less elaborate and less personalized than in the west.<sup>39</sup> The same disregard for communal or collective activity prevented the monasteries, unlike the sufi orders of Islam or the monastic orders in the Latin Church, from playing any wider part in weaving the social fabric than as centres of local piety.

Abundant anecdotal evidence notoriously depicts intense and intensely local religious fervour among the unprivileged laity of the Byzantine world. On the other hand, the lack of any body of evidence of routine administration and pastoral concern comparable with that supplied for the west by the records of church councils, fragmentary and even haphazard though they are before the thirteenth century, leaves us with little real grasp of how, and how uniformly or consistently, such piety was sustained. In its absence we flounder. 'In some respects it is possible that Orthodox worship at the end of the middle ages did not differ in essentials from what was found during the present [twentieth] century in villages and monasteries in Greece', remarks our formidable standard authority.<sup>40</sup> In other respects, no doubt, it is possible that it did. But, granted a greater degree of liturgical and theological uniformity—maintained, of course, over a very much smaller area—the broad pattern of sophisticated urban splendour, only loosely linked to simple and intensely defended village piety, is perhaps not so different from that of the Muslim world as the theologically-defined view from the perspective of literate culture has generally assumed.

Both China and the Islamic world saw, between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, a consolidation of learned traditions and a definition and assertion of identity on the part of the literate elites, in some respects quite like those which took place in Latin Christendom during the same period. There are signs of similar developments around the same time in peninsular India, where a reinvigorated Brahmanism, making use of revived and reinterpreted ancient texts, was closely associated with the extension of settlement and the consolidation of regional kingdoms.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, whereas at the millennium there had been broad similarities between all the Eurasian civilizations in patterns of piety and understanding of access to the holy and its uses, by the middle of the thirteenth century Latin Christendom offered a dramatic contrast to the rest. No other dominant set of beliefs was so clearly, systematically, comprehensively and prescriptively articulated; no other clerical elite exercised so firm and centralized a control over access to and discipline within its own ranks. The Chinese mandarin, which probably came closest to it in those respects, expected its values to prevail in public affairs but had no interest in imposing its beliefs or ritual behaviours on the population at large either by persuasion or coercion, or in prohibiting alternative belief systems or cults as such. Conversely, while Islam pervaded the culture, values and conduct of believers at all social levels no less thoroughly than Catholic Christianity, and insisted no less determinedly on its exclusive claim to divine truth, the mechanisms which controlled access to the ranks of those empowered to expound, disseminate and defend that truth were embedded in communities, not vested in institutions, and correspondingly more open to local variation and populist manipulation. In neither case, of course, may size be forgotten. Even allowing for great differences in the efficiency of communications, levels of literacy and sophistication of administration, to secure and maintain a comparably centralized direction over imperial China or between Morocco and the Hindu Kush would have been an enterprise quite different from that of doing so in the relatively compact and sparsely populated territory of Latin Europe. Nevertheless, it is fair to conclude that neither the ambition of the Latin clergy by the time of Lateran IV, nor their achievement then and thereafter, can be paralleled among their counterparts anywhere on the Afro-Eurasian landmass.



The case of the Greek Church shows that the contrast was not simply or directly a function of Christian doctrine, or of the foundation in exclusive truth-claims which, in contrast with the belief systems of south and east Asia, was shared by the religions of the book. It is rather what did not happen that is suggestive. Probably no other clerical intelligentsia or set of religious leaders had enjoyed such continuity from and since antiquity. Even the prolonged crisis of Iconoclasm, intimately bound up with the survival and reshaping of the empire itself in the face of the Arab onslaught, served in the end to turn the Church in on itself, identifying even more closely with the political regime and setting itself apart from other Christian confessions.<sup>42</sup> Further east the family-based, clerical-administrative elites of the first millennium remained solid and united, though they had to adapt to new conditions. In the central Islamic lands both Roman and Persian administrations survived the conquests of Islam more or less intact, and the families which staffed them, by this time mainly Christian (as some of them remained as late as the fourteenth century), continued to provide the rulers of the late ancient and medieval Middle East, including the post-Abbasid military regimes, with their secretaries, clerks and scribes, their treasurers and assessors and collectors of taxes.<sup>43</sup> In China the aristocratic clans which had dominated the court and controlled imperial office under the Tang survived the examination system and adapted it to their own purposes.

The Latin Church and its clergy, by contrast, were shaped by the most profound and far-reaching of the social crises we have encountered. Two decades of vigorous debate have largely persuaded the present generation of medievalists to abandon Georges Duby's 'feudal revolution' of the years around the millennium, finding that most of the changes to which he drew attention had been in train since the ninth century or before.<sup>44</sup> But transformation is the product of the combination of elements, not simply their presence. In 972 the bishop of Le Puy secured from the nobles of his diocese restoration of the lands that they had usurped from his church, on the condition that it would henceforth be held in common by canons vowed to celibacy.<sup>45</sup> Those were the terms on which, in effect, the Latin Church was richly re-endowed over the next two centuries or so. At the same time inheritance customs in most of the lowland regions of western Europe were adapted to secure the undivided transmission of lay property from one generation to the next, usually by means of male primogeniture. The process was indispensably facilitated by the Church's co-operation in assuring monogamy, controlling marriage by prohibiting incestuous unions (very broadly defined), and elevating the prestige both of monogamous matrimony and of celibacy. This was neither easy nor self-evidently desirable, for it meant depriving the younger and illegitimate sons of the nobility and almost all its daughters of their natural expectation—as it had been—of their share of their family's wealth and with it their means of livelihood. It shattered the old order of local hegemonies in which resources, both land and office, were shared by fluid and normally harmonious traditional accommodations between the notable families of the neighbourhood. Such hegemonies were, and elsewhere remained, common through most of Eurasia, and indeed were reinforced during this period by economic growth and the re-articulation of the social order. In consequence, polar opposites though they were in almost every aspect of their formation and culture, both Chinese and Islamic elites remained dependent on the support and influence of their kin in their localities. Whatever the aspirations of the regime they might serve it was always in their best interest, so far as they could, to maintain and advanced the interests of those kin, constructing in the process societies and civilizations which proclaimed universal values but remained firmly rooted in, and bounded by, local structures of power and culture in practice more absolute in their claims, and considerably more effective in enforcing them.

Their western counterparts were less fortunate. Driven from their families by the rule of primogeniture and prevented by that of celibacy from founding new ones of their own, these younger sons had nowhere to look for advancement save to the goodwill of their patrons and the extension of their patrons' power. Their energy and ingenuity in pursuit of those goals lies at the root of the widening and deepening of governmental power, secular and ecclesiastical, in twelfth-century Europe. But they did not accept that dependency with equanimity. Those who chose, or were forced to choose, the clerical rather than the knightly path had two things to offer: the technical skills that literacy could bring to the exercise of power and the assurance and assertion of legitimacy in doing so. Their prospect of position and respect in the world, therefore, their own claim to legitimacy in office and the exercise of authority which they could not assert by birth, depended on their attainments, and ever more directly on their education. The status and authority of their education depended in turn on the position of the ablest and most respected among them as the unquestioned guardians and interpreters of the Christian faith, whose logical foundations, teachings and implications for every aspect of daily life they now hammered out with a rigour and comprehensiveness undreamed of since the age of the Church Fathers. The singular coherence of that faith and the institutions that secured and advanced it reflect the inescapable reality that it was indeed the rock upon which not only the Church, but the new world of the high middle ages and beyond was built.

# NOTES

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1. See particularly chapters by [Miller](#) and [Hamilton](#), this volume.
2. R. I. Moore, *The First European Revolution, c. 970–1215* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 146–149; Dominique Iogna-Prat, *Order and Exclusion: Cluny and Christendom Face Heresy, Judaism and Islam (1000–1150)* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002), esp. chs 9–11.
3. R. I. Moore, ‘Medieval Europe in World History’, in Carol Lansing and Edward D. English, eds, *A Companion to the Medieval World* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), 563–568.
4. Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. David Womersley (London: Penguin Books, 1995), cap. lxvii, 916–917.
5. ‘any system of belief or worship’: *Chambers 20th Century Dictionary*; ‘a particular system of such belief’: *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*.
6. John Bossy, ‘Some Elementary Forms of Durkheim’, *Past and Present* 95 (1982), 4–8.
7. John Bossy, *Christianity in the West 1400–1799* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 171 (closing words of the book).
8. Tomuku Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Catherine Bell, ‘Paradigms behind (and before) the Modern Concept of Religion’, *History and Theory* 45 (2006), 27–46.
9. See also chapter by [Bull](#), this volume.
10. Cf. Lester K. Little, ‘Romanesque Christianity in Germanic Europe’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23, no. 3 (1993), 453–474.
11. David Ludden, *Peasant History in South India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985; paperback edn. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 15–41; Jean Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 94–116; Richard Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe* (London: Harper Collins, 1997).
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14. Ernest Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967); Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982).
15. Notably in the writings of William H. McNeill, perhaps reflecting the influence on him of Arnold Toynbee; see also Jerry H. Bentley, *Old World Encounters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
16. Distinguished examples include Robert S. Lopez, *The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages, 950–1350* (Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice Hall, 1971); David Herlihy, ‘The Agrarian Revolution in Southern France and Italy, 850–1100’, *Speculum* 31, no. 1 (1958), 23–41; Mark Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1973), 113–199.
17. Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Johann P. Arnason and Bjorn Wittrock, eds, *Eurasian Transformations, Tenth to Thirteenth Centuries: Crystallisations, Divergences, Renaissances* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004).
18. See chapter by [Bagge](#), this volume.
19. R. I. Moore, ‘The Eleventh Century in Eurasian History’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33, no.1 (2003), 1–21.
20. [Moore](#), *First European Revolution*, 112–126; R. W. Southern, *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe I: Foundations; II: The Heroic Age* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995, 2001), especially I, 134–232; II, 116–132. See also Ian Wei, *Intellectual Culture in Medieval Paris: Theologians and the University, C.1100–1330* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
21. [Southern](#), *Scholastic Humanism* I, 264–282; Anders Winroth, ‘The Legal Revolution of the Twelfth Century’, in Thomas F. X. Noble and John Van Engen, eds, *European Transformations: The Long Twelfth Century* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 338–353.
22. Classical discussions include Alexander Murray, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); and Jacques Le Goff, *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).
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24. [Bol](#), *This Culture*, 50–51.

25. Statistics from John King Fairbank, *China: A New History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 94–95, largely drawing on John W. Chaffee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning in Song China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
26. Robert P. Hymes, *Statesmen and Gentlemen: The Elite of Fu-Chou, Chiang-Hsi, in Northern and Southern Sung* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
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33. For a map, see Francis Robinson, *Atlas of the Islamic World* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1982), 29.
34. Notably by George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges In Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), but cf. Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 69–90.
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38. A. P. Kazhdan and Ann Wharton Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 120–133, 192–195; Paul Magdalino, 'Enlightenment and Repression in Twelfth-century Byzantium: The Evidence of the Canonists' in N. Oikonomides, ed., *Byzantium in the Twelfth Century: Canon Law, State and Society* (Athens: Etaireía Buzantinôn kai Metabuzantinôn Meletôn, 1991), 359–373.
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40. [Hussey, Orthodox Church](#), 366.
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# PART II

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# SPACES

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# CHAPTER 6

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# THE BOUNDARIES OF CHRISTENDOM AND ISLAM

## *Iberia and the Latin Levant*

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AMY G. REMENSNYDER

MOST medieval Christians living in the Mediterranean kingdoms abutting Muslim lands would have been puzzled by the maps that fill modern books about the relations between Christian and Islamic polities in the middle ages. With their heavy black lines marking borders—sometimes nuanced with complex codes of dotted, striated or coloured zones—these maps purport to offer a precise visual account of the fluctuating boundaries between Christian and Muslim territory. They begin by charting the military expansion of Islam in the seventh and eighth centuries, as the Muslims created an empire with its capital first in Damascus and then Baghdad, by extending power from the Arabian Peninsula over vast swathes of the Mediterranean world, including parts of the Byzantine and Persian empires and almost the entire Iberian Peninsula. These maps then show how in the ninth and tenth centuries, the boundaries between Christendom and Islam remained fairly stable, though the Muslims added Sicily, Corsica, and Sardinia to their domains. Next, they plot how in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Latin Christendom had its turn at military expansion in both the eastern and western Mediterranean: in the Iberian Peninsula, Christian warriors from the emerging kingdoms of Castile, Aragon and Portugal began to take cities and towns that had been in the hands of Muslims ever since 711, while in the Levant, successive waves of crusading knights and soldiers established and then defended Latin polities, including the kingdom of Jerusalem, the principality of Antioch and the counties of Edessa and Tripoli.

Maps depicting the thirteenth century trace the divergent fates of western Christendom's recent dilation at either end of the Mediterranean. In the east, they show the shrinking of the Latin Levantine principalities after Salah al-Din's great victory of 1187 at the battle of Hattin which put Jerusalem under Muslim rule, while in the west, they chart the continued military enlargement of particularly Castile and Aragon at the expense of al-Andalus (Muslim Iberia). By 1291, the Latin Levantine principalities vanish from the map altogether, effaced by the loss in that year of their last toehold, the city of Acre, but Castile and Aragon loom large over the remaining Muslim polity on the Iberian Peninsula, the tiny if culturally luminous Nasrid kingdom of Granada. On maps depicting fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Iberia, the inexorable advance of lines representing Castile's southernmost borders squeezes Granada into an ever-diminishing strip of land until the Nasrid polity disappears in 1492, effaced by its conquest in that year by the late medieval Christian power couple, Isabel I of Castile (d. 1504) and Ferdinand II of Aragon (d. 1516).

This modern mapping of the boundaries of medieval Islam and Christendom has its utility, offering a compelling master narrative of political and military contractions and expansions. Yet it can be misleading—and not only because it imposes visual neatness onto the actual messiness of human activity. These maps engender anachronism by suggesting that medieval Christians envisioned and experienced their world as we often do ours: a globe carved up by crisp linear international boundaries drawn by central governments, determined by political treaties, and often delineated on the ground by a series of checkpoints, fences, fortifications or even walls. Today, as the processes of globalization

erode this very concept of boundaries, some historians are beginning to wonder whether we are right to project it backwards onto the middle ages.<sup>1</sup>

Cartographic thinking would in fact have been very foreign to most medieval Christians as they negotiated the multiple and changing boundaries that existed in their world between Christendom and Islam. These were borders that they neither conceived of nor experienced as bold lines marked on a map. Instead, they had their own distinctive—and strong—sense of the spatial divisions between Islam and Christendom. It shaped Christian military ideologies, the organization of physical boundaries, and the ease with which people crossed those boundaries. Occasionally, it even marked Christian maps themselves.

## MAPPING ISLAM AND CHRISTENDOM

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Before the sixteenth century it was rare for western Christian mapmakers to trace anything resembling linear political borders on their products.<sup>2</sup> Hence no sharp edge demarcates Christendom from Islam on the T-O maps that so often gave visual expression to the Christian worldview between the seventh and the fourteenth centuries. Indeed, the lands of Islam rarely appear at all on such maps. With Jerusalem, the navel of the world, at their very centre, T-O maps provided a soteriological image of the world as God had laid it out: a circle of oceans surrounding the three continents of Asia, Europe and Africa (representing the tripartite division of humanity after the Flood in the persons of Noah's three sons [Genesis 9.19]) separated by a T-shaped Mediterranean whose resemblance to a cross might be quite pronounced. The peoples, monstrous races, animals, and natural features ornamenting these maps usually were borrowed from the Bible and the geographical and ethnographic treatises inherited from classical antiquity. Named towns, cities and churches typically either came from those sources or belonged to the topography of Christian pilgrimage. This Christianizing and classicizing geography generally left little room for Muslims.

Even a T-O map as large and as detailed as the Hereford Map (c.1290–1300) made space on its broad parchment surface (1.58 × 1.33 metres) for only two rather indirect references to Muslim presence anywhere in the world. Among the monstrous races depicted along one edge of this famous English map stands a hermaphrodite sporting a turban, the headgear that often crowned Muslims in medieval Christian iconography.<sup>3</sup> A yet more oblique allusion to Islam appears in a scene along the route of the Israelites' passage from exile in Egypt toward the refuge of the Promised Land: a group of people raise their hands in worship of a grinning, defecating idol. Though these idolaters are labelled 'Jews' (*iudei*), they adore a figure identified as 'Mahum', or Muhammad. Conflating Jews and Muslims, this vignette encourages the viewer to see the Israelites' worship of the Golden Calf through the distorting lens of the medieval Christian stereotype which cast both peoples as idolaters (hence in many of the epic poems that entertained Christian audiences, Muslim characters bow before golden idols of Muhammad).<sup>4</sup> Created in just the years when the fall of Acre to Mamluk armies put a resounding end to the Latin Christian kingdoms of the Levant and left the area entirely under Muslim rule, the Hereford Map countered the disturbing new geopolitical reality by turning Muslims into monsters and idolaters—and relegating them to the fringes of the physical and moral world.

Other mapmakers of the crusading era instead adjusted their world picture to show the lands of Islam.<sup>5</sup> Yet even they drew few firm boundaries between Christian and Muslim territories. The vividly illustrated maps of the Levant that we owe to the artistic flair of



Matthew Paris, a mid-thirteenth century English monk and chronicler, for example, apportioned the landscape among Muslims and Christians with words rather than with lines.<sup>6</sup> Extensive captions scattered among the delicately rendered cities, mountain ranges, and bodies of water announce some areas as under Muslim dominion and others under Christian rule, yet Matthew sketched no borders enclosing either. True, on what appears to be an unfinished draft of one map, he strung out the names of the lands (*terra antioche*, *terra egipti*, *terra soldani* and so on) with exaggerated long strokes between the letters, but their horizontal march across the parchment leaves plenty of gaps.<sup>7</sup>

It was the makers of the portolan charts that emerged as navigational aids beginning in the fourteenth century who came closest to separating Muslim and Christian territories with a linear border. Though these cartographers focussed on mapping the Mediterranean and Atlantic coastlines rather than inland territory, a recent survey of portolan charts pre-dating 1500 has turned up a handful that indicate the land border between Christian Castile and Muslim Granada.<sup>8</sup> Yet the majority of these are quite late (fifteenth century) and most define the border as constructed by nature rather than by humans; they run the red boundary line right along the blue or green course of two rivers, the Guadalquivir and the Segura. Other portolan charts perhaps suggest this naturalized border by highlighting those same rivers in blue or green while omitting the rest of the waterways in the Iberian Peninsula. Islam's claim to the small slice of Iberia south of these rivers might be underscored with an additional visual code: on some of these maps, the red banner of Granada's ruling Nasrid dynasty flaps over their kingdom and a miniature castle—doubtless intended as the famous palace-city of the Alhambra—flaunts its towers near the word 'Granada'.<sup>9</sup> But in all cases, by using these waterways to delineate Muslim Granada from its Christian neighbors, the cartographers provided an ossified view of the border; by the time these portolan charts were drawn up, Castile had extended its control well south of both the Guadalquivir and the Segura.

It thus took Christian mapmakers centuries to incorporate Islam into their vision of the world. Yet when they did so, they did not draw linear boundaries corresponding to changing political realities, as a modern cartographer would. If they suggested borders at all between Christian and Muslim lands, these were the timeless and unchanging ones of natural features rather than the dynamic ones produced by human action and decision. Here they remained true to the principles that had guided their craft for generations: on most medieval maps, the only international boundaries are those that nature has traced on the landscape.<sup>10</sup>

Yet it was human activity that reduced al-Andalus to the kingdom of Granada and led to several centuries of Latin Christian political presence in the Levant. Propelling this expansion of western Christendom in Iberia and the Levant during the high middle ages were the material and spiritual ambitions of Christian rulers and men of war. If their lust for land and booty often joined in a marriage of convenience with the ideology of holy war, allied to crusade itself were deeply territorial worldviews proclaiming that the Levant and all of the Iberian Peninsula rightfully belonged to Christians, not to Muslims. Accompanied by conceptual and practical strategies intended to Christianize lands seized from Muslims, these military ideologies proposed spatial boundaries between Islam and Christendom—but not ones that cartographers could have plotted.

## RESTORING CHRISTIAN LANDS AND CHURCHES

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So many people believed [in Muhammad's teachings] that they took possession of many lands that belonged to Christians who were converted to the faith of Jesus Christ through the apostles. They still take many of these lands and hold them right down to the present day. This is why there is war between Christians and Moors, and always will be until the Christians have taken back the lands that the Moors have seized from them. There would not be war between them because of religion (*ley*) or sect... because Jesus Christ never ordered that [Christians] kill or oppress anyone to make them follow His religion (*ley*)... good Christians believe that the reason God allowed Christians to receive so much harm from the Moors is so that there would be cause to have war straight away with them, and so that those [Christians] who die in it become martyrs, having fulfilled Holy Church's commandments.<sup>11</sup>

This history lesson given by the Castilian prince and man of letters, Juan Manuel (d. 1348), neatly explains Christian holy war against Muslims as originating not in religious antagonism (though he has little good to say about Islam), but in a righteous desire to recover Christian territory from the hands of Muslim usurpers. Not all high medieval Christians would have agreed completely with him. During the Levantine crusades and the Christian campaigns that whittled away at al-Andalus, Christian men of war and the writers who vaunted their deeds could cast the followers of Islam as legitimate military targets precisely by slurring them as God's enemies. Yet if religious hatred for Muslims at times inspired chroniclers and crusaders, most shared Juan Manuel's belief that history too had inscribed the rationale for Christian conquest on the landscape itself. After all, if the territory for which Christians contested had originally belonged to their co-religionists, their military campaigns against Muslims fell into the category of just war as defined by Augustine of Hippo and his high medieval successors like Thomas Aquinas. Among the conditions outlined by these influential Christian thinkers that could transform sinful bloodshed into sanctioned warfare was right cause, including the recuperation of lands lost to an enemy.

The notion that Christian conquests of Muslim-held lands rightfully restored the territorial ordering of the past had great success in both the eastern and western Mediterranean, though shaped in each place by distinctly different historical geographies. Its first stirrings were in Iberia. There, late ninth-century royal chroniclers from the nascent kingdom of Asturias asserted (probably contrary to fact) that the rulers of this small Christian polity tucked into the Peninsula's northwest corner were directly descended from the Visigothic monarchs. In fashioning this genealogy, the chroniclers tacitly claimed for their royal patrons not the legacy of the Visigoths' resounding defeat by the invading Muslim armies in 711, but instead the heritage of the expansive realm they believed these Christian monarchs had ruled: the entire Iberian Peninsula along with a good slice of North Africa. Inspired by the victories the Asturian king Alfonso III (d. 910) had recently won against his Goliath-like Islamic neighbor to the south—al-Andalus—one chronicler dared to predict that 'very soon' this ruler would 'restore the kingdom of the Goths... and reign over all of Spain'.<sup>12</sup>

Alfonso III certainly didn't fulfil this prophecy. Though his military campaigns and those of some other tenth-century Christian kings chipped away at al-Andalus' bulk, the Islamic polity would continue to dominate the Iberian Peninsula geographically and politically until the collapse of its ruling dynasty, the Umayyads, in the early eleventh century. But in later centuries, the Visigothic genealogical connection adumbrated by Alfonso's chroniclers—and its attendant territorial aspirations—would resurface episodically in more developed forms. The rulers of León and Castile (the kingdoms to which Asturias had given birth by the eleventh century) and their propagandists would especially invoke this bold vision at moments of spectacular Christian gains against the Umayyad caliphate's Muslim successors.

According to a royal document drawn up in 1086 or shortly thereafter, for example, this territorial sanction from the deep past had spurred Alfonso VI of León-Castile to a victory that spelled disaster for the taifa kingdoms, the statelets into which al-Andalus had fragmented after the fall of the Umayyads. In 1085, Alfonso seized Toledo, one of the more important of these diminutive polities—and formerly the Visigoths' royal capital. It was then perhaps natural that the Gothic ghost would be conjured by the anonymous scribe who put words into the king's mouth proclaiming Toledo's return to Christendom: 'Inspired by the grace of God, I brought an army against that city in which my most powerful... forefathers had formerly reigned. I believed it would be pleasing in the Lord's sight if I, Alfonso, with Christ as my leader, could restore to His devotees that which treacherous people under the faithless leadership of Muhammad had seized from Christians'.<sup>13</sup>

This legitimating Visigothic vocabulary was much honed in the thirteenth century during the reign of Ferdinand III of Castile, whose many conquests of important Muslim towns and cities included the capture of Cordoba (the old Umayyad capital) and of Seville, the Iberian seat of the Almohads (the Berber dynasty that ruled al-Andalus from the 1160s to the early thirteenth century). Though Ferdinand's son and successor, Alfonso X, had fewer victories over al-Andalus to his credit, he and his court continued to cultivate the idea that as heir to the Visigothic realm, Castile could rightfully claim the land that lay in Muslim hands.

In the fifteenth century a renewed fascination with the Visigoths swept Castile. The kingdom's *literati* even created a 'neo-Gothic' portrait of their own world, asserting that the Visigothic past continued in the person of contemporary rulers and aristocrats. Hence there is every reason to think that when in January 1492 Isabel I triumphantly rode into the city of Granada to take possession of al-Andalus' final incarnation, she believed that she did so with history's blessing. After all, her poets and propagandists had been insisting for years that Visigothic royal blood flowed in her veins.<sup>14</sup>

Isabel's husband, Ferdinand II of Aragon, may have preferred to think of the military campaigns that returned Christian rule to the whole Iberian Peninsula as fulfilling a different—if equally territorial—mandate: the prophecy current in Aragon ever since 1301 that 'Spain, the wet nurse to Muhammadan depravity', would be ripped apart by warfare until the advent of a Christian ruler who would re-unite the Peninsula and, like a bat, devour the Muslim 'mosquitos' and 'subjugate Africa'.<sup>15</sup> By all accounts, Ferdinand believed himself to be this fabled ruler—and more. By his day, the bat-king prediction had intertwined with several other strands of Christian prophecy to create a grandiose vision of the great sweep of lands Ferdinand felt himself predestined to wrest from the Muslims. As a Castilian aristocrat seeking to curry favour with him put it, Ferdinand was the foretold king who would 'destroy all the Moors of Spain... take the kingdom of Granada... subjugate all of Africa... and all the lands up to the gates of Egypt and the mountains of Ethiopia... and take the holy house of Jerusalem... and plant the banner of Aragon on Mount Calvary in the resting place of the cross on which Our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified'.<sup>16</sup>

By attributing these words to Isidore, a much revered seventh-century archbishop of Seville, the canny Castilian nobleman added the lustre of the Visigothic past to this prophecy proclaiming Ferdinand the apocalyptic emperor of last days who would restore Jerusalem to Christian rule. In Aragon itself, however, the Visigothic legacy was not often invoked as the sanction for territorial warfare against al-Andalus, for fear of endorsing Castile's pretensions to rightful control of the whole Peninsula. Yet in Aragon as in Castile, the belief that Christian conquests were in effect *reconquests* of naturally Christian land could colour texts celebrating victories against al-Andalus. In both kingdoms, even writers far more humble than those enjoying royal patronage could wield the vocabulary of territorial restoration, recovery, and return.

Whether this lexicon justifies labelling the Christian military campaigns against al-Andalus between the late eleventh century and 1492 ‘the Reconquest’—a term many modern historians have used to sum up this period of Iberian history—is nonetheless debatable. The word *Reconquista* is itself a post-medieval coinage, and one that has often been pressed into service on behalf of disturbing constructions of modern Spanish identities.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, it implies ideological constancy and consistency of a sort that is hard to find in the medieval sources. It is perhaps best to think of the vocabulary of territorial restoration as belonging to a jumble of ideas of which Christians in high medieval Iberia availed themselves when convenient.

The popes, however, did their best to fan the language of reconquest from their seat in faraway Rome.<sup>18</sup> They favoured it themselves in their written dealings with Iberian churches and monarchs, even before the early twelfth century when they declared Iberia a theatre for crusade equal to that in the Levant. In the eyes of ambitious pontiffs like Gregory VII who strove to expand the papacy’s power, Christian military campaigns against al-Andalus promised to restore ecclesiastical sovereignty over lands that had once belonged to Saint Peter’s domain.

Popes equally enthusiastically characterized the crusades in the east as a project of recovering Christian land from Muslim conquerors. But the prospect of Christians controlling the Levant inspired in the papal chancery—as well as in chroniclers and crusaders—a far more charged vocabulary of territorial restitution than that applied to the Iberian efforts. After all, this was the very land where Jesus himself had lived and died, its soil rich with pilgrimage shrines standing sentinel over Christianity’s most sacred sites.<sup>19</sup> As the setting for holy history, it was intrinsically Christian territory—or so Urban II, the pope who launched the First Crusade at the council of Clermont in 1095, and many of the Christians he galvanized into action, seem to have believed. In a letter of December 1095 exhorting ‘all the faithful in Flanders’ to join the armed expedition to the east, Urban explained the campaign’s goal with language he had probably used in his sermon at Clermont a month earlier: ‘a barbarian rage’, he thundered, ‘had devastated God’s churches in the east’, and, worst of all, had ‘subjugated Christ’s holy city, famed as the place of his passion and resurrection, to intolerable servitude along with its churches’.<sup>20</sup> While in this letter Urban called for the ‘liberation’ of the ‘eastern churches’ in general, some of the armed pilgrims who answered his appeal declared that they would focus their energies on freeing Jerusalem itself.<sup>21</sup> Implicit in the idea of delivering the sacred city and the eastern churches from the polluting degradation of Muslim captivity was the belief that these places had once enjoyed a pristine freedom—and thus originally had been Christian.

After a mixed army of French and Germans (lumped together in most sources as ‘Franks’) took Jerusalem in 1099, the language of territorial recovery became noticeably more explicit as the Levant’s new lords and the writers who celebrated their deeds sought to legitimate the conquests. As a group of Frankish leaders angrily declare to the sultan of Babylon’s emissaries in one early twelfth-century chronicle: ‘this land...belonged to our people in the earliest times, and your people evilly took it away from them. It should not be yours just because you have held it a long time’. God’s mercy, they continue, had decreed that the territory ‘unjustly taken away from the fathers should now be returned to the sons’.<sup>22</sup>

These ‘fathers’, whose landed inheritance the victorious Franks righteously claimed, included the Christian emperors of Rome who had once ruled the region, but were above all figures drawn from the pages of scripture. The crusader Anselm of Ribemont, for example, remembered the defiant message he and his fellows—‘the army of the Lord’—had sent in



1098 to Kerboga, the Muslim leader besieging them in Antioch: ‘Retreat from us and the allodial property (*hereditas*) of Saint Peter’.<sup>23</sup> If the Franks proclaimed Antioch Peter’s possession because they believed the prince of the apostles to have been the city’s first bishop, they knew the holiest city of all—Jerusalem—as the inalienable patrimony of none other than Christ. As Christ’s spiritual children, Christians—and not Muslims—were the natural heirs to Jerusalem, declared a cascade of feudal imagery flowing from writers’ quills.

When the men who called themselves pilgrims violently took possession of this inheritance in 1099, they waded through Jerusalem’s streets red with Muslim blood ‘and came rejoicing and weeping from excess of gladness to worship at the Sepulcher’, as one of them later remembered.<sup>24</sup> It quickly became evident that the Franks wished not just to pray before Christ’s tomb, but also to renovate and rebuild the church that housed it; the embellishment of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher (and of Bethlehem’s Church of the Nativity) was the earliest artistic endeavour undertaken by the Latin rulers of the kingdom of Jerusalem.<sup>25</sup>

Indeed, if popes saw the crusades in both east and west as campaigns to restore the Church writ large, the men who carried out these conquests often did their best to resurrect the actual built fabric of Christian worship. One historian has estimated that in the twelfth century alone, the Franks built or rebuilt over four hundred churches in the Levant, many of them the high places of Christian pilgrimage.<sup>26</sup> As for the Iberian Peninsula, James I of Aragon spoke for his fellow Christian men of war when he boasted: ‘in all the large towns that God has granted us to take from the Saracens, we have built a church’.<sup>27</sup>

Distilling the conquerors’ claim to the landscape, the creation or restoration of churches offered practical and symbolic strategies of Christianizing formerly Muslim territory. It was the centrepiece of the pious rites of victory with which Christian men of war proclaimed themselves the land’s new masters. Beginning with Alfonso VI’s taking of Toledo in 1085, Castilian and Aragonese rulers celebrated their triumphs over al-Andalus by presiding over the ritual consecration of cathedrals in defeated Muslim cities and towns. Crusaders in the east could do the same, as suggested by one early twelfth-century description of the victory festivities in Antioch in 1086:

[T]he bishop of Le Puy and the other princes...cleansed from all defilement the basilica of blessed Peter the apostle, which the Turks had profaned with their sacrilegious rites, and they rebuilt with every adornment the holy altars which had been overturned ... and they restored Catholic priests to carry out the divine mysteries ... from all the clergy, Greeks as well as Latins.<sup>28</sup>

Although tacitly alluding to the significant communities of ‘Greek’ Christians who had lived in the Levant under Muslim rule for generations (their existence would create some complex ecclesial politics in the Latin principalities), this chronicler emphasized the Franks as the heroes who purged the taint of Islam from Antioch’s cathedral and rededicated it to Christian use. In the Iberian Peninsula too, the ritual gestures with which clerics consecrated churches—sprinkling the building’s walls and altar with holy water, drawing crosses on the floor and threshold, and waving thuribles to send forth clouds of pungent incense—were understood to expel the polluting demons of Islam from buildings now claimed for Christianity. In both east and west, the revelation of special relics, often believed to have been hidden away centuries ago as protection from Muslim desecration, also helped to (re)establish the Christian purity of the churches—and of the land itself.

## HOLY LANDS, FRONTIERS, AND LIVING TOGETHER

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As Christians invoked sacred and not-so-sacred history to legitimate their conquests of Muslim lands, and cathedrals and their surrounding dioceses were reborn (though often with new boundaries dictated by the extent of Christian control), subtle shifts in vocabulary suggest that these strongly territorial ideologies and practices resulted in the conceptual creation of bounded Christian space. A new sense of the Levant as one territory emerged. For centuries Christian writers had favoured the diffuse term *loca sancta* ('holy places') in their descriptions of Palestine, reserving *terra sancta* ('Holy Land') for references to Jewish conceptions of the area.<sup>29</sup> But in the very early twelfth century, the term *terra sancta* suddenly came into vogue. It is no accident that the earliest evidence of the shift toward this more defined territorial language comes from a crusade chronicle.<sup>30</sup> The establishment of the Frankish principalities in the Levant proved that the Christians were the new Israel and thus heir to the holy land God had promised the Jews.

If crusader successes engendered a much more concrete sense of Palestine as one land that should be under Christian rule, Christian military expansion in high medieval Iberia redefined perception of the spatial division between Islamic and Christian territory, rendering it much keener. Once again a change in terminology reveals the shift. When referring to the places where Christian lands ended and Muslim ones began, Christian authors in Iberia had, ever since the early middle ages, preferred words like *partes*, *fines*, or *confines* that indicated large swathes of land, regions almost. But in the thirteenth century, as Christian campaigns gradually reduced al-Andalus to Nasrid Granada, a word of narrower scope increasingly came to designate those areas: *frontera* ('frontier').<sup>31</sup> Unlike the earlier terms, which could be applied to any of the kingdom's edges, *frontera* meant specifically the space where the Christian polity touched its Islamic neighbour. First appearing in an Aragonese royal document of 1059, this specialized term tellingly remained the province of royal writers for some time before coming into more general usage. As in another area of medieval Europe where a Christian kingdom faced non-Christian neighbors—Hungary—the notion of the frontier became a building block of royal ideology, allowing rulers to claim the elevated status of defender of the faith.<sup>32</sup>

In the Christian kingdoms of high medieval Iberia, popular legends played with the emerging idea of frontier by mapping it onto the sexualized female body, the site in many cultures for metaphoric representations of territorial integrity and its violation. In these stories circulating in chronicle, romance, epic and song, women's bodies, Christian and Muslim, stand for the contested space of the Iberian Peninsula—and its natural destiny as Christian land. Some of these tales feature a Muslim maiden who gives herself willingly in love or marriage to a Christian man or is delivered into his possession by a Muslim man. If her fate suggests that Muslim Iberia eagerly awaits Christian conquest, other legends raise the spectre of Christian women as the sexual property of Muslim men in order to give an equally emphatic message: Christian women—and thus the Iberian Peninsula itself—cannot rightly be possessed by the followers of Islam. In some of these stories, a Christian woman avid for sex and power sleeps with a Muslim leader and receives divine punishment; in others, a virtuous Christian virgin resists rape by a Muslim man, successfully defending her purity even to the death. All these legends draw the line between Islam and Christendom right through the female body.<sup>33</sup>

Yet a traveller to high medieval Castile and Aragon would not have found these kingdoms to be the pure bounded Christian spaces embodied by the heroic Christian virgins of legend and suggested by the idea of the frontier. Interfaith sex and its explosive potential were no figment of storytellers' imagination. Both Aragon and Castile were home to significant numbers of Jews—and to even larger populations of Muslims (known as

Mudejars) who chose to stay on under the Christian conquerors rather than abandon the lands where their families had lived for generations. This religious diversity was reflected in royal ideology; the same rulers who styled themselves the champions of Christianity also called themselves the ‘rulers of the three faiths’. The Frankish princes in the Levant could have said the same about themselves, for inhabiting their polities were Muslims and Jews as well as a diversity of Christians. Though Christian legends emerged that, like the Hereford Map, denied Muslim presence in the ‘Holy Land’ (in this case by orientalizing the Franks and thus depicting them as the region’s natural denizens), Muslims probably outnumbered Christians in the Frankish Levant.<sup>34</sup>

The tenor of relations between Christians and Muslims (and Jews) in Christian Iberia and in the Frankish Levant has been the subject of much complex debate, particularly when it comes to assessing the balance between interfaith violence and more friendly interactions. While early layers of crusade scholarship posited that the Franks exercised a benevolent form of colonial rule over subject Muslims and indigenous Christian populations, the next generation of historians saw instead a much harsher colonial regime characterized by spatial and cultural segregation, almost apartheid. Now many scholars of the Frankish Levant reject both stances, arguing instead for what has been compellingly termed ‘rough tolerance’.<sup>35</sup> On the Iberian side too historians have recently sought a middle ground avoiding the false dichotomy between violence and toleration. They have coined new expressions—including ‘communities of violence’ and ‘amiable enmity’—to add shades of dark and light to the too-rosy portrait of *convivencia* (‘living together’) often painted by earlier scholars working on the texture of interfaith existence in Christian Iberia.<sup>36</sup> Whichever term they prefer, many scholars working on both ends of the Mediterranean now think that instead of representing three bounded monolithic cultures, Christians, Muslims and Jews engaged in a wide variety of interchanges, mutual borrowings and dialogues that produced an abundance of hybrid forms.

The internal spatial organization of these Latin Christian polities, east and west, erected few hermetic boundaries between Muslims and Christians. To be sure, in high medieval Christian Iberia many towns and villages had their *morería* (Muslim quarter). There, Muslim residences and shops clustered around mosques. The sense of cohesion such neighbourhoods could provide was reinforced by Christian laws recognizing Mudejars as self-governing communities. But though its extent might be delineated in a town’s founding charter or enclosed by a wall, the *morería* hardly created impermeable spatial divisions between Muslims and Christians. Even after the fourteenth century when rulers increasingly made residence in *morerías* compulsory for Muslims, many lived in predominantly Christian parts of city or town. Some Christians themselves petitioned for permission to reside within their town’s *morería*. And although in the rural areas of the Frankish Levant or the southern stretches of Aragon, Muslims might live in villages populated mostly by their co-religionists, as they went about their daily activities, they would encounter Christians, whether their lords or their neighbours.

The striking attempt made by the Franks to purge Jerusalem from the residential pollution of the infidel shows how porous internal spatial boundaries between Muslims and Christians could be. In 1099, the victorious crusaders forbade non-Christians from living in the holy city. Yet the Franks allowed Muslim merchants and peasants to sell their wares in Jerusalem’s marketplace—and to worship in the city. There, Muslims would prostrate themselves in prayer in buildings they knew as mosques, but which the new Christian lords considered churches. Thus Christian pilgrims visiting Jerusalem’s Temple Mount might brush up against Muslims who came to worship in the sacred compound that the followers of Islam for generations had called the Haram al-Sharif. This precinct held the glorious

mosque of the Dome of the Rock—transformed by the Franks into an Augustinian church—and the expansive al-Aqsa mosque, in which the Templars installed their headquarters while reserving a small neighbouring mosque for Muslim use.

Many of the churches that Christian conquerors worked so hard to restore in the Frankish Levant and in high medieval Iberia were in fact mosques that they appropriated and then consecrated as churches, often with minimal architectural modification. Like the buildings in Jerusalem's Haram al-Sharif complex, these converted mosques confound any assumption that churches always actually incarnated the bounded Christian space that they represented conceptually. Both their physical fabric and the meeting of Christian and Muslim worshippers that took place in some of them tell a very different story about boundaries. As one late twelfth-century Muslim traveller saw in Christian Acre, although the Franks had turned the city's main mosque into their cathedral, 'God kept undefiled one part of [it], which remained in the hands of the Muslims as a small mosque', while outside the city was 'a mosque of which there remains in its former state only the mihrab [an architectural niche, indicating the direction of Mecca], to the east of which the Franks have built their own mihrab; and Muslim and infidel assemble there, the one turning to his place of worship, the other to his'.<sup>37</sup> The Iberian Peninsula too had its instances of Muslims praying in buildings that were Christian churches now but had been mosques originally.

Even churches that weren't converted mosques could attract Muslim worshippers. Prominent among them was Saidnaya outside Damascus, where Christians and Muslims (and some Jews) jostled with each other to collect vials of sweet wonder-working oil oozing from a famous Marian icon. Lesser known churches in the Frankish Levant and Christian Iberia also received Muslim visitors. Like Saidnaya, these were often shrines dedicated to the Virgin Mary, for she straddled the divide between Christianity and Islam. Familiar with the angelic praise she received in the Qur'an (3.42)—'O Mary, indeed God has favored you and made you immaculate, and chosen you from all the women of the world'—Muslims venerated her as the virgin mother of a prophet.<sup>38</sup>

The shrines of some rather more enigmatic Christian saints too drew Muslim devotees. In the fifteenth century, for example, both Christian and Muslim pilgrims supplicated San Ginés de la Jara in his church located near Cartagena on the Iberian Peninsula's Mediterranean coast. The Christians praying for his aid believed him to be a pious brother of the epic hero Roland, while the Muslims perhaps thought of him as a saintly representative of their own faith—one of Muhammad's relatives, even—as seventeenth-century Christian authors would claim. But one thing is clear: San Ginés' reputation as a wonder-worker transcended the boundary between Christian and Muslim Iberia. The Muslims who came to his church full of hope that he might heal their ailments were not Mudejars living under Christian rule but instead, as a fifteenth-century Christian author wrote, 'from the land of the Moors', that is the kingdom of Granada.<sup>39</sup> In travelling to San Ginés' church, they left behind the dar al-Islam (the 'house of Islam') and entered Christian territory. What exactly did the boundary between Islam and Christendom that they crossed consist of? It is time to turn to the ways Christians and Muslims physically organized and experienced those spatial boundaries that Christian mapmakers were so disinclined to delineate.

## LIVING ON THE FRONTIER, CROSSING THE BORDERS

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Sometime in 1460, the civic dignitaries of the Muslim town of Vera met their counterparts from the Christian town of Lorca at a spring where the animal herders of both communities often mingled as they watered their flocks in this arid region of the southwestern Iberian Peninsula. Called Fuente de la Higuera, the spring lay on the main road that traversed the fifty odd kilometers separating the two towns. But if the road connected the kingdoms of Muslim Granada and Christian Castile, the spring itself both joined *and* divided them; officials from Vera and Lorca often convened there to resolve boundary issues threatening the neighbourly relations that usually prevailed between their towns. And so on that day in 1460, the assembled dignitaries ranged themselves in two rows, the Muslims on one side of the spring and the Christians on the other. Following the terms of an agreement already reached between the two towns, the *caudillo* of Vera led a young woman to the spring and the lines of men embodying Islam and Christendom.

Born a Christian, this woman had been raised in Lorca until her father made the startling decision to move to Vera and convert to Islam. He took his daughter—just a girl then—with him. In Vera she embraced Islam and married a Muslim man. But after some time, her father regretted having abandoned Christianity. Renouncing Islam, he moved back to Lorca, and then petitioned the town council for help in recovering his daughter for Christianity. After conferring, the civic officials of Vera and Lorca decided that the young woman herself should choose between the two faiths at Fuente de la Higuera. So as the leading men of each community stood arranged by religion on either side of the spring, she was asked where she wanted to go: to the land (*tierras*) of Vera or of Lorca. She elected Vera, a geographical choice announcing her intention to remain a Muslim.<sup>40</sup>

As the stage for many such border transactions between the two towns, the spring at Fuente de la Higuera had much in common with the boundaries between the lands of Christianity and those of Islam that a Muslim pilgrim named Ibn Jubayr encountered at the eastern end of the Mediterranean in 1184. While travelling from areas of Syria under Muslim rule toward territory dominated by the Franks, Ibn Jubayr passed a formidable oak tree. It was, the locals told him, called the ‘tree of measure’ and formed the ‘boundary on this road between security and danger’; ‘Frankish brigands’ preyed upon anyone who ventured even an arm-length beyond its trunk ‘on the Muslim side’, while they spared anyone found on the side facing Christian territory. Later that same day, Ibn Jubayr’s journey took him near a part of the Jordan Valley whose ‘cultivation’, he reported, ‘was divided between the Franks and the Muslims and in it there is a boundary known as “The Boundary of Dividing”. They apportion the crops equally and their animals are mingled together, yet no wrong takes place between them because of it’—the latter an arrangement familiar to the animal herders of Lorca and Vera, as well as to countless others from medieval frontier communities in Granada and Castile who grazed their flocks in the no-man’s land between these Christian and Muslim kingdoms.<sup>41</sup>

The ‘tree of measure’, the ‘boundary of dividing’, and the spring at Fuente de la Higuera all suggest just how little the physical boundaries between Islam and Christendom in the Middle Ages resembled the borders that structure modern international relations. To begin with, no official treaty between Muslim and Christian rulers designated the tree, the spring, and the valley as sites for the articulation of boundaries. It was instead local custom and usage that shaped these natural features of the landscape into privileged places where communities of Christians and Muslims could negotiate relations, neighbourly or hostile. These men and women did so with little sense of a sharp linear border in mind. Today you can walk a few feet and leave Greece for Turkey. But where exactly did Ibn Jubayr pass from Muslim held-Syria into Christian lands? He never says. Indeed, the ‘tree of measure’ around which Christian bandits prowled was itself actually *in* Muslim territory, while the



‘boundary of dividing’ seems to have served more to equitably apportion the fruits of farmers’ labour than to slice the Jordan Valley into two neat halves, Christian and Muslim.<sup>42</sup>

To be sure, in some places a line of markers announced the boundary between Castile and Granada, but these were probably the exception, not the rule. ‘There were no marked boundary stones when the land belonged to Moors and Christians’, remembered the civic officials of the town of Cazorla in the early sixteenth century.<sup>43</sup> And the only line at Fuente de la Higuera on the day the young woman made her choice between Islam and Christianity was the one traced out by the bodies of the Muslims of Vera and the Christians of Lorca arrayed on either side of the spring. As a place where the boundary between Islam and Christendom might be expressed, the spring was in fact rather like the ‘tree of measure’—a point not a line. Indeed, it has recently been suggested that even to understand the boundaries between medieval Islam and Christendom as broad fluid zones rather than as crisp edges imposes too much linearity on the way Muslims and Christians physically organized frontier space.<sup>44</sup>

Even castles—those iconic frontier buildings whose formidable outlines would seem to announce them as defensive bulwarks between Christian and Islamic polities—on closer look embody the non-linear nature of frontier space. Careful examination of the archaeological and written record reveals that in neither Iberia nor the Holy Land did Christian frontier castles constitute a co-ordinated defensive system—a wall—strategically designed to repel the enemy.<sup>45</sup> To be sure, in both high medieval Castile and the thirteenth-century Frankish Levant, castles were more ubiquitous on the frontier than elsewhere in these polities. Yet when popes and Castilian rulers spoke of walls and fences (*murum, vallador, paredes*) protecting Christians and Christian lands from Islam, they usually meant not castles but people (whether warriors or the faithful in general), or Christian cities, or Christian law.<sup>46</sup>

It would indeed have been difficult for castles to form a defensive curtain, since it is questionable whether any one of them actually ‘commanded’ a segment of the frontier. A typical party of Muslim attackers—a small band of raiders rather than a large host—could easily slip by a castle unnoticed under the cover of dark. And when more sizeable groups of Muslim warriors arrived, so lightly garrisoned were the frontier castles of high medieval Castile that their occupants could do little more than raise the alarm to alert cities and towns to the enemies’ presence. A historian who recently scoured the sources to find examples of such castles actually blocking attacks from Granada was unable to discover even one such instance.<sup>47</sup>

Instead of creating a defensive rampart between Christian and Muslim territories, the density of frontier castles in Castile and the Frankish principalities of the Levant represented unsystematic efforts to extend Christian lordship into these contested areas and to render them difficult to conquer; an enemy could take possession of this territory only by laying siege to each and every one of these fortifications, a time-consuming and costly enterprise. Each castle stood at the centre of a circle of lordship whose potency ebbed the farther away one went from it—a spatial model of political power that one historian has suggested could be applied to most medieval Christian polities.<sup>48</sup> So little did frontier castles constitute a defensive wall between Islam and Christendom that ties of friendship might unite a Christian castellan with his Muslim counterpart a few miles away.

The concentric organization of frontier space, whether around natural points in the landscape like the spring at Fuente de la Higuera or the human-made ones of castles, in fact made the physical boundaries between Islamic and Christian lands so porous that they



hardly seem like boundaries at all. To be sure, a licence was officially required for travel between Granada and Castile, but plenty of people (including smugglers) ignored this legal detail. Whether in times of peace or times of war, Muslims and Christians of all sorts moved in and out of each other's territories with surprising ease, weaving a network of interfaith relations that, like San Ginés de la Jara's fame as wonder-worker, spatially joined Islam and Christendom.

Many men and women, whether Muslim or Christian, made these journeys unwillingly as the human spoils of war: captives taken in raids or large-scale expeditions. They could return home if ransomed or exchanged for captives of the other faith, arrangements often made in high medieval Iberia by *alfaques* or *alcaldes entre moros y cristianos*, the officials who handled negotiations between Muslim and Christian frontier towns (Muslim Vera had its own *alfaques* as did Christian Lorca). These men, Muslim and Christian, might meet with each other at recognized boundary places like Fuente de la Higuera to hammer out deals and then hand over relieved captives.

Other Muslims and Christians voluntarily entered each other's lands. Some came from the loftiest ranks of society. Alfonso VI of Leon-Castile, for example, first set foot in the taifa kingdom of Toledo not as its conqueror in 1085, but instead as an exile thirteen years earlier seeking refuge from a violent succession dispute with his brother. Alfonso enjoyed the hospitality of Toledo's ruler, al-Ma'mun, for seven months and then returned north after receiving the welcome news of his brother's assassination. In high medieval Iberia, it indeed became rather a habit for members of the royal family who had fallen out with the reigning king—whether in Granada or Castile—to cross the frontier and temporarily join the court of their Muslim or Christian counterpart. After all, medieval Christian and Muslim monarchs rarely hesitated to enter into formal political agreements—even military alliances—with each other. They honoured each other as belonging to the exclusive club of royalty, whose privileges transcended religious difference.<sup>49</sup>

The entourages of Muslim and Christian kings might also include male aristocrats, as well as less socially distinguished men of war, who had left the land of their co-religionists behind to take paid service with rulers of a different faith. Some of these men converted to their new lord's religion, as did the members of the 'Moorish Guard' employed in the fifteenth century by John II of Castile and his successor Henry IV. But the large corps of Christian mercenaries who fought in the North African armies of the Almoravids and the Almohads in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries generally retained their own faith while serving these Berber dynasties. The numbers of Christian mercenaries living in thirteenth-century Marrakech may even have made the city's Christian community large enough to warrant its own church.

If these mercenaries indeed gathered in a building dedicated to Christian worship, they may have prayed alongside other European members of their faith who came to Islamic lands in pursuit of fame and fortune: merchants. The marketplaces of the Mediterranean—whether Christian or Muslim—bustled with men of commerce from all three monotheistic faiths, who cared more about profit than about their trading partners' religion. Christian merchants from sea powers such as Catalonia, Genoa, Pisa, Amalfi, and Venice could be as at home in the great port cities of the Islamic world as they were in those of the Christian Mediterranean (the many years one adventurous early twelfth-century Pisan trader spent in Cairo even earned him the nickname 'Guido of Babylon').<sup>50</sup> Inland marketplaces too drew traders from across the frontier. Truce agreements between Castile and Granada (of which there were many, especially between the 1350s and the 1460s) typically guaranteed favourable conditions for commerce, setting days and times when Castilian merchants would be welcome in Granada's marketplaces and vice versa.

So important was trade between Muslims and Christians that by the late twelfth century, popes worried that the flow of weapons, wood and iron into the Islamic world facilitated by European merchants was bolstering the Muslims' capacity to resist Christian crusaders. The resulting papal prohibition on selling war matériel to the 'infidel' had little effect, as did the almost total ban on trade with Muslims announced by the pontiff after the fall of Acre in 1291. So many Christian merchants flouted the moratorium that in 1330, the papacy retreated and began a lucrative business selling licences for such cross-faith commerce.

The substantial European Christian merchant communities residing in Muslim cities raised another set of worries for high medieval popes, as did the presence in Islamic lands of European Christian mercenaries and captives: living outside Christendom among the infidel, these Christians faced constant spiritual peril. Hence, the papacy sent priests and friars into Muslim lands to act as shepherds to this dispersed part of the Latin Christian flock. Historians have traditionally understood the Christian preachers who arrived in Morocco and Egypt and other parts of the Islamic Mediterranean lands in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as missionaries burning with evangelical passion for converting the infidel. Many of these men indeed shared Saint Francis' desire to bring Muslims into the Church; the founder of the Franciscans famously voyaged to Egypt in a failed attempt to win its sultan for Christianity. Yet it has recently been suggested that they were primarily responding to pastoral concerns articulated by popes as early as 1192.<sup>51</sup> In that year, Celestine III dispatched a well-educated priest who commanded both Latin and Arabic to Almohad cities in Iberia and North Africa in order to minister to Christians living there. The pope's letter on the subject reveals the concerns that would animate his thirteenth-century counterparts who went so far as to engage in extensive diplomacy with Muslim rulers in an effort to safeguard the souls of Christians residing in Morocco.<sup>52</sup> The priest should, Celestine instructed, comfort those Christians whom he found to be firm in faith and orthodox in practice. But he should chastise those who, 'deceived by any superstition', had mixed with the 'people of darkness' and engaged in 'depraved customs inimical to the catholic faith'.<sup>53</sup> Such perversion of Christian belief and ritual could lead to the ultimate betrayal of the faith: conversion to Islam.

Conversion was in fact one of the rare places where both Christians and Muslims drew a sharp territorial line separating Islam and Christendom. Whether a person's decision to embrace the other faith was received with horror or respect by their former co-religionists, it often involved making the choice between the lands of Islam and those of Christianity that confronted the young woman at Fuente de la Higuera in 1460. Christians who converted to Islam were no more welcome in Christian territory than Muslims who converted to Christianity were in Islamic domains. The geographic consequences of religious choice received ritual form at Fuente de la Higuera over and over again in the fifteenth century, as converts were brought to the spring and faced with the twin rows of dignitaries, one embodying Muslim Vera and the other Christian Lorca.

At Fuente de la Higuera, officials from the two towns could even literally draw the crisp line so often lacking in the medieval understanding and experience of the spatial boundaries between Islam and Christendom. One day, they stooped down and traced a line in the dirt near the spring, then ranged themselves on either side according to their religion. A young boy from Vera, originally a Muslim but now claiming to be a Christian after spending time as a hostage in Lorca, was led forward to stand on the line. Asked to choose between the two faiths, he 'thumbed his nose at the Moors' as he joined 'the people of Lorca'—and Christendom.<sup>54</sup> No mapmaker, medieval or modern, could have captured the line this boy stepped across, for it represented the territorial boundaries between Islam and Christendom

that really mattered: not those between polities, but those marked onto the souls of individual men and women.

# NOTES

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3. Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons and Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 187.
4. For the image, see D. A. Harvey, *Mappa Mundi: The Hereford World Map* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 42. See also Strickland, *Saracens, Demons and Jews*, 166; David B. Leshock, 'Religious Geography: Designating Jews and Muslims as Foreigners in Medieval England', in Albrecht Classen, ed., *Meeting the Foreign in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2002), 202–225 (here 211–212).
5. Alfred Hiatt, 'Mapping the Ends of Empire', in Ananya Jahanara Kabir and Deanne Williams, eds, *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 48–76 (here 60–67).
6. These finished maps accompany Matthew's *Chronica Major* (e.g. <[www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/sacredtexts/images/zoomify/mpariszoom.html](http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/sacredtexts/images/zoomify/mpariszoom.html)>, accessed 7 July 2013). For discussion, see Hiatt, 'Mapping', 61–64; Suzanne Lewis, *The Art of Matthew Paris in the Chronica Majora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 347–364.
7. Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS. 2, fol. 2v; reproduced in Hiatt, 'Mapping', 65, fig. 7. For transcription of the captions, see Reinhold Röhrich, 'Karten und Pläne zur Palästina-kunde aus dem 7. bis 16. Jahrhundert', *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 18 (1895), plate VI.
8. Carlos Gozalbes Craviot, 'La frontera terrestre nazarí en la cartografía medieval', in Francisco Troes Ceballos and José Rodríguez Molina, eds, *II Estudios de Frontera. Actividad y vida en la frontera* (Jaén: Diputación Provincial de Jaén, 1998), 357–370.
9. See, e.g., D. A. Harvey, *Medieval Maps* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), fig. 34 (46–47).
10. Gautier Dalché, 'De la liste', 21–24.
11. Juan Manuel, *El libro de los estados*, eds Ian R. MacPherson and Robert Brian Tate (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 117.
12. *Chronique Prophétique*, cap. 2.2, in *Chroniques Asturiennes (fin IXe siècle)*, ed. Yves Bonnaz (Paris: CNRS, 1987), 3.
13. Andrés Gamba, *Alfonso VI. Cancillería, curia e imperio*, 2 vols (León: Centro de Estudios e Investigación San Isidoro, 1997–98), no. 86, vol. 2, 224–229 (here 227).
14. Barbara F. Weissberger, *Isabel Rules: Constructing Queenship, Wielding Power* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 112.
15. Josep Perarnau I Espelt, 'El text primitiu del *De mysterio cymbalorum ecclesiae* d'Arnau de Vilanova', *Arxiu de textos catalans antics* 7–8 (1988), 7–169 (here 103); Alain Milhou, 'La chauve-souris, le nouveau David et le Roi caché. Trois images de l'empereur des derniers temps dans le monde ibérique (XIIIe–XVIIe siècles)', *Mélanges de la Casa de Velazquez* 18 (1982), 61–78.
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19. See also chapter by Bull, this volume.
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22. Robert the Monk, *Historia Iherosolitana*, cap. 5.2, in *Recueil des historiens des Croisades*, 16 vols (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1841–1906), vol. 3 (*Historiens occidentaux*), 792.
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28. Albert of Aachen, *Historia Ierosolimitana*, ed. and trans. Susan B. Edgington (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), cap. 5.1, 339. For discussion, Christopher MacEvitt, *The Crusades and the Christian World of the East: Rough Tolerance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 100.
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30. Schein, *Gateway to the Heavenly City*, 15; Wilken, *The Land Called Holy*, xv.
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# CHAPTER 7

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# CHRISTIANIZING KINGDOMS

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SVERRE BAGGE

## FROM ROMAN TO ECCLESIASTICAL EMPIRE

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AFTER the breakdown of the west Roman Empire in the fifth century, a new cultural, religious, and ecclesiastical entity was created through the expansion of western Christendom to the north and east. It began with the conversion of England in the seventh century, continued with northern and east central Europe in the following centuries and ended with the conversion of the last pagan principality in Europe, the Duchy of Lithuania, in 1386. In a certain sense, a new empire, based on a common literary language, a common religion, and a common ecclesiastical organization, came into being over this long period. This new empire is a good illustration of the political potential of 'the religions of the book', Christianity and Islam, both of which are based on a revelation from an almighty God and directed to the whole of mankind. Whereas the empires of the ancient world were based on political unity and religious and cultural fragmentation, the new ones included religious and cultural unity, combined either with political fragmentation or, in some cases, such as the late Roman Empire and the Caliphate during the first two centuries of its existence, even with political unity.

The 'new empire'—western Christendom—had its origin in the old empire, that of Rome, which was converted to Christianity during the last phase of its existence. Before that, Christianity had existed as one of many religions of oriental origin for around 300 years. A considerable increase in the number of Christians took place during this period, and the organization as well as the doctrine of the Christian Church underwent an important development. Nevertheless, Christians were still a minority, estimated at around 10 per cent of the population, when Constantine made Christianity the favoured religion in 312. The conversion of the majority of the Roman population was therefore the result of imperial support, which in 395 made Christianity the only lawful religion. During the same period, Christianity also spread outside the Roman Empire, to the Germanic tribes along its northern borders and along the caravan routes to inner Asia. These conversions were largely the result of the activities of the losers in the theological struggles within the Empire and thus resulted in different varieties of Christianity inside and outside the Empire.

The fall of the Roman Empire in the west immediately led to an increased religious division, as most of the Germanic invaders were Arians. However, they did not attempt to impose their religion on the Roman population. Eventually, they either converted to Catholicism, as the Visigoths in Spain did in 589, or succumbed to the Byzantine counter-offensive under Justinian (the Vandals in Africa and the Ostrogoths in Italy). Already from the beginning, however, the Germanic rulers in Gaul formed an exception, as their king, Clovis, converted to Catholicism directly, probably in 496.

Thus, the fall of the Empire in the west did not lead to the fall of Christianity. From point of view of the Church, it might even—in hindsight—be regarded as an advantage, as it liberated the churchmen from imperial control and laid the foundation for the later western system of bishops as lords of towns and the pope as an independent prince and the administrative leader of the whole of western Christendom. By the end of the sixth century,

however, Christianity had not managed to expand outside the borders of the Roman Empire in the west and had lost some of the areas it had controlled some centuries before. The next century brought the great blow to mediterranean Christianity—the Arab conquests—but also a new expansion to the north, which was the beginning of a shift of emphasis, from the Mediterranean to the European lands north of the Alps, eventually linking large areas outside the old Roman Empire with western Christendom.

## MISSION IN WESTERN EUROPE: FROM AUGUSTINE OF CANTERBURY TO BONIFACE

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The first step in this direction was the embassy to England, organized by Pope Gregory I (590–605) and followed by several others, all referred in great detail in Bede's ecclesiastical history. Bede describes in drastic terms the terror of the missionaries leaving for this wild and barbarous people. However, the distance between England and Christian Europe was far less than implied in Bede's account. Christianity was not unknown in England: the western part of the country was still dominated by Christian Celtic kingdoms and even the Anglo-Saxon part of the country was less isolated from the rest of Europe than Bede would have us think. The mission also turned out to be very successful. Although there were setbacks, most of England had become Christian by the second half of the century. When Bede wrote his history in the 730s, he lived in a wealthy and well-established monastery in the north of the country and could look back on a long period of Christian learning and institutions.

What made the English accept Christianity? Bede's comparison of human life with the sparrow flying through the hall in a brief moment, coming from the unknown and returning to the unknown, suggests an existential explanation: a population in deep ignorance, who were willing to accept the teaching of foreigners who claimed knowledge about the origins and aim of human life.<sup>1</sup> This explanation fits in too well with the missionaries' own understanding of the conversion to seem entirely convincing. On the other hand, force was clearly not involved, at least not in the first phase. The missionaries were unarmed clerics and had no military power. However, they brought rich gifts to kings or rulers and represented a power that may have been associated with wealth and high culture. Was the Roman Empire still a reality in the Anglo-Saxon world view of the sixth century? The Anglo-Saxons knew Christianity from the Celts they were fighting. However, conversion to Christianity would seem to have more attraction if the missionaries came from the refined world of the Mediterranean; it might even give the Anglo-Saxon superiority over their Celtic rivals. The Christianity accepted by the Anglo-Saxons was very much *Roman* Christianity, as expressed in the decision at the synod of Whitby in 664 to use the Roman rather than the Irish date of Easter.

The extension of western Christendom to England coincided with an increasing isolation of the various Christian communities from each other, a situation Peter Brown characterizes by the term 'micro-Christendoms', that is a series of Christian communities with different rites, customs, and organization, often believing that their own variety of religion was the correct one, but with little possibility of comparing various traditions or of having exact criteria for what was authentic or not.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the conversion of England (as well as the somewhat earlier conversion of its neighbour to the west, Ireland) did not create a radical break with earlier traditions. Legends of the past and memories of the pagan ancestors were kept alive and although learned monks like Bede wrote extensively in Latin, the vernacular

language was widely used for religious as well as secular purposes. However, the early use of the vernacular in these countries is probably less a result of different religious attitudes than of the simple fact that their northern European languages were radically different from Latin. By contrast, although it was pronounced in different ways in different areas, Latin could still be regarded as the common language in the Romance-speaking countries at this time.

Whatever the motives for the conversion, Christianity clearly had a great impact on English society. By 604 Augustine was able to consecrate two English bishops, and an indigenous clergy as well as monasteries soon developed. Having been converted by missionaries from far-away countries, the English and the Irish themselves became missionaries. It became part of the self-sacrifice of English and Irish monks to leave their own communities and work among foreigners and to spread the message of the Gospel to the pagans.

As in the case of the first missionaries to England, there is no lack of descriptions in the sources of the challenges that the missionaries met among wild and barbarous peoples. Some of them also paid with their lives for their missionary zeal and were later venerated as martyrs, including the most well-known of them, Boniface; although his killers may actually have been robbers rather than pagans resisting Christianity. Nevertheless, the picture of the missionary on his own among pagans totally unacquainted with Christianity is mostly misleading. In most cases, the missionaries had the support of kings or nobles, and the people to whom they preached were often nominally Christian and subjects of these rulers. Usually, in this case as well as in later ones, the peoples visited by missionaries had some knowledge of Christianity from contacts with traders or visits in Christian countries.

## **IMPERIAL CHRISTIANITY: THE CAROLINGIANS**

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Thus, already in the case of the early Irish and Anglo-Saxon mission, there was a link between the missionaries and political authorities. This link became stronger with the rise of the Carolingian empire.<sup>3</sup> The new rulers who took over the Frankish kingdom after the Merovingians, first as the actual rulers, then as kings (from 751) and emperors (from 800) not only extended the borders of the realm but also carried out a considerable internal consolidation. Admittedly, the Carolingian empire was both short-lived and primitive compared to the Byzantine and Arab empires in the east as well as to later European kingdoms, but its rulers had a strong will to impose order and unity on its mixed population, who were spread over a wide area. One of their main instruments in this was Christianity. In addition to the secular divisions of government, the counties, the empire was held together by religious institutions, bishoprics, and monasteries. A series of ordinances (capitularies) were issued from the central government about secular as well as religious matters, in theory binding upon the whole population. The Latin language and the Roman script were revived, classical as well as patristic texts were copied and commented upon, and an extensive Latin literature was produced, contributing to the formation of a homogenous elite, linking the different parts of the empire together. Despite considerable differences, the Roman Empire was clearly the model, but the Carolingian empire was more strongly Christian than its late antique counterpart. A ban against pagan cults was not sufficient; the whole population had to be thoroughly Christian. While the late Roman Empire and for a long time its Byzantine successor did not worry much about the religion of the peoples outside its borders, the Carolingians gave high priority to the spread of Christianity. For the first time force was extensively used to achieve this. A primary example is Charlemagne's



conquest of Saxony in the late eighth century, which went hand in hand with the attempt to convert the Saxons to Christianity. At one point, 3,000 Saxons were executed for failing to bow to Charlemagne and his new religion. Only after thirty years did the Saxons submit, becoming Christian and being integrated in the Empire, where they eventually became a prominent element.

## **THE SECOND WAVE: THE CONVERSION OF SCANDINAVIA AND EAST CENTRAL EUROPE**

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The Carolingian empire and its heritage played a major part in the formation of western Christendom as well as its expansion to the north and west. From now on, secular authorities became strongly engaged in the spread of Christianity and often took initiatives in this direction. Christianization could serve as an instrument of political interests or even military conquest. As the prolonged and costly struggles against the Saxons show, however, there were limits to the number of areas that could be converted in this way. Charlemagne's use of violence against the Saxons may also have had a strategic rather than a religious motive; he was eager to conquer this people just across the border. In other, more distant areas, he and his successors preferred diplomacy. Various attitudes can be detected in the following period, but diplomacy clearly played a more important part in the following expansion of western Christendom than direct military action.

From an early period the Carolingians began missionizing among the Slavs.<sup>4</sup> Charlemagne's victory over the Avars in 795 opened the way for a new Slavic principality, Moravia, situated in the fertile valley in the southeastern part of the present Czech Republic, which was crossed by an important trading route. At the same time, Byzantine missionaries moved in the same direction, which led to competition between the two parts of Christendom. The empire at the time included a large Slavic population in Balkans and Greece, south to the Peloponnesus. The most well-known of the Byzantine missionaries were the brothers Methodius and Constantine (also known as Cyrillus, the name he took when he became a monk shortly before his death), who composed the first alphabet in the Slavic language. In the mid-ninth century, the ruler of Moravia approached Byzantium to convert to Greek Christianity, whereas his Bulgarian counterpart approached the west, both preferring to convert to a distant power to avoid the risk that their conversion led to a loss of independence. In the end, the area did come to be divided geographically, the western part (including Moravia) joining western Christendom and the eastern part (including Bulgaria) joining Byzantium. Both, however, managed to gain concessions in return for their conversion. Like its western counterpart, Byzantine Christianity continued to expand, notably through the conversion of Russia in 988. Despite rivalry between the two parts of Christendom, there was considerable contact between the two, even after the formal breach in 1054. Gradually, however, the relationship deteriorated, to the extent that the Orthodox Christians became a target for western crusades (as we shall see below).

The principality of Moravia was destroyed by the Magyars in 906–907 and its ecclesiastical organization disappeared. It was eventually replaced by a new principality to the northeast, Bohemia, also situated strategically along an important trade route and in addition having access to the wealth from silver mines. Its first Christian ruler was Wenceslas, who received a relic of St Vitus, the patron saint of Saxony, from King Henry I of Germany and built the first church in Prague. Wenceslas—still the national saint of the country—was murdered by his brother Boleslav at the age of nineteen in 929. However,

Boleslav continued to work for Christianity and the consolidation of the principality during his long reign (929–967), even profiting from the sainthood of his murdered brother. The Bohemian rulers established close links with Germany, seeking protection against the Magyars. Four of five bishops of Prague until 1030 were German, and Bohemia remained under the church province of Mainz until 1344, when it became a separate province with the bishop of Prague as archbishop.

Boleslav I married his daughter Dobrava to Duke Miesco of Poland in 964. Two years later, this country also converted to Christianity. Although the pious Dobrava is credited with having converted her husband, the conversion must also be regarded as the result of strong links with Germany. The Ottonians had defeated the Slavs in battles in 929 and 933. Later, Widukind's contemporary chronicle (967/973) depicts Miesco as Otto I's friend and ally, although, surprisingly, without mentioning his conversion to Christianity. The Magyars, who had raided large parts of Europe in the first half of the tenth century, were decisively defeated by Otto I at the Lechfeld, south of Augsburg, in 955. The defeat apparently resulted in the formation of a Hungarian principality, whose first ruler, Geza, approached Christianity and the Ottonians. His son Vaik, later called Stephen (Istvan), converted formally and was crowned king of the country in the year 1000.

Contacts between Danish rulers and the Carolingians began already under Charlemagne. A Danish king, Harald Klak, was baptized in 826, under Charles' successor Louis the Pious, and returned to Denmark with the monk Ansgar, commissioned by the emperor to preach the gospel to the Danes. Although Harald was deposed at his return, Ansgar remained in the country for a long time and also visited Sweden. The result of his mission in terms of people who were converted is uncertain, but it led to the formation of a missionary archdiocese in Hamburg-Bremen in 864, with Ansgar as the first archbishop, which became an important institution later. The final conversion of the Danish monarchy took place at about the same time as that of Poland, in 965, but the Christian influence seems to have been strong in the previous period. Although Denmark was vulnerable to German pressure along its southern border, it was also a formidable sea-power. A united Denmark was able to conquer England in the early eleventh century, and even without unity, Danish Vikings were a great threat to Christian Europe. The need for an alliance with Germany may have been a factor in Denmark's conversion, but hardly because of the fear of a German conquest. The king's need for allies against other countries or internal struggles would seem to have been a more likely motive.

By contrast, the two last of the six countries, Norway and Sweden, were too distant for German pressure to have played any significant part. Instead, Anglo-Saxon England was an important factor. In contrast to Germany, Anglo-Saxon England was a relatively weak power. The Anglo-Saxons were not in a position to force any pagan people to accept Christianity. Insofar as there could be a political explanation for the Anglo-Saxon mission, it must be regarded as a defensive measure, an attempt to pacify the Scandinavian Vikings who raided the British Isles from the late eight to the early eleventh century, ending by conquering the whole of England in 1013–17. The initiative therefore largely came from the Norwegian kings rather than from the Anglo-Saxons. In contrast to Denmark and Sweden—or at least to what we know about Denmark and Sweden—almost all Norwegian kings between c.930 and 1066 came from abroad. They had spent most of their youth in foreign lands, and ascended to the throne because of the wealth and followers they had gained on Viking expeditions or as mercenaries. Thus, the conversion of Norway was not the result of Christian kings or missionaries from other countries invading Norway but of Norwegians invading other countries. There are no narrative sources regarding the conversion of Sweden, but King Olof who ruled in the late tenth and early eleventh century is depicted as

a Christian. There is also archaeological and runic evidence of Christianity from about the same time. Most probably, however, the Christianization of Sweden took longer to achieve than that of the two other Scandinavian countries.

## THE SWORD AND THE BOOK

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Seeing the desired city from afar, he humbly approached barefoot. After being received with veneration by Bishop Unger, he was led into the church where, weeping profusely, he was moved to ask the grace of Christ for himself through the intercession of Christ's martyr. Without delay, he established an archbishopric there, as I hope legitimately, but without the consent of the aforementioned bishop to whose diocese this whole region is subject.<sup>5</sup>

In this way, Thietmar of Merseburg describes Otto III's visit to Gniezno in Poland in the year 1000, only a generation after the country had been converted to Christianity. The conversion was clearly a triumph for Ottonian diplomacy as well as for the German Church, notably the Archbishopric of Mainz, whose territory was greatly extended. Thietmar sympathizes with Otto's humility and veneration of the sacred place he is visiting, the grave of the great missionary Adalbert of Prague, martyred by the Prussians shortly before (in 997), but has reservations about the new archbishopric, which reduced the size and prestige of the province of Mainz. Generally, Thietmar has little positive to say about the newly converted peoples in the east, despite his belief in the necessity of converting the pagans. The Polish and Bohemian kings are thoroughly unpleasant characters, who are unwilling to recognize the German emperor as their superior. Thus conversion is a good thing, but it should be accompanied by subordination to the German emperor. Thietmar's somewhat reserved attitude to Otto III is clearly determined by Otto's positive attitude to the Poles, in contrast to that of the contemporary emperor, Henry II, who was even willing to ally himself with the pagan Liutitzi against the Christian Poles.<sup>6</sup>

The same attitude is expressed in Thietmar's account of the Slavic rebellion in 983, which he regards as God's punishment for the suppression of his own diocese, Merseburg. Regarding the Slavs, he admits that they had been provoked, but does not go into details about this, confining himself to the remark that they had previously accepted Christianity as well as the payment of tribute, but now decided to take up arms.<sup>7</sup> The sentence is significant: Thietmar regards conversion as a part of an imperial project, which is supposed to add new and obedient subjects to the emperor's realm.

Although probably widespread, Thietmar's attitude was not the only one at the time. The canon Adam of Bremen's chronicle about the missionary diocese in the north, Hamburg-Bremen from the 1070s represents a different attitude. Early on, Adam distinguishes between Charlemagne's Christianization by the use of force and 'the souls' spiritual triumphs', to be dealt with in the following work.<sup>8</sup> He also criticizes his fellow-countrymen, including the Saxon dukes, for using the mission as a means to conquer other peoples instead of taking care of their souls. Thus, he is sharper than Thietmar in his criticism of the oppression that led to the Slavic uprising in 983. Oppressed more than was reasonable by their Christian judges, the Slavs were forced to take up arms to defend their liberty.<sup>9</sup> In accordance with this view, Adam mainly emphasizes the work of the missionaries in the conversion of the Scandinavian and Slavic countries.

Without underestimating Adam's genuine zeal for the propagation of Christianity, it must be pointed out that he was in a special position as a canon in a church province on the northern border of Germany which owed its existence to the project of Christianizing the

Danes and the Slavs. Hamburg-Bremen was an archdiocese with no suffragans, as they were to come into existence as the result of a successful missionary activity. The formal establishment of three Danish dioceses in 948 is an expression of this. Moreover, it is also clear from Adam's account that there were vested interests involved. Despite a passage about the equal value of all Christian missions,<sup>10</sup> Adam is generally sceptical of ecclesiastics from other provinces, notably those from England, and he is a staunch defender of the wealth, power, and prestige of Hamburg-Bremen. There are examples of Adam's attitude in other sources as well, for instance in Alcuin's very discreet reservations against Charlemagne's violent conversion of the Saxons.<sup>11</sup> There were also missionaries in the Ottonian period and later who followed in Ansgar's footsteps and went unaided by any political and military power to preach to the pagans, such as Adalbert of Prague and Bruno of Querfurt (d. 1009), who were both killed by the Prussians. Conversion was certainly not only a political project; there was both an ideology and an organization based on the assumption that the conversion of the pagans was an aim in itself, which was likely to suffer as the consequence of conquest and exploitation.

## AT THE RECEIVING END: THE MOTIVES FOR CONVERSION

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Most medieval accounts of conversion are written by monks or clerics and follow the pattern of Bede, regarding the obvious truth and superiority of the Christian religion and God's intervention as the main factors. Modern scholars are more inclined to focus on political motives on the part of kings and rulers who accepted Christianity, which seems reasonable enough, as long as we are aware that contemporary pagans as well as Christians were equally convinced of the existence of a supernatural world. However, such a belief is entirely consistent with choices based on interest and calculation. First, there was hardly a sharp distinction between the religious and the secular sphere in the early middle ages, certainly not in paganism and considerably less in Christianity than in later ages.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, success in the secular field might easily be transferred to the religious one, and God could be used as a political ally in a similar way as earthly rulers. Secondly, it must be noted that contemporary religion was not an objective system of dogma, but rather intensely personal, so that there was a strong connection between attachment to a leader and attachment to his gods. And thirdly, what is to be explained in this case is not a complete cultural and religious change, but the official introduction of Christianity through the ruler's and the elite's formal acceptance of the new religion.

From the point of view of the converted peoples, the neighbours of Germany seem to have had the strongest incentive, the need for gaining the friendship or avoiding the enmity of the powerful ruler of this country. In addition, a connection with imperial Germany may have presented similar attractions as the papal embassy did to the Anglo-Saxons in the early seventh century, the attraction of a civilization that was regarded as superior. During the last centuries, the Christianization of the world outside Europe forms part of the western dominance over the rest of the world, and westerners' enormous technological and organizational superiority must have been a strong motive for conversion. The gap between Christians and pagans was considerably less in the early middle ages. The wealth, culture, and technology of the pagans should not be underestimated. Adam of Bremen states that Jumne, the Viking town near Rügen, was the largest in the world.<sup>13</sup> Militarily, the pagans, including Scandinavians as well as Slavs and Hungarians, had been superior until the tenth



century and might still be dangerous enemies in the following period. Nevertheless, one may imagine that pagan visitors to Carolingian and Ottonian Europe were impressed by the beauty and splendour of churches, monasteries, palaces, and religious and royal ceremonial. There is also evidence that missionaries argued in such terms, pointing out (as did Bishop Daniel of Winchester to Boniface) that the best and most fertile lands were inhabited by Christians, whereas the pagans were confined to the outskirts.<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, adopting Christianity might also mean a danger, given Germany's strength and imperial ambitions. One possibility to counteract this would be to play on the rivalry between the two Christian empires, Byzantium and Germany; another would be to bypass the Germans and go directly to the pope. The balance of power in diplomatic negotiations is well illustrated by a comparison between the three newly converted principalities in the east. Stephen of Hungary received the royal crown as well as an archbishopric from Otto III, and Boleslaw of Poland an archbishopric but no crown until he proclaimed himself king in 1025, whereas the ruler of Bohemia was not fully recognized as king until 1198, and no archbishopric was erected until 1344. Hungary's success is easily explained by the fact that this country was situated in the middle between eastern and western Christendom and might turn to the east if the west did not prove sufficiently accommodating. Under Otto III, Boleslaw's Poland was a strong principality and a valuable ally against the Elbe Slavs who had shaken off the German yoke in 983 and were still unconquered. Bohemia was closest to Germany and least likely to force the German king to make concessions. The creation of a separate Scandinavian archdiocese in Lund in Denmark in 1104 may be explained by papal interests during the Investiture Contest, as the Archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen was an adherent of the emperor.

In contrast to Germany's neighbours, the countries converted from England were less in need of considering pressure from abroad, except that the influence of Denmark may have played a part in the case of Norway and Sweden, and influence from Norway in the case of Iceland. It is also more uncertain to what extent these peoples felt inferior to the European kingdoms. On the one hand, they probably admired towns, monumental buildings, and the wealth of palaces and monasteries abroad; on the other, they had no reason to feel inferior militarily, at least not until after the Norman conquest of England in 1066. In any case, it seems that internal factors were more important in the case of these countries.

The Old Norse sources, composed by laymen or clerics, but mostly for a lay audience, are exceptional in giving a more secular account of Christianization than those of most other countries. The oldest and probably the most reliable of them is the story of the conversion of Iceland in the year 1000, probably written in the 1120s by Ari the Wise (1068–1148), an Icelandic cleric, and the earliest saga writer whose work has been preserved. According to Ari, the popular assembly, the Allþing, accepted Christianity after a short period of sharp opposition between the Christian and the pagan party. The final decision was worked out by the lawspeaker (the man responsible for remembering the laws), who was himself a pagan: Christianity should be accepted as the official religion, but the pagans should not be prevented from practising their religion in secret. The argument for this decision was that division in society over such a matter would make life intolerable.<sup>15</sup> This shows a remarkably pragmatic attitude to the supernatural. There are no miracles and no Christian arguments that make the pagan see their errors and convert. Religious division is clearly conceived as a major problem, a problem that eventually leads the pagans to sacrifice their own public cult in the interest of peace. Ari's story is of course no eyewitness account but is probably relatively trustworthy, based on the narrative of Teitr, born around 1050 and the son of Iceland's first bishop. The pragmatism of the story is



actually an argument in its favour, as it is difficult to imagine that such a conversion story was invented in Christian times.

Apart from a brief reference to the preaching of a German priest, Tangbrand, and pressure from the Norwegian king Olav Tryggvason, Ari gives no explanation as to why people converted to Christianity in the first place. Nevertheless, the story points to an explanation for the victory of Christianity once it had started to gain adherents. Christianity was an intolerant religion that could not be adapted to the old one in the way new gods and cults might be added to the existing pantheon in ethnic religions. Admittedly, there may have been some syncretism in the beginning, but sooner or later the Christians would claim religious monopoly. Such a claim was also likely to be raised at an earlier stage in a small and closely knit community like early eleventh-century Iceland, but may have been of some importance elsewhere as well.

However, the later Norwegian conversion stories show considerable differences.<sup>16</sup> Here the king is in focus, travelling all over the country and negotiating at the popular assemblies to make the people convert. In some cases, even arguments and counter-arguments are presented. The arguments are not particularly theological: they are about what people should do rather than what they should think. They should abstain from pagan cult practices and from meat on Fridays and work on Sundays. The pagan counter-argument is that the Christians will turn everything upside down and make people behave differently from their ancestors. A furious local chieftain gets great acclaim from his audience when he accuses the king of forbidding them to eat and to work.

It is unlikely that these stories are based on any authentic evidence from the pagan period, as they only occur in sources from the first half of the thirteenth century. Nevertheless, this way of characterizing the difference between paganism and Christianity may tell something of popular psychology which may also have been there in the pagan period. Some other stories, more likely to be authentic, add to the picture. The king's personal charisma is of great importance. Gaining his friendship is an important motive for conversion. According to the sagas, the first great missionary king, Olav Tryggvason (king 995–1000) won some of the greatest magnates for Christianity by letting them marry his sisters and others by rich gifts and the offer of his friendship. A good relationship to a successful king is an immense asset for an ambitious local chieftain, the key to wealth as well as power. Characteristically, the two main missionary kings, Olav Tryggvason and St Olav Haraldsson (king 1015–30) are both described as powerful and charismatic figures, both bringing with them plenty of gold and silver from Viking raids and mercenary service abroad. Thus, intellectual conviction was probably secondary to personal attraction. In a way, this may also be transferred to the relationship to the Christian God as well, regarded as a powerful patron in a similar way as the missionary kings, as sometimes expressed in the skaldic poetry of the period. Here we also find the fear of Hell, which may have been an important motive once people started to think that there might be something in the missionaries' message.

The exact motives for the kings, not only to convert but also to impose the new religion on their peoples, are impossible to detect, but we can at least point to some advantages in the new religion for an ambitious ruler. It would appear that religion and political power were closely connected in the pagan period. There was apparently no professional priesthood. Chieftains acted as both political and religious leaders. The cult consisted in large sacrificial parties where the local population gathered for common eating and drinking on the estate of some chieftain. We may imagine that the position of chieftain was not particularly stable; there probably was competition between several leading men for local power. Nor did the pagan religion give any incentive to strong leadership, although it did

not directly prevent it. Most importantly, a pretender coming from abroad would be at a disadvantage in such a competition, which was likely to be won by the well-established chieftains at home.

By contrast, Christianity was a unitary religion, with one God, an explicit doctrine, and a cult that was the same in its main outline all over Christendom and administered by a professional clergy. Although the king was not necessarily the head of this organization, he had considerable control over it in the early middle ages, notably in a country where Christianity was a new religion. Thus, Christianity had a centralizing effect, not only because of the character of its organization and belief system but also in being a new religion. This gave the king the opportunity to replace a number of powerful chieftains with men loyal to himself who, as protagonists of the new religion, needed his support. In other words, the change of religion made it possible for the king to emerge as the leader of a 'party' with relatively strong loyalty to himself. It is significant that the sources occasionally draw the parallel between the rule of one king and the belief in one god, thus indicating the logical connection between the new religion and larger political entities. There seems often, although not always, to have been a connection between the two.

Although we have less direct information from other countries, similar factors probably also applied there. Christian countries and above all Germany might be a model for ambitious rulers who had established themselves as lords over larger territories, such as the princes of Poland, Bohemia, Hungary, and the Scandinavian countries. Generally, there seems to be a close chronological connection between Christianization and the emergence of kingdoms. Poland and Hungary are clear examples of this: in both cases, the first king or ruler was also the one who converted to Christianity. Miesco, who introduced Christianity in Poland, was also the founder of the duchy. Geza, who founded the kingdom of Hungary, also took the first steps towards Christianity, while his son Vajk/Stephen instituted Christianity in the kingdom. Both the introduction of a new religion under the ruler's protection and the establishment of a central cult place for the whole realm through the creation of a national saint contributed to political centralization. The canonization of St Stephen in Hungary and St Wenceslas in Bohemia are examples of this. Although Poland for a long time lacked a royal saint, the cult of St Adalbert in Gniezno played a similar role.

The situation in Denmark, Sweden, and Bohemia is somewhat more complex, but even here there are strong connections between the two processes. A close connection between conversion and the formation of the realm seems likely in the case of Bohemia, although we cannot be absolutely sure about the size and importance of the principality before Wenceslas and Boleslav. Denmark may possibly be an exception, as archaeological evidence suggests a united principality already in the sixth century, although hardly with a continuous existence until the ninth and tenth centuries, when we have written sources. It is also disputed whether the Danish kings we meet in Carolingian sources actually ruled the whole of the later kingdom or only parts of it, and to what extent there was a real dynasty at the time. It is therefore possible to argue that Harald Bluetooth, who fulfilled the conversion of the country, was the first king in the real sense and the founder of the dynasty which continued to rule until 1387. The case of Sweden is also open to discussion, but here Christianization seems to have come first; the real unification of the country may have taken place as late as around 1250. Concerning Norway, the sagas attribute its unification to Harald Finehair in the late ninth and early tenth century, but according to most modern scholars, he only controlled western Norway. The first ruler controlling the whole country is therefore likely to have been St Olav, who admittedly was defeated by the Danes, but whose sainthood was an important asset for his successors who established Norway as an independent country. Even Denmark and Sweden eventually got their royal saints, although

St Cnut in Denmark (d. 1086) and St Erik in Sweden (d. 1160) did not have the same importance in the consolidation of the kingdoms. Whatever the reasons for individual kings to embrace Christianity, conversion is an important factor in the formation of the new kingdoms in northern and east central Europe.

## **THE THIRD PHASE: MISSION AS CRUSADE, 1150–1386**

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During the first two phases of Christianization, the area of western Christendom had doubled in size, although not in number of people—the new areas were still less densely populated than the old ones. From a political point of view, the expansion had only to a limited extent increased the size of the existing Christian kingdoms; its main effect was to have created a series of new kingdoms, governed by indigenous rulers and an indigenous clergy.

The last phase of the expansion differed markedly from the previous ones. Around 1150 a new movement started at the eastern border of western Christendom, aiming at conquering and converting the remaining pagan peoples along the shores of the Baltic Sea. The various missionary methods discussed previously, preaching and diplomacy, were replaced or subordinated to a massive military offensive, proclaimed as crusades.<sup>17</sup> The tension between genuine missionaries, like Ansgar or Adam of Bremen, and imperialists, like Thietmar of Merseburg, disappeared, or the former category was submerged in the latter. Most of the southern and eastern shore of the Baltic Sea was conquered by knights, soldiers, or merchants from the west, with ideological support from the Church, and a large part of the indigenous population became serfs under western landowners. Whereas in earlier phases of Christianization, the missionaries were soon replaced by an indigenous clergy, the clergy in these areas, particularly the higher clergy, continued to be foreigners, mostly German. Admittedly, there were exceptions, pagan princes who wisely saw what was going to happen and converted while it was still possible to make a deal with the conquerors, such as Vratislav of Pommerania and Pribislav of Mecklenburg.<sup>18</sup> Both were able to leave their principalities to their descendants for many centuries, the latter until the proclamation of Germany as a republic in 1918. Nevertheless, the general picture differs markedly from that of the previous period.

An important explanation of this is the development of the crusading ideology.<sup>19</sup> Traditionally, the Christian Church had been opposed to the use of arms, but this gradually changed after it became part of the political establishment. Still, violence was regarded as a necessary evil and the contemplative life of the monk as the ideal Christian life. This changed with the Gregorian reform movement from the late twelfth century which developed the idea of an active intervention from the Church in secular society and the mobilization of the laity, notably the secular aristocracy, for the cause of Christianity. Pope Urban II's speech in Clermont in 1095, which launched the First Crusade, forms a breakthrough of the new ideology. The crusading ideology was further developed in the following period, notably in Bernard of Clairvaux's propaganda in favour of the Second Crusade, which took place in 1147–49. Moreover, the crusading ideology was also institutionalized. Special indulgences were given to crusaders, who were also promised to go directly to heaven if they were killed in battle against the pagans. Special taxes were levied for the crusades, and crusading kings were even allowed to tax the clergy for this purpose. Last but not least, new religious orders were organized whose members were to live in celibacy as monks with the duty to fight the pagans. Bernard was an eager adherent

of this idea, and there was a close connection between the Cistercians and the Templars and other military orders, both of whose members were often recruited from the aristocracy.

The aim of the crusades was originally the Holy Land, but the crusading ideology was soon transferred to other areas as well, the reconquest of Spain and the conquest and Christianization of the Baltic region. The same indulgences and privileges were granted to people fighting in these regions, and several military orders were founded with the purpose of fighting the pagans. The most of important of them was the Teutonic Order, originally founded in Palestine in 1190, which moved to Europe during the decline of the Kingdom of Jerusalem in the thirteenth century and established its headquarter in Marienburg near Danzig in 1309. In addition, north German rulers and the kings of Denmark and Sweden as well as numerous knights from western Europe engaged in the conquest of the Baltic. Whereas earlier, secular powers had often been reluctant to engage in missionary activity, because they preferred to exploit the pagans rather than giving them rights as fellow Christians, they could now combine the two, fighting for Christianity while at the same time gaining new land and subjects to cultivate it and pay taxes to them. Admittedly, Christian doctrine forbade forced conversions. Although this doctrine remained in place, it was weakened by various reservations. In particular, it did not apply to people who had already been Christians but lapsed from the faith. In many cases, the pagans in the Baltic converted fairly easily as a consequence of a Christian show of force, but went back to their traditional religion as soon as the missionaries had left. They were then lawful targets for new crusades. Eventually, the crusades were directed not only against the pagans but against Christians of another persuasion, in the Baltic the Orthodox Russian, who in the fourteenth century were attacked as schismatic or heretics.

In addition to the new ideology, there are economic and demographic explanations, increased population and increased need for new land. The crusades were also accompanied by urbanization. A series of new towns were established along the southern and eastern shore of the Baltic Sea, from Lübeck in the west to Reval (now Tallinn) in the east, near present-day St Petersburg. These towns, organized in the powerful Hanseatic League, became exporters of merchandise from the area to the growing markets in western Europe, luxury goods like furs, honey, and amber of which there was plenty in these areas, and in increasing quantities grain from the manors run by the conquering Christian lords. Thus, we are dealing with one of the early examples of European colonization.

Finally, there is also the question of relative strength. Already in the tenth century, the Germans were superior to their eastern and northern neighbours in military technology; their castles and heavy armour enabled Ottonian armies to defeat numerically superior enemies. However, the technological gap was not so great that it could not be overcome by adaptation; nor was it sufficient to allow a German conquest of the neighbouring areas.<sup>20</sup> The technological difference was approximately the same in the following period, except that the technology of fortification had taken a considerable step forward. Once more, however, the indigenous people could and did adopt the western technology. More important from this point of view is organization. The great difference between the Slavs east of the Elbe and their neighbours to the north and south was that the latter were organized in large principalities. Economically, the Elbe Slavs were apparently superior to their neighbours until well into the twelfth century through their control of trade links between east and west, but politically, the lack of a united principality was a weakness that contributed to their downfall. Admittedly, neither did the Christians represent a united front. Nevertheless, there was a greater degree of unity among the Christians than the pagans. Thanks to the crusades, organized by the papacy, the Christian princes could mobilize manpower and resources from all over Europe for the struggle to convert pagans. In this

way, they succeeded in pushing the borders of western Christendom from the Elbe to Narva and significantly increase the number of Christian principalities and towns.

The importance of organization can also be illustrated by the great exception to the European success in the Baltic, the principality of Lithuania, which remained pagan until 1386. Lithuania may have had some natural advantages, such as relative isolation and difficulty of access, but it was clearly well organized, with a stable dynasty that held power over a long period, at least from the early thirteenth century onwards. Part of its population was Christian, but the governing elite remained pagan. The Lithuanian dukes also showed considerable diplomatic skill in dealing with their Christian neighbours, announcing their intention of converting, either to Catholic or Orthodox Christianity, thus playing the two Christian churches off against one another. One of them actually converted in the thirteenth century, but renounced Christianity soon afterwards. Christian pressure seems to have increased by the mid-fourteenth century, after the Teutonic Order had bought Estonia from Denmark in 1343 and was thus encircling the Duchy. Then a great opportunity turned up. The king of Poland died without a male heir, and the Poles sought for a new king who could marry the late king's daughter. The crown was offered to Duke Jogaila (Jagiello, in Polish) of Lithuania who converted, married Queen Hedwig (Jatwiga) and joined the two countries in a union. This also put an end to the threat from the Teutonic Order and not long after led to their crushing defeat in the battle of Tannenberg (1410) which permanently ended their expansion.

## **THE FORMATION OF WESTERN CHRISTENDOM**

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Between the early seventh and the later fourteenth century, western Christendom had expanded until it covered an area approaching the size of the Roman Empire. Without forming a political unity, it had many of the characteristics of an empire. It had a common religion, not only Christianity as such, but its western variety under the leadership of the pope. How homogenous the empire was in this respect and how much 'official' Christianity had penetrated the whole area, remains an open and much discussed question; but at least at the level of the elite, there was considerable unity. This unity was not only religious, as Christianization brought with it a whole package of culture and learning: art and architecture of churches and monasteries, to some extent town planning, the Latin language and the classical literature in this language, pagan as well as Christian, and Roman and canon law and legal method. The centres of higher learning that developed in England, France, Italy, and Spain in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the universities, attracted students from the whole area, and after 1350, new universities were founded in most of the new countries of western Christendom. However, the Christian religion did not only create a cultural unity, but also an organizational one. The western Church took over the organization that had emerged during the first centuries after Christ, based on bishops and dioceses, and developed it further, far more than the corresponding organization of the east. As often pointed out, the medieval Church had many of the characteristics of a state, with a well-developed bureaucracy, a territorial organization covering the whole of western Christendom, jurisdiction, taxation, and even to some extent military forces. This means that it was also a crucial factor in state formation, making the individual kingdoms more organized and bureaucratic than they would otherwise have been. In addition, it served as a model for secular rulers. From this point of view, the question whether the kingdoms developed before or after Christianization becomes of limited importance. What needs to be explained in the case of the kingdoms is not primarily their rise, but their continued



existence. It is not too difficult for an energetic and ruthless ruler to conquer a large area, but in most cases such kingdoms dissolve after the conqueror's death. A permanent kingdom needs organization, law, and ideology, which the Church was able to provide in the middle ages. As the example of Lithuania shows, the Church was not the only organization that could provide this, nor were all the kingdoms that developed after the conversion equally successful and permanent; but in most cases, Christianization was of crucial importance.

Thus, the story told in this chapter about the wave of conversions in the middle ages is not primarily about the conversion of existing kingdoms but of their *creation*, and thus is not only about parts of Europe replacing one religion with another, but largely about the formation of Europe as we know it today.

## NOTES

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1. Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), II.13.
2. Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 355–397.
3. Richard Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe: From Paganism to Christianity 371–1386 ad* (London: Fontana Press, 1997), 193–227; [Brown, Rise](#), 434–462. See also [Nelson](#), this volume.
4. See [Fletcher, Conversion](#), 327–450; and Nora Berend, ed., *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
5. *Thietmari Merseburgensis episcopi Chronicon*, ed. Robert Holzmann, MGH SRG IX (Berlin: Weidmann, 1955), IV.45; translation in David A. Warner, ed. and trans., *Ottonian Germany: The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 183.
6. Sverre Bagge, *Kings, Politics, and the Right Order of the World in German Historiography c. 950–1150* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 134–37.
7. [Thietmari, III](#), 17.
8. Magistri Adam Bremensis, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, ed. Bernhard Schmeidler, MGH SRG 2 (Hannover & Leipzig: Hahn, 1917), I. 9.
9. [Adam, Gesta](#), II. 42.
10. [Adam, Gesta](#), II. 37.
11. [Fletcher, Conversion](#), 220–222.
12. See also [Koziol](#), this volume.
13. [Adam, Gesta](#), II. 22.
14. [Fletcher, Conversion](#), 242–243.
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16. Sverre Bagge, ‘Christianization and State Formation in Early Medieval Norway’, *Scandinavian Journal of History* 30 (2005), 107–34; idem, ‘The Making of a Missionary King: the Medieval Accounts of Olaf Tryggvason and the Conversion of Norway’, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 105 (2006), 473–513.
17. Eric Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades: the Baltic and the Catholic Frontier of Europe 1100–1525* (London: Macmillan, 1980); Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950–1350* (London: Penguin, 1993); and Ane Bysted et al., *Jerusalem in the North: Denmark and the Baltic Crusades, 1100–1522* (Turnout: Brepols 2010).
18. [Bartlett, Making](#), 274–278, 297.
19. See also [Bull](#), this volume.
20. [Bartlett, Making](#), 70–84.

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# CHAPTER 8

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# MONASTIC LANDSCAPES AND SOCIETY

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WENDY DAVIES

## MONASTIC ESTABLISHMENT AND GROWTH

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THE image of a desert landscape repeatedly colours the view of early monasticism that was expressed in the central middle ages. Not the vast deserts of north America, with their brilliant colours and dramatic landforms, but the rocky deserts of the Near East, with their sandscapes and rock-strewn plains and their proximity to the great cities of antiquity. Monasticism was seen to have had an origin in the flight from urban culture, in rejection of civic values and of a pre-occupation with business—money making, profit, bargaining, gossip, to and fro, daily cares. In part this was a legitimizing image, simply a sought past, a past that suited contemporary values, but in part it was a reflection of what had happened. Many did go to the desert, from at least the early third century. Anastasius's later fourth-century Life of the desert monk St Antony, circulating in Greek in the Byzantine Empire and for the west translated into Latin by Evagrius, is one of the most influential of texts of the middle ages.<sup>1</sup> Antony went to the Egyptian desert round about 285 ad, supplied with food by villagers in the early days and later, when he went to his mountain, cultivating some grain himself and weaving baskets in return for food. The emphasis of the Life is on solitude, although even in this text there were clearly plenty of 'monks' around, living in groups.

The desert here was the desert on the edge of civilization, like the deserts of Israel and Jordan, the 'wilderness' of the New Testament. City life was not that far away; there was a market for the ropes, mats, and baskets that the ascetics made; there were rural communities close by to bring bread, or even olives and pulses, such as those brought to Antony when he was old.

The notion of desert monasticism was transmitted to the western world by occasional personal contacts but overwhelmingly through the dissemination of writings about it. Evagrius's translation of the Life of Antony was especially important but there were also the cenobitic ideas conveyed by the *Institutes* of Cassian (an Egyptian who settled in Marseille), and by the *Dialogues* and *Life of Saint Martin of Tours* by Sulpicius Severus, all of the early fifth century.<sup>2</sup> These circulated as far west as Ireland, where Egyptians could be explicitly invoked in early medieval texts and 'desert' words abound for eremitic sites; hence the 'seven Egyptian monks in Dísert Uilaig [now Dundesert, Co. Antrim]' of the Irish Litany of Saints and the *díseart/dísert* place-names which locate some early monastic settlements across the landscape of Ireland: Hogan counted about 500 references to names of which it forms a part, like Dísert Diarmata plundered by Vikings in 842; and the well-known Dysart O Dea, Co. Clare, formerly Dísert Tola, a hermitage believed to have been founded by Bishop Tóle of Clonard (d. 738).<sup>3</sup> The idea of eremitic monasticism also runs through Carolingian literature: 'what good are the roughness and silence ... of the desert (*heremo*), if wicked urges rage within, and vices pervert the spirit'. Abbot Adalhard of Corbie was even referred to as 'our Antony'.<sup>4</sup> In the Near East the desert had supplied the physical context for those who had withdrawn: in opposition to the city but defined by the



city, it was not totally remote or completely cut off, and it was not without resources. In its early medieval realizations it provided the spiritual context for the most admired of monastic values; yet even Abbot Adalhard was a man of management and his 'Statutes' of 826 deal in a practical way with the running of the complex economy of a very large monastery.<sup>5</sup>

In the busier world of the central middle ages, the desert notion had another kind of impact: monasteries might create deserts in order to have a place for withdrawal, as the Cistercians were accused of doing in twelfth-century England; Walter Map accused them of relentless avarice, of making a solitude if they could not find one, destroying villages and churches and condemning the dispossessed to die of starvation.<sup>6</sup> This was an extreme view but there was a touch of truth in it: straightforward reorganization of the landed space by monastic landowners, by the absorption and regrouping of small properties, could lead to desertion by its former inhabitants. In clearing away the practices of traditional agriculture, the new landlords created the conditions for development: consolidated blocks of arable allowed more efficient cultivation while the great sheep runs of Wales and northern England laid the basis for the wool industry of the later middle ages, though already profitable by the late twelfth century. Deliberate creation of eremitic solitudes had its eastern expressions too, as the monks on Patmos in the Aegean Sea overturned the grazing rights of the villagers of Leros in the late eleventh century, reserving them exclusively for themselves on the grounds that their solitude must be preserved.<sup>7</sup>

Long before that, all over Europe and in the Byzantine Empire, monasteries—as corporate bodies—were accumulating landed property.<sup>8</sup> People gave land to monasteries for reasons of piety or because they wanted to secure a burial plot or lasting commemoration. But people also gave land to monasteries to discharge debts, to give thanks for assistance, to pay fines and compensations for offences committed, to secure legal or economic support, or to join a potentially beneficial network. Where collections of charters have been preserved, or copied, we can track these donations, although—since we are dependent on the (often chance) survival of the records—we will never recover the whole picture: apparently low donation rates can simply be the consequence of loss of archive; higher donation rates may not necessarily indicate the most favoured institutions. However, some collections are exceptional and everything suggests that they point to exceptional acquisitions. In the region of the middle Rhine, hundreds of donations were made to popular monasteries like Lorsch and Fulda, especially from the middle of the eighth century until the mid-ninth; Lorsch was founded in 764 by a local nobleman called Cancor and his widowed mother on a family estate; these were powerful benefactors but the foundation attracted many local donations—over a hundred every year for the first five years—from village landowners.<sup>9</sup> In Switzerland too the monastic foundation at Saint Gall, south of Lake Constance, by Aleman notables round about 719, was followed by endowments from local, small-scale landowners as well as from aristocrats, especially in Rhaetia (to the south east) and Alemannia itself; 869 charters recording transactions of pre-920 survive.<sup>10</sup> In Brittany endowment of the monastery of Redon, founded in 832, again followed a similar pattern: the foundation came from local aristocrats, and attracted very high-level Breton and Carolingian royal patronage within the next twenty years, but here it was peasant villagers who were the striking benefactors: they gave small-holdings, particularly in the 860s, when, as in many other places, they frequently received them back for rent; in other words, the donors continued to work their plots but they now had to pay rent from them.<sup>11</sup> In the East many of the endowments of the monasteries of Athos and of Cappadocia, in Asia Minor, also came from locals. In northern Spain and Portugal the pattern has some similarities but

was different. As in all parts, there were major gifts from kings and from great and lesser aristocrats—on occasion gifts of many estates, like those of the woman Jimena, who in 985 gave sixteen estates to the monastery of Sahagún (Sahagún was on the *meseta*—the high plains of central Spain—but the properties stretched from the north coast through the Cantabrian Mountains to the Cea valley nearby). There was also significant giving by peasants, but here the gifts were not so much of complete small holdings but of a field here or an orchard there or a fraction of a plot; very little leasing back is recorded, and there was almost nothing of the precarial grant. We have no evidence of eighth- and ninth-century giving comparable to that in the Frankish Empire and it is the mid-930s before peasant donation really begins to show in the record. Even within Iberia, though, there was quite considerable regional variation: in the tenth century, while peasant donation constituted as much as 35 per cent of giving in the Castilian collection of the monastery of Cardena and 27 per cent in the collections of León, it was as little as 10 per cent in that of Galician Sobrado (though this may of course reflect surviving records and not necessarily the totality of past experience).<sup>12</sup>

Giving land to monasteries (and churches too) is a particular characteristic of the early middle ages, especially from the mid-eighth century onwards, and continued until the end of our period, but it was not a constant: in the case of Redon, by the late 880s the cycle of giving was over. In Italy gifts to the monastery of Pratiaglia, in the Tuscan Appennines, founded by 1001, reached a high point in the 1020s and 1030s, and then began to drop off, with very few charters recording donations after 1090. A man called Boso, of the small settlement of Ornina, about 20 km to the south, made seven gifts to Pratiaglia, including a private church and his own house, which he leased back from the monastery, and family and neighbours made further gifts in the period 1027–34; the leasing back of gifted land was common here.<sup>13</sup> All over Europe there were often phases of giving for several decades after foundation or renewal, perhaps marked by the translation of the relics of a notable saint, like the arrival of Saint Nazarius at Lorsch from Rome; and there were phases of giving from one region for a period, perhaps succeeded—if the monastery had a widespread reputation—by a phase from a different region. But after a flurry of giving, donation might fade away.

Property was not only acquired by receiving gifts. Monasteries bought and exchanged lands too, although there are not so many records of purchase from northern Europe as there are from the south. But the abbot of Redon in Brittany was buying interests in the salt pans of coastal Guérande from the late 850s, a generation after the foundation, clearly for commercial purposes for this was the abbot who took goods to the markets of Tours to sell. Sales occur in the Italian corpus from earlier and later dates: the acquisitions of the monastery of Camaldoli in the eleventh century included almost as many purchases as gifts. In the Spanish case acquisition by purchase is a characteristic of some but by no means all monasteries: as was the case throughout the Christian world, strategy and experience varied enormously. The monastery of Sahagún is the most striking because acquisition by purchase outweighs acquisition by gift for most decades of the tenth century; the community was deliberately accumulating property in the different landscapes of selected areas, from mountainside to river valley. Celanova, in Galicia, by contrast, was very active in purchasing peasant properties in the 960s but much less so in other decades; Cardena, in Castile, was actively buying inland salt pan and water rights in the 980s, but at few other times.<sup>14</sup> There was acquisition by exchange too, that is exchange of one plot of land or of one estate for another. In Spain this was a relatively rare occurrence. Italy was quite a different case, however, and in some parts of the north exchange transactions were extremely common, especially from the mid-tenth century: over 30 per cent of recorded

transactions in Piedmont and 25 per cent in Lombardy were exchanges but there were very few in Lazio and in the Byzantine south. Where exchanges were common in Italy, there was a tendency for them to benefit ecclesiastical parties: a church or monastery could well get more than it gave. Fewer transactions tend to be recorded as exchange in northern Europe but numbers from Freising are high, as indeed are those from the whole of Bavaria, especially in the second half of the ninth century.<sup>15</sup>

Whether a transaction was recorded as gift, sale, or exchange partly depended on local scribal practice and the texts need careful analysis if the transactions they record are to be properly understood; there were genuine differences between gift, sale, and exchange but they are not always obvious at first reading. Whatever the mode of acquisition, by 1100 there were monasteries with extremely substantial portfolios of property. One can overstate this: there were small and poor monasteries too; we should not imagine an unvarying landscape of great monasteries with vast lands. In eastern Brittany, there were at least two additional independent small monasteries within the community of Bains, where the large establishment of Redon lay, places supported by a few cultivable fields and intermittent offerings from the faithful, as continued to be the case for several centuries in the western tradition. In the eastern world, there were monasteries of fewer than ten monks and there were cave monasteries in Cappadocia; the emperor Nikephoros Phokas himself drew attention to monasteries that could barely survive and there are hagiographic stories of monks who lived by cultivating a tiny plot of beans or grain.<sup>16</sup> However, the more prosperous monasteries had remarkable accumulations: by the late ninth century, the monastery of Redon had some property in every community that lay within a surrounding zone of 30 × 55 km. The great monasteries of the Carolingian Empire had even more: by the mid-ninth century that of Saint-Germain-des-Prés had properties across an area of 125 × 175 km in the Paris basin and that of Prüm across an area of 350 × 500 km, from Frisia to Hesse.<sup>17</sup> In Spain, by 1000 the lands of Sahagún stretched across 150 km from north to south. In the Byzantine Empire Nikephoros Phokas issued a new law in 964 condemning the avarice that led to excessive accumulation of monastic property: ‘they have turned ... to the care of acquiring each day thousands of measures of land, superb buildings, innumerable horses, oxen, camels and other cattle, making the life of the monk no different from that of the layman with all its vain preoccupations’.<sup>18</sup> In England, on the basis of the Domesday survey, it has been calculated that almost a sixth of total annual income went to monasteries, with Glastonbury, Ely, Christ Church Canterbury, and Bury St Edmunds accounting for a quarter of that, although at the other end of the scale there were some very poor monasteries too.<sup>19</sup> Less dramatic but still significant, the monasteries of Praglia and Camaldoli in Italy had acquired sufficient land to rival that of the local bishop by 1120. Between its foundation in 909 and the death of Abbot Odilo in 1049, the extraordinarily successful monastery of Cluny in Burgundy was involved (nearly always as beneficiary) in some 3,000 transactions. By 1049 its properties stretched from the dense agglomerations of the near neighbourhood to 300 km to the south; and thereafter its interests expanded into many parts of western Europe.<sup>20</sup> In the East, even in the tenth century the monastery of Myrelaion, in Constantinople, had lands in Miletos, 300 km to the south, and by the end of the eleventh century, the lands of the Athonite monastery of Lavra stretched 150 km to the north west and 300 km to the north east. As Matthew Innes has put it, monasteries were the ‘multinationals’ of the early middle ages.

Landscapes could be reshaped, from creating a desert for solitude to consolidating plots to make more extensive fields and to utilizing mountainsides, as in Wales and the Pyrenees, for systematic upland grazing. We do not have much detail about the physical appearance of

the landscape that belonged to any particular monastery, particularly since such surveys as we have tend to list man- and woman-power and obligations rather than describe what the land looked like; and since hagiographic descriptions tend to stress a rugged landscape and hard conditions in order to emphasize the spiritual endeavour of the monk overcoming the trials of nature. However, we can make some deductions on the basis of listed obligations and of the underlying geography if we know what properties were owned: the obligations indicate mixed farming regimes almost everywhere and suggest that the demands of cultivation required plenty of labour. We can see inhospitable mountains (again strongly reflected in the hagiography) and fertile flat lands but it is easy to ignore the fertile valleys of the mountains; the fruitful high valleys of Catalonia, for example, furnished considerable resources for the monasteries of Ripoll and Sant Joan de les Abadesses, amongst others.<sup>21</sup> Overall, many monasteries, great and small, were cultivating cereals; there was plenty of arable land on monastic estates, although, where conditions were right, vineyards and olive groves were also nurtured.

We can look to archaeology for localizable insights. While much archaeological excavation of monasteries has focussed on the complex of central monastic buildings, work on rural settlement has expanded in the past generation and can be relevant: settlement shift in the Île de France in the later seventh and early eighth centuries, for example, has been associated with the initial development of the great ecclesiastical estates there.<sup>22</sup> There is one monastery whose lands were the subject of extensive fieldwork for thirty years: San Vincenzo al Volturno, in north-west Molise, in central Italy, to the south east of Rome. The land of the monastery was a single large block, almost all in the mountain valley of the Upper Volturno, as it remained from the eighth century to the 1040s—in itself a contrast to the fragmentation of holdings of many other monasteries; its location in this valley gave it access both to high mountain pastures, narrow but fertile valleys, and an alluvial plain. The great church of San Vincenzo Maggiore, which was constructed in the early ninth century, lies on the west bank of the Volturno and across the river were the workshops of the lay settlements that supplied it (for manufacture of glass, pottery, and so on). These covered an area of almost the same size as the monastery and have been interpreted as part of an urban settlement, the *borgo*; they appear similar to the workshops outside the monastery of nearby Monte Cassino or those at the monastery of Reichenau. Apart from the focal sites of monastery and *borgo*, there is very little settlement evidence in the territory in the period of the seventh to ninth centuries, although it is likely that there were farms engaged in small-scale agricultural activity across it, returning modest rents to the monastery, but archaeologically invisible because they were post-built or constructed from *pisé* (puddled earth), with thatched roofs. Everything changed in the late ninth and early tenth century, perhaps as a consequence of the Arab sack of 881, when occupation of the *borgo* completely ceased and new fortified nucleated villages were established on hilltops, as at Colle Castellano (the ‘Olivella’ of a lease of 962), about 6 km to the south east of the monastery, a walled settlement whose excavation produced large numbers of discarded tenth- and eleventh-century ceramics; its livestock regime included intensive pig-raising and its arable activity included cultivation of millet, with some wheat and barley. At least eight churches and shrines were constructed by the monastery within its territory in the late eighth and ninth centuries, as cult centres, like the ninth-century church at Colle Sant’Angelo, about 3 km from the monastery but visible from it, as also visible to those approaching the valley from the south; it was roofed with tiles and decorated with frescoes inside and is associated with many fragments of glass hanging lamps, probably produced in the monastic workshops. The monastery site was finally abandoned and a new monastery started in the late eleventh century, finished in the early twelfth, on a new, defensible site



across the river on the east bank.<sup>23</sup> We can see several stages of the shaping of a landscape from this work—the proto-urban settlement, the placing of churches, the creation of fortified villages—but even here, where so much work has been done, we cannot grasp the total picture.

The survey (*praktikon*) made for the monastery of St John the Theologian on Patmos, in the Aegean, in 1088 provides another kind of insight and gives rather more detail than surveys usually do: the surveyor wrote of an ‘impenetrable forest of brushwood and pines’ and noted that only 627 *modioi* of 3,860 were cultivable, of which only 160 could be ploughed (that is, about 62 of 386 hectares, with 16 ploughable) for the rest had to be broken up with spades; but the monastery also had at least 1,068 *modioi* of arable land in the more fertile nearby islands of Leipsos and Leros, as well as a good range of fruit, olive, carob, and oak trees there. Such information is extremely useful, although it is impossible to know if this kind of proportion of arable to rough land was in any way typical, even of this region.

## USING THE LANDED BASE

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These landed resources constituted very significant wealth. How were they utilized? For the most part, income was realized through the collection of rent. The medium of collection varied significantly from place to place and across time: in late eleventh-century Gwent (south-east Wales) rents were being paid in honey, pigs, and cows; the monastery of Leire, in Spanish Navarre, expected dues to be paid in bread, cakes, and grain round about the year 1000; but some money-rents were expected in the southern Limousin and in northern Italy in the late sixth century.<sup>24</sup> By contrast, customary ‘gifts’ to minor landlords (of pork, lamb, poultry, eggs) were expected from many tenants across the whole of our period and into the late middle ages too.<sup>25</sup> Local practice usually determined the medium through which the return was made. While much of landlordship in the early middle ages was simply about collecting traditional rents from tenants and dependents, there was some more deliberate management of landed resources, and of vineyards in particular, from an early date. Where active management of agricultural estates can be suggested, it tends to be associated with kings, bishops, and the greater monasteries, most evidently in the Carolingian royal heartland in the later eighth and ninth centuries but also elsewhere, as with the eighth-century estates of the monastery of Farfa in Italy and the ninth-century estates of those of Bobbio and Santa Giulia di Brescia. This kind of management often involved some element of labour service: on the estates of the monastery of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, just outside Paris, many tenants paid rents (in cattle, wine, chickens, eggs) and also provided one or more days’ labour and two or more *corvées* (unpaid labour obligations) a week; others had more specialized obligations, like those in the forest of Boissy who had to make wooden implements and barrels. While one can note labour requirements in many texts of this period, we should be careful not to assume it applied everywhere and we should be mindful of the great variety of its forms. However, the very existence of the *polyptyques* (surveys) of Saint-Germain-des-Prés (823–828), of Bobbio (862, 883), of Prüm (893), of Santa Giulia (905–906) indicates a concern on the part of some of the greatest monasteries for knowledge about their properties and about the income and resources they might expect from them. It used to be thought that such estates were closed systems, simply supporting themselves. More recent research indicates that they produced for a market to the profit of the landlord, as carrying services would in any case



suggest. Although some made a speciality of certain resources—mills and fishponds, silvo-pastoral regions, vineyards, and salt pans—there was not a great deal of specialization in our period: most farms were mixed farms and their staple product was grain, with some wine if possible, and oil in the south.

How did they use the profit? Support, naturally, for the community to allow monks to focus on the work of prayer. Lighting for churches to provide for proper ritual observance and the burning of candles at mass.<sup>26</sup> Hospitality for guests, including those spending time within a monastic community for devotional reasons. And provision for the poor: it is an explicit objective of some pious donors for when Nonito gave a vineyard and an orchard to the nunnery of Piasca (on the edge of the Liébana) in 945, the charter recording the gift specifies support for the monks and the poor; when the priest Rodrigo gave much of his property to the monastery of San Félix of Cisneros in 946, again the charter specifies the sustenance of the poor.<sup>27</sup> These and similar references are of course formulaic (though the formulas vary), and they tend to be written by scribes writing for the beneficiary, but that in itself indicates an awareness of a wider obligation on the part of the receiving monastery. At the monastery of Corbie, in north-east France, care for the poor was organized on a grand scale, as the Statutes of Abbot Adalhard show: in addition to twelve poor who stayed overnight, who were directly supported, there were daily distributions at the gate of the monastery of food, clothes, shoes, and firewood to about a hundred people. The obligation to protect the poor and the weak is a recurrent theme in ecclesiastical writing and is indeed a provision of the Rule of Benedict.

So much is what we might expect. Many of the things that were received in kind could immediately be devoted to these purposes—eaten in the monastery, given to guests, distributed to the poor; and wax, or oil, for lighting might well be a specialized return that came directly, as the *mellarios* from four localities provided for the monastery of Celanova in 985. But some of the income was surplus and was converted into other movable goods: precious objects to provide comfort and delight—beds, feather mattresses, pillows, embroidered coverings, table cloths, silver flasks, gilded goblets, silver dishes; and precious objects to adorn the church and enhance liturgical display—altar cloths, silk chasubles, golden chalices, glass chandeliers, silver crosses and reliquaries, hand bells, and great bells.<sup>28</sup> They might be purchased with the surplus or their manufacture was directly supported. And there were books too—acquired, bought, exchanged, written. Maybe three or four for small monasteries but thirty or forty or more for larger; and where great monasteries had large scriptoria, hundreds must have been produced, judging from the numbers of manuscripts that survive—over 7,000 from ninth-century Carolingian libraries; the monastery of Reichenau alone had 415 books by the early ninth century.<sup>29</sup> We find Psalters, Gospels, biblical commentaries, prayer books, liturgical *ordines*, antiphonaries, monastic rules, patristic writings, letter collections, secular and ecclesiastical legal collections, Gregory's *Dialogues*, ecclesiastical histories, Lives of saints, calendars, grammars, some classical authors.

Monks wrote as well as copied, structuring past and present through making records and writing histories, be it of kings or of saints. In the scriptorium, landscape and text entwined: transactions in land were recorded, usually with great care, with the names of witnesses written out in long lines or columns, often prefaced by a chrismon (a symbol representing Christ). Properties were not merely named but boundaries could be indicated with precision, noting the names of neighbours and topographical features, all with an acute sense of the space they occupied: 'land beside the land of Gomiz Belaza, with the land of John the priest on another side, that of Tellu Feles on the third, and the Cardeña brothers' hill on the fourth'; or 'down from Cléguerrec hill to the great stones, along the public road to the

mound at the crossroads below Silfiac church, along the valley below the church, across the *lande* (leaving the monastery of the martyr Sergius to the north), down the valley which leads to Castel Cran, as far as the river Blavet'.<sup>30</sup> Scribes sometimes went out to the land, recording the outcome of a dispute or the walking of a boundary in the monastery's interest, but also making records for other parties, bringing the skill of the scriptorium to the use of the community, as the monks of Saint Gall appear to have taken over record-making functions from local priests in the mid- and later ninth century.<sup>31</sup> Scribes also copied charters, on single sheets sometimes, but pre-eminently creating cartularies, often organized topographically, bringing that sense of land and landscape even more acutely into the scriptorium. So the Lorsch cartulary—a twelfth-century cartulary which appears to be modelled on an earlier Carolingian compilation—is organized by the territorial unit of the *pagus* and then by individual settlements within the *pagus*. Even before this, the chapters of the *polyptyque* of Prüm were set out in a rational geographical order, making it possible to visit the properties in sequence:<sup>32</sup> surveys such as those of the great *polyptyques* of the Frankish world were in part an attempt at the rational organization of space. History writing and compilation of *miracula* were also supported, the latter especially associated with place—the stone with the saint's footprint, the hill where the saint had sat, the dell where robbers attacking the monastery had been swallowed up, the sea where the saint was blown off course, the river where a fish recovered the saint's lost book. Such compositions served to fix institutional memory in the landscape just as, at the same time, they placed the monastic community at the physical and spiritual centre of the surrounding world.<sup>33</sup> This literary activity was funded from the land and turned attention constantly back to the land. The past was structured from the scriptorium; and the agricultural surplus gave the scribes the wherewithal to eat and the time to think.

## LANDSCAPES OF POWER

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Monastic landholding brought wealth and consumption, comfort and display, a richer life in more senses than the obvious. But it also brought power, and that included power to consort with kings, as Abbot Hilduin of Saint-Denis took the monk Hincmar (later archbishop of Reims) to the court of the emperor Louis the Pious; Abbot Abbo of Fleury dedicated his collection of canons to the Capetian kings Hugh and Robert; Athanasios of the Lavra went to Crete to advise Emperor Nikephoros while he was on campaign there; Clement and Naum became close advisers of the Bulgarian Tsar Boris in the late ninth century; and the early Norman kings of England called the monk Lanfranc from the abbey of Bec to take over as archbishop of Canterbury. It brought power over populations too, both the power of the master over a dependent labour force and the power to influence the behaviour of the free. Most monasteries had tenants, and with that the power that any landlord at any period can exercise. But the great monasteries with large estates tended to have servile dependents too, that is workers who were not free to negotiate the terms of their labour and who were not free to move away from the plots they cultivated. When *paroikoi* (agricultural labourers) were given by Byzantine emperors to monasteries like the Lavra and Iviron in the tenth and eleventh centuries, what was given was in practice the rent due from their holdings; in consequence, these *paroikoi* were not free to move away from those lands. The obligations of dependents were not necessarily onerous, but these people were tied. In the Paris basin in the early ninth century, for example at Villeneuve Saint Georges, in addition to the payment of regular dues of wine, mustard, withies, hens, and eggs, the family of

Adalgar had to labour whenever ordered and his wife had to weave serge and feed poultry; in other parts of the region dependents had to do ploughing service or spread manure or provide carts for the harvest.<sup>34</sup> By the late tenth century, the southern Galician monastery of Celanova had men obliged to work the salt pans of Requeixo and others who had to grind corn, look after pigs, make barrels (and prepare baths for the monks).<sup>35</sup> These practices were certainly not universal: even tied tenants might simply pay dues, and there were significant regional variations. In northern Italy, where in any case there was much greater use of short-term leases and fewer hereditary obligations, by the late tenth century such labour dues as there had been were reducing. Landlords made their profits by collecting heavier returns rather than by directly controlling labour.

Monastic landlords also had power through their exercise of patronage. Small-scale landowners and richer peasants became clients, making donations to a selected institution, lining up in support of one church and expecting support in return. Chris Wickham has shown how whole villages in the Tuscan Appennines would choose a particular spiritual centre, and sustain their choice over several generations, so that their communities developed strong links with this or that monastery. Most striking is the case of the monastery of Cluny, in Burgundy, whose exceptional number of transactions and large range of benefactors have been analysed by Barbara Rosenwein to show the ‘give and take’ of the relationship between locals and the monastery—giving, taking back, and giving again in a continuous process and in the dialogue of a continuing relationship; donation thereby had ‘social meaning’ in the creation of long-standing ties with the monastery. For the donors, donations brought links with neighbours, prestige, proximity to St Peter, and sometimes gifts from Cluny—gains not losses. For the recipient, gifts (and purchases) brought the power of a seigneurial lord and the capacity to establish consolidated territories. Land transactions signified a relationship between donor/vendor and beneficiary—they worked as ‘social glue’, at least until the mid-eleventh century when, Barbara Rosenwein argues, land began to lose its social meaning and ‘became the seat of economic and political power’.

Power also came with the capacity to build and develop social memory, memory of individual and of family in the deliberate creation of an association with a monastery. *Libri memoriales*—books of memory—listed thousands of benefactors to be remembered in some parts of Europe, like the vast collections from Fulda and Saint Gall, though the same happened on a smaller scale in many parts; Fulda maintained its lists from the eighth until the late eleventh century.<sup>36</sup> Benefactors were remembered in the liturgy of the appropriate day and in the case of the powerful in special anniversary services. Thereby they were remembered by the living laity as well as by those with the keys to heaven. Memory was embedded in the landscape too—stones that marked a burial place along a road, stones that asked the passer-by to stop and pray, stones that commemorated a gift, like the ‘deserted place’ identified on the Llanllŷr stone in west Wales that records a gift to Madomnuac (perhaps the Irish saint Mo Domnóc).<sup>37</sup>

Monastic landlords could also provide professional services for the laity. Notarial services have already been mentioned. There was money-lending too, and the provision of credit, as the cartularies of Saint-Vincent de Mâcon, of Cluny, and of several southern Italian monasteries show for the later ninth and tenth centuries.<sup>38</sup> There could be help in hard times, as the monks of Buezo in Castile provided food and clothing for a man and his children who were dying of hunger in a dreadful year—to be thanked in 950 by a gift of property when things were better.<sup>39</sup> For others, particularly the childless, monasteries could be a place of retirement at the end of their lives—a comfortable retirement home. In

northern Spain local priests are particularly notable in this category but lay persons did the same.

With land could come judicial power, although this was not as common as it became in the central to late middle ages. Depending on local circumstances, abbots might preside in court though bishops and archbishops are much more notable in this role at this time. The provost of the abbey of Saint Martin at Tours presided over a case of 857.<sup>40</sup> The abbot of Redon clearly presided at local courts within the territorial *seigneurie* which the monastery had established in its immediate neighbourhood: by 892 he presided at a major court held in front of the church at Bains, which dealt with a property dispute between lay parties. In Italy those who held short-term written leases (*livelli*) could be subject to the justice of the landlord—*iustitia dominica*.<sup>41</sup> Landlord justice tended to depend on landlords' capacity to establish, or be given, an immunity (from royal or imperial power), as the early immunities of Merovingian Francia and the later ones of the Carolingian Empire proclaim: no *iudices* were to enter those lands. In other words no officers of state or secular lord or bishop could come and hold a court; thus Saint-Denis and its satellites like Tussonval in the late seventh century or Corbie or Pavia in the ninth and early tenth.<sup>42</sup> It is very rare to find this in northern Iberia in this period, but the monastery of Turieno, in the Liébana, appears to have been doing so by about 962 and that of Celanova was certainly doing so by 1000.<sup>43</sup> Monastic officials from the latter heard straightforward cases of theft between lay parties, as also one claim of adultery, and took the fines. Holding court not only gave access to additional income, it gave real, practical power over local people.

Monasteries, like people, could be rich or poor. The poor do not leave many records and so it is difficult to make a realistic assessment of comparative numbers and comparative wealth. Overall, however, there were probably far more poor than rich monasteries in the early middle ages and we should remember that. Nevertheless, the capacity of some monasteries to amass exceptional wealth and exceptional amounts of landed property is extremely important as a social and economic fact and as a stimulus for social and economic change. And the capacity of some monasteries not simply to sit on the land surface but to mould and change the landscape is as significant for the changing visual environment as it is for economic growth. We could do with more archaeology of monastic landscapes: evidence of physical change in settlement patterns and in types of structure, as well as of those underlying economic strategies; clearance, planting, changes of crop and of stock, erection of boundaries, could all be revealed.

Despite generations of discussion, there remain major issues relating to freedom and dependence. Servile holdings are very strong in the record, but that is because those with large accumulations of land tended to make records and when these were ecclesiastical they tended to be kept. But how much of the land surface of Europe and the Near East was actually worked by free peasants? Where we have the chance survival of texts, as in eastern Brittany, the numbers and proportions of free peasants look significant. And even where there is clear evidence of dependent tenants, obligations often look quite light—how many tenants were obliged to make regular but not too onerous returns? And what proportion actually had to do labour service? Was it only those on the really great estates? Jean-Pierre Devroey has stressed the variety of tenant arrangements in western Europe and the change as one went from village to village, and from region to region. We can imagine that a journey across Europe would have taken us through some very different human landscapes.

Uneven habits in record-making and even more uneven chances of survival bear on the issue of cycles of giving. Particular local circumstances can explain a lot, especially the flurries of donation in the generation or two after a foundation. But why do we find donation revived in later phases? Were there underlying deeper trends? And was donation



always donation? How much was in fact sale, concealed by traditional notarial practice, or vice-versa?<sup>44</sup> How much was outright gift and how much was transactional, in practice a negotiation about things that are not recorded, in a network of relationships we cannot always reconstruct? Some additional rigorous analysis could help here—both of notarial and archiving practice and of the underlying relationships between individuals, where there is a sufficiently large body of records to permit meaningful counting. Despite generations of study of monastic landholding, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century, there remains work to do, both on the ground and in the archive.<sup>45</sup>



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45. I am extremely grateful to Jinty Nelson and Mayke de Jong for some very helpful conversations; as also to John Arnold for his comments and enthusiastic encouragement.

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# CHAPTER 9

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# CIVIC RELIGION

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## NICHOLAS TERPSTRA

‘CIVIC religion’ describes rituals, institutions, and practices of religious belief as these were shaped around the circumstances and goals of towns, cities and their inhabitants. Andre Vauchez defined it as ‘a collection of religious phenomena—cultic, devotional, and institutional—in which civil power plays a determining role, principally through the action of local and municipal authorities’.<sup>1</sup> Early studies focussed around questions of politics, social services, and economic order and were often overtly functionalist: how did elites, merchants, or artisans ‘use’ saints’ cults, processions, charitable hospitals, or confraternities to promote their particular goals? Recent work deals more with space, time, senses, and emotions, and is more ethnographic: how do forms, rhythms, and participation in devotions reveal to us a broader sense of how medieval people constructed a social world between earth and heaven, between the present and eternity? Which boundaries did they observe, and which transgress? In deeply fractured and factious communities, could they use religion to achieve some form of unity or practical co-existence? Towns and cities were far more stratified socially and politically than rural areas, making them far more reliant on civic religious institutions and rituals that promoted cohesion, unity, or healing; these were common goals, even if not commonly achieved in full. A question that unites most studies of civic religion regardless of approach is how we might understand the laity as active agents in Catholicism: in a Church whose history is often written from the point of view of clergy, how did lay people shape Catholic beliefs, institutions, and worship to their own understandings and needs?

Having said that, ‘civic religion’ did not exist as a concept that any medieval Christian would recognize. It had no distinct devotions, no particular clergy, no common theology, rituals, or observances. The term itself did not emerge until the twentieth century. It is entirely a construct of modern historians, some of whom reject the very concept while others disagree about the details. That it emerged at all reflected the sense among many historians that too much church history was written by insiders, be these clergy or simply committed lay believers. While sometimes very skilled, these ‘insider historians’ often shaped their analysis around the questions, assumptions, and values of active members of the Catholic Church as it existed in recent centuries. From the 1960s, changes in both the historical profession and the Christian churches generated new questions about how the Catholic faith and institutional Church functioned within past societies. In addressing these questions historians devised conceptual frameworks and coined terms that many medievals would have found perplexing: local religion, popular religion, women’s religion, and lay religion among them.<sup>2</sup> None of these concepts ‘existed’ in any real sense in the middle ages, but each lends more nuance and depth to our understanding of what it meant to believe, how communities, groups, and individuals shaped those beliefs, and how those beliefs shaped them.

Recent work highlights three different dimensions of civic religion: how its institutions worked within urban politics and economics; how its structures characterized social relations between laity and clergy and among social groups generally; and how its rituals marked the rhythms of holiness in time, space, and the senses.



## GOD ON OUR SIDE: THE POLITICS AND ECONOMICS OF CIVIC RELIGION

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One of the first historians to address civic religion directly was the social and economic historian David Herlihy, who aimed to show how late medieval religious life might be plotted economically. He coined the term ‘civic Christianity’ to describe a discernible shift in financial capital away from clerical institutions like convents and monasteries and towards lay-run religious institutions like confraternities and hospitals. Herlihy argued that the Catholic Church was barely functioning at the local urban level: between an impoverished local clergy and a careerist and immoral hierarchy, the needs of the faithful were poorly fulfilled. Yet these same neglected faithful were extraordinarily devout, pouring funds and energy into a number of hospitals and a wide range of confraternities. Pistoiese laypeople were clearly able to distinguish their Christian devotion from their Christian clergy. The cultural forms of the confraternity and the hospital allowed them to focus that devotion within the walls of the city and to help the many ‘poor of Christ’ who were not just a religious abstraction, but their own sisters, brothers, wards, employees, and neighbours.<sup>3</sup>

The first law of economic history is to ‘follow the money’, and as other historians adopted Herlihy’s approach, they found the same shift of economic resources from clerical to lay institutions repeating in other places across Europe. Testators intent on investing their earthly goods in the acquisition of an eternal home shifted their legacies away from religious orders and towards confraternities and hospitals. What was discernible as a trickle from the late thirteenth century became a veritable tsunami in the Black Death of the mid-fourteenth, and carried many lay religious institutions well beyond religious houses in terms of wealth.<sup>4</sup>

Historians have focussed on the institutions into which lay Christians channelled their wealth and energies, above all urban hospitals, parish guilds, and confraternities. ‘Following the money’ requires finding a trail of ledgers, balance sheets, and testaments, and this inevitably turns research towards institutions which keep records. The resulting institutional histories can be deadly boring if historians are unable to lift their eyes beyond the minute books and ledgers and see what all that concentration of financial and human capital was building—namely, the *corpus christianum*. In this corporate body of Christ, charity provided the sinews. How, where, why, and for whom did this Body flex its muscles?

The example of Cortona is instructive. From the early fifteenth century, this Tuscan town south of Florence developed a truly impressive network of charitable institutions. This included over twenty hospitals offering a wide range of charitable services, all of them dwarfed by the wealthy S. Maria della Misericordia (purportedly founded by St Margaret of Cortona in 1286). From the early fifteenth century, the Misericordia itself began taking over many of the properties and responsibilities of other hospitals, and began constructing a magnificent new hospital in the centre of the city, opposite the Palazzo Comunale. By 1571 its revenues were four times those of the bishop, and five times those of the Cathedral Chapter. Cortona’s local elite consolidated hospital revenues and used the funds to give food to the hungry, clothing to the naked, and lodging to the homeless within the city.<sup>5</sup>

Apart from tallying up the numbers as a sign of increased devotion and charity, what questions does Cortona’s case raise? The rapid increase in hospital numbers and endowments and their gradual consolidation into S. Maria della Misericordia came only

after Florence assumed control of the town in 1411. From that point, Florentine rectors supervised local government, and Florentine candidates were appointed as bishops; only lesser offices of Church and State remained in local hands. Cortona itself became an actor in the rituals of Florence's civic religion, joining a host of local communities obligated to participate in Florence's St John the Baptist day celebrations and march in other religious processions. Their banners, wax candles, and offerings of tribute became the signs of Florence's glory and of their own subordination into the emerging Florentine regional state.<sup>6</sup> Cortona's hospitals were outside the control of the local rector and bishop, and free of these obligations to participate in Florentine rituals. This puts into a different light the work by local elites over a period of decades to consolidate these institutions and centralize their administration and resources. Their effort succeeded in preserving for these same elites spheres of influence and significant funds which were clearly and exclusively in their hands alone. This allowed them to exercise significant social influence which compensated in part for their loss of political authority.

Seeing how the lay Cortonese *corpus christianum* consolidated its strength and flexed its muscles vis à vis outside authorities in Church and State gives us a more distinctly political and dynamic view of civic religion. It introduces conflict and strategy into a field of study which is sometimes mistakenly believed to be all about harmony and peace. With great wealth came great responsibility, and confraternities in Florence, Bologna, and Venice evolved from private brotherhoods into quasi-public almoners that channelled state and testators' resources towards the needs of the destitute and diseased. But with great wealth also came great vulnerability, and these same brotherhoods' extraordinary wealth attracted the attention of new members intent on securing for themselves some of the resources flooding into confraternal coffers, and turning some of these to the needs of their class or faction.

Cortona's multitude of small hospitals represented the civic religious charitable drive of lay people who, through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, turned their giving towards new institutions which gave them possession of the tools to help the widows, orphans, sick, and destitute of their city, and the travellers passing through it. Guilds, private donors, and confraternities built this network, but then lost control of it to their lay social superiors when these elite men, politically dispossessed, realized that the network of hospitals could serve new political and civic religious purposes if appropriately 'reformed'. Almost all cities in fifteenth-century Italy saw a similar process by which 'Great Hospitals' were formed by consolidating the host of existing small institutions, and in almost all cases this was achieved by higher class members who had flooded into the confraternities and who eventually took them over in a process which modern historians call 'ennobling'. These centralizing brotherhoods could in their turn be termed 'great confraternities' in that they frequently took over smaller groups, gathered significant properties, and controlled major shrines and conducted processions. Class dynamics transformed civic religion at the decline of the communal period, turning it from a more horizontal into a more vertical religion, though one still determinedly and even more aggressively lay.

'Ennobling' transformed the institutions of civic religion in many late medieval European cities as social elites adapted to life under the changed circumstances of political consolidation. In parts of Brabant, a declining textile industry and the rise of Antwerp forced a political and economic retrenchment that led to fraternities of many kinds (e.g. militias, archery companies) becoming more exclusive in their membership and protective of their privileges. In Bruges, the civic government moved from the fourteenth century to displace guilds and ecclesiastics and to expand its control of key processions and celebrations so that its members could take their place alongside the count of Flanders as

key lay liturgists of ritual life. In French towns disputes erupted between local authorities and royal officials as local elites fought hard to maintain their control over charitable institutions which the monarchs wished to regulate.<sup>7</sup> Control over corporate groups, ritual life, and public welfare went to the heart of how the civil community was defined and disciplined. Since issues of control demonstrated whether local authorities could preserve the health of the *corpus christianum*, these disputes brewed through the fifteenth century and were at the centre of intense centre-periphery battles, erupting into the poor relief reforms of the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Such disputes reveal how civic religion might function as a legitimating rhetoric that masked some of the power shifts taking place within local communities. As we will see further below, civic religion incorporated a deeply historical narrative that wove local plagues and famines, shrines and devotional movements, religious houses and civic hospitals into a pious chronicle of how God's discipline and favour interacted with the people's repentance and devotion to create a holy *communitas*.<sup>8</sup> In a city like Bologna, that pious chronicle's roots in twelfth- and thirteenth-century struggles against noble and ecclesiastical rulers gave it a distinctly popular cast, such that confraternities, guilds, and militia companies were seen as the three pillars of a community of merchants, artisans, and professionals that framed its daily needs in service of divine precepts. The rhetoric became even more important as the underlying social and political realities changed. Local elites marginalized by political changes evoked historic rights and privileges when negotiating with external political authorities, and indeed some subordinated towns like Pistoia and Cortona successfully resisted becoming objects within the Florentine civic religion. At the same time, these same elites in cities as diverse as Bologna and Bruges evoked historic civic religion when negotiating their own political position with internal social groups. Control of processions, shrines and hospitals made them the custodians of charity and keepers of charisma, and both charity and charisma were strategic religious assets in the elite's fight to maintain local reputation, patronage, influence, and legitimacy. It might, as in Bologna, involve a fundamental transvaluation of civic religious rhetoric. Even as the guilds, confraternities, assemblies and magistracies of the communal republic were being marginalized, that republic's slogans and religious rituals were being used to legitimate a new oligarchical senate. It takes a hermeneutic of suspicion to read through the rhetoric of *communitas*, the *corpus christianum*, and the common good, because the levelling and egalitarian words so frequently mask hierarchical realities.<sup>9</sup>

The fact that Christianity provided the language of medieval European civic religion does not mean that it was the sole source of models through which that religion took shape on local streets. New research into the cultural forms and institutions of civic religion must look beyond the bounds of western Christendom to find organizational models. If we look only to the civic hospitals that multiplied through the Netherlands, Germany, France, Italy, and Spain, we can ask whether the lay founders of this common cultural form took inspiration only from examples like the Greek *xenodochium* or the monastic hospital, as has traditionally been assumed. These clerical institutions were certainly natural models, and in some cases lay people took over monastic institutions that clergy could no longer maintain.<sup>10</sup> Yet we also need to remember that the lay merchants who founded and funded many hospitals were often travellers whose trade brought them to al-Andalus or to the Levant, where they encountered and possibly had shelter in Islamic complexes known as waqfs. These hosted a wide range of activities including clinics, hostels, orphanages, hospices, schools, soup kitchens, and more. Crusaders shared the merchants' experience and also returned home with some understanding of what waqfs did, how they were

organized, and who they served.<sup>11</sup> The waqfs were built on endowments and this, together with the absence of a resident community of clerics, made their administration and funding closer to that of Christian civic hospitals than either monastic establishments or the *xenodochium*. Coincidence is not causality, and there is as yet no evidence that an experience of waqfs inspired Christian merchants to establish hospitals. Yet at least one historian has argued that Oxford's Merton College took its administrative form from an Islamic model.<sup>12</sup> There are enough parallels in economic activity, civic engagement, and urbanistic presence that at least one agenda for future research into the charitable institutions of Christian civic religion should be exploring possible Islamic connections and inspirations.<sup>13</sup>

## THE BODY OF CHRIST: SOCIAL RELATIONS IN CIVIC RELIGION

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Catholicism is so deeply and reflexively clerical, that it can take some effort to imagine how it looked from a lay perspective. Civic religion never aimed to dispense with clergy, but promoting locality inevitably prioritized laity to some extent, and we need to consider whether and how civic religion may have served to counterbalance those institutional reforms in the Catholic Church that prioritized clergy. Civic religion began to emerge as urban settlements themselves grew in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a time when the Church was aiming to reinforce its institutional forms and assert its spiritual prerogatives within distinctly urban contexts. It grew in the decades following the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, with the halting implementation of a series of decrees aimed at focussing Catholics' attention on the parish, the sacraments, and the ordained clergy by promoting higher requirements for laity (in the form of regular confession and communion and marriage banns), higher moral, educational, and administrative standards for secular and regular clergy, and a reaffirmation of the supreme pontifical authority. New cities needed spiritual patrons, and so miracle cults emerged around figures like St William of York and St Kenelm of Winchcombe—the former a recently-deceased archbishop and the latter a murdered Anglo-Saxon child, but both having an intensely local history and distinctly civic appeal.<sup>14</sup>

This was also the century when mendicant orders were emerging and expanding rapidly in direct response to the challenges and opportunities provided by towns and cities. City governments, urban patrons, and lay testators funded the numerous mendicant houses with their frequently cavernous churches as critical civic sites of the holy, and they undertook to build new circuits of city walls to ensure that this spiritual charisma was inside rather than outside the urban space. Their almsgiving was not directed to some institutional abstraction headquartered in Rome—it honoured local saints, marked local miracles, built local houses, and fed and sheltered the often local boys and girls who took vows and lived in them. Those locals who did not take orders might maintain contact by joining the lay confraternities that each mendicant house promoted. Historians have assumed that these confraternities took their models from the mendicant orders, and certainly the charitable missions, penitential and praising spiritual exercises, and social kinship which characterized confraternities' civic religion had powerful mendicant models. Yet we may equally ask whether the modelling worked in the other direction, and what the mendicants may have picked up from the laity who already gathered in kin groups like guilds and militias.



At issue here is not determining who had priority, but rather how both drew from a common source. Of all the shared values, motifs, and traditions animating Catholicism and programming its social relations, the most important was undoubtedly the metaphor of the family or, more broadly, kinship. It defined the Trinity, framed the Abrahamic covenant, and bound the saints in paradise to Jesus and Mary. There was little wonder that it would unite the spirituality of lay and clerical believers and shape their social relations as a 'body of Christ'. Mendicants in particular realized that kinship was a model that could bridge the gap between clerical life and lay realities, and hence promote spiritual and social action. Promoting confraternities allowed them to extend their own mission. While some like the Dominicans held their brotherhoods on a tight chain as auxiliaries, others like the Franciscans saw confraternities as a means of turning their message of charity into a mission which could diffuse more broadly into urban society. Lay members were drawn to these kinship groups not simply by the attraction of mendicant spirituality but because the language of obligation and aspiration spoken there was already so familiar from their guilds, militias, and social fraternities. They took on mendicant spiritual exercises and communal life not in an exercise of imitative piety, but because these could be adapted quite readily to the rhythms of lay life. As a result, their borrowings were less a sign of subordination to the clergy, than a sign of collaboration in fulfilment of a model that both shared. Laity and clergy were fundamentally brothers and sisters in the *corpus christianum*.

Like any other brothers and sisters, they competed, jostled, and fought as often as they co-operated and collaborated. The tensions could be extreme, particularly in cases where bishops held political as well as spiritual authority. In some cities like Augsburg and Constance civic authorities progressively stripped the bishop of judicial, political, and economic authority through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, severely limited his ritual performances in the fifteenth, and finally rejected his spiritual authority in the sixteenth.<sup>15</sup> Yet it would be a mistake to see common tensions and particular rebellions as a sign of widespread anticlericalism. Mendicant friars comprised an educated bureaucratic class, and were sometimes recruited to audit civic accounts. Laypeople headed to churches to notarize documents, particularly testaments, frequently drawing on friars as their scribes and witnesses.<sup>16</sup> While they may have redirected their testamentary alms away from clergy and towards confraternities and hospitals, we should remember that they continued to send money and alms, sons and daughters into local religious houses. Late medieval Florentine families liked to have their daughters, their shops, their rental properties, and their palaces all in one neighbourhood, and only with the decline of the republic and the rise of duchy did they shift towards spreading these resources around the entire city. Nuns from prominent families did not hesitate to use their conventual platform to act as lobbyists for familial causes in local politics, a practice that certainly extended to German convents threatened with closure by the debates between reformers and Catholics on city councils from the 1520s onwards.<sup>17</sup>

Tension might emerge when confraternities assumed roles in civic shrines, processions, worship, and charitable work which gave their members a degree of authority over clergy, and sometimes even quasi-sacerdotal roles. In the wake of a devotional movement that spread through central and north Italian cities from 1336, confraternities emerged to give food, drink, and bedding to those in prison, to pay the fines of those released, and to comfort those condemned to death. Lay confraternal comforters became a distinct and expanding presence in Italian executions, complete with specialized training manuals, a rich literature of songs and poems, specially-painted panel paintings to instruct prisoners and help focus their attention in the last hours, and private rooms within the prisons where they could conduct their work. The lay comforters' activity served both spiritual and secular



ends in one of the most paradigmatic forms of civic religion at work. The spiritual promise was that a prisoner who accepted his fate, forgave his accusers and executioner, and went to his death peacefully might be accepted directly into heaven like the good thief executed with Christ. The secular benefit was an execution free of anger or protest, no small thing in Italian cities riven by factionalism, and one reason perhaps why comforting confraternities became, like those running hospitals, key targets for strategic ennobling by the sixteenth century. Decked in robes, flanking the prisoner, singing spiritual songs, carrying religious images, and offering public prayers, confraternal comforters were the central lay liturgists in a civic religious drama that strategically merged justice, mercy, and social discipline.<sup>18</sup>

Another lay ritual which made clergy nervous was public flagellation, particularly in urban processions of wailing and whipping penitents intent on expiating the sins of their *communitas*. Public penance easily morphed into the *imitatio christi* in ways that could seem to suggest intercessory power. So, while flagellants processed openly down the streets south of the Alps, in north European cities like Tournai they were more often banned and even charged with heresy for assuming clerical prerogatives.<sup>19</sup> Not all lay drama was this provocative, and clergy generally supported the wide range of civic dramas that guildsmen and confraternal brothers staged across Europe. Their plays typically localized the events of biblical history, so that Jesus' birth in a manger in Maastricht or Herod's raging in Coventry underlined the immediate presence of the holy and made incarnate the confession that the town itself was a New Jerusalem and its citizens a chosen people.<sup>20</sup>

Studies of civic religion must explore the social relations of laity and clergy, but we cannot consider these in isolation. As civic religion looks at the social world within the city walls as a factor which, together with broader devotional movements and ecclesiastical politics, shapes the forms of worship, devotion, and outreach, it necessarily turns to sociological models for plotting these dynamics. Some recent work explores whether current sociological models like 'civil society' and 'social capital' allow us to get a better grip on these dynamics.<sup>21</sup> As developed most notably by Robert Putnam, these models explore how self-governing professional and religious corporations like medieval guilds and confraternities offered experience in social collaboration, mediation, and dispute resolution. In this way they raised expectations around trust and accountability, and eventually made for more effective representative civic governments. The model compares horizontal and vertical networks of civic engagement, formal and informal networks of alliance and patronage, strong and loose social ties, and forms of social capital that bridged social divisions or bonding social groups.

Putnam's work has been heavily criticized for methodological gaps and historical fallacies, and yet some historians of late medieval urban society in the Netherlands, England, and Italy have found that these concepts can provide some helpful heuristic tools for analysis of pre-modern civil society.<sup>22</sup> At a certain level this analysis is entirely sociological, yet insofar as social discourse in medieval society was cast in religious terms, it comes into the field of civic religion. Christianity was the critical factor that originated and legitimated action, and encouraged lay people to see their efforts on earth as oriented to their personal and collective fortunes in heaven. As we have already seen, this in turn made civic religion the convenient legitimating discourse of political and social action in expanding towns and cities. Confraternities, hospitals, guilds, and militias were among the urban cultural forms in which this language was the common vernacular.

Some have argued that since real *communitas* and a peaceful *corpus christianum* was never entirely realized, it cannot have been a vital ambition for medieval urban citizens. This was in part a reaction to Bernd Moeller's description of late medieval German towns

as self-fashioned ‘sacred societies’, and his assertion that the civic reformations of the sixteenth century came about so quickly because of long habits of civic religious co-operation mediated above all by town councils. Summed up popularly as ‘no cities, no reformation’, Moeller’s analysis underscored the fact that it was communities rather than theologians who actually moved Reformation forward.<sup>23</sup> Heiko Oberman poured some cold water on this assumption by showing that citizens had little say in many civic reformations, and that ideas like the *bonum commune* were evoked so often by so many competing parties as to be practically meaningless.<sup>24</sup> More recent studies have explored the sharp and bloody divisions within medieval German towns, in a challenge to Max Weber’s characterizations of the medieval European city.

Weber argued that European cities differed from those in other societies in two chief respects: their citizens won political autonomy from local lords, and they exercised forms of unity that went beyond family and kin and were based instead on the parish, the city itself, and shared religious values.<sup>25</sup> Evidence of deep and continuing divisions between urban quarters and corporate groups seems to belie this Weberian vision of *communitas*, yet the problem surely lies more in the strict definitions of the nineteenth-century German sociologist than in the fractious reality of fourteenth-century German towns. Performing unity allowed a degree of practical co-existence precisely because divisions were so intractable. Religion was an effective tool for achieving this because it had an imperative force that transcended the locality, and because laypeople accepted that the very concept of the *corpus christianum* was predicated as much on division as on union—why else would the Apostle Paul have written about all the parts of the body quarrelling together? Ironically, it would be the imperatives of *communitas* that would later allow Lutherans and Catholics to work out practical forms of religious co-existence in the new order urban political defined by the 1555 Religious Peace of Augsburg.<sup>26</sup>

There’s certainly a point to be made here about not being too vague and romantic about medieval civic *communitas*. Yet the critique seems oblivious to the fact that much of religion is shaped around the reach that exceeds the grasp, in aspirations for what can never be achieved, and with public expressions of sorrow for the failure to achieve a divine standard of perfection. Broken-ness, animosity, and violence are what religion is about, and many of its civic forms assumed these divisions and aimed precisely to at least mediate, if not entirely repair them. As we will see below, unity was more an aspiration than an achievement, but no less powerful a social goal for that.

## PERFORMING *COMMUNITAS*: CULTURAL FORMS AND RITUALS OF CIVIC RELIGION

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Work on structures and institutions is vital for understanding how civic religion framed social life and functioned in urban centres. And we must probe social dynamics to see what models were followed and how civic religion may have mediated or exacerbated relations between laity and clergy and also between different social groups within medieval towns. But what did people actually believe? Was there anything in civic religion that distinguished it from the convictions of parish priests, the worship of mendicant friars, or the devotions of cloistered nuns? It is fine to highlight the holy community, the *corpus christianum*, charity, and kinship as the shaping values of civic religion. Yet while urban laity may have organized their charitable work according to different models and with an eye towards secular values and ends, there was nothing in these values that clergy could not

agree with. How might we recapture the core convictions and characteristic exercises of medieval civic religion?

If institutional approaches start by following the money, then to answer this question we need to start by following the processions. ‘Belief’ as something internal and subjective is notoriously difficult to access for the medieval period, and some historians would say that the approach itself is anachronistic, preferring instead to follow Durkheim in focussing on performative public rituals rather than internal subjective states.<sup>27</sup> The familiarity of religious language can lead us to project modern or even early modern assumptions back into the past. Most of the historians who have tried to capture the core beliefs of civic religion turn to examining matters of space and time, and the rituals that were fashioned around walls, squares, streets, and shrines, and that followed daily, weekly, monthly, and annual rhythms and observances.

As we move further out of the ledger columns and into the streets, we expand the range of experience to include the food people ate and when they ate it, the smells they created, the bells they heard, the plays they acted, the sculptures they commissioned and the shrines they built either within the walls or just outside. As they moved together through the streets, bearing saints to view the city or baring backs for flagellation, they marked and connected the sites of the holy. They were not the secular surveyors of some practical map or spiritual tour guides marking the ‘must see’ holy sites. They were supplicants or penitents. They didn’t simply observe holy obligations, but rather enacted sacred states and realized religious *communitas* together and with their saints. Emphasizing ‘time’ can get it wrong if we are not careful to set aside our assumptions—lay liturgists and devotees weren’t just observing the clock, they were its very mechanism, and their movements marked divine time.

That said, few of these civic clocks ran on time, and most needed constant repair. No city lacked for those who wanted to move the hands or control the mechanisms. As with studies of the institutions and structures of civic religion, our study of its times, spaces, movements, and sense has to balance ethnographic description with a keen sense of underlying ambitions and conflicts. Edward Muir built his discussion of Venetian civic religion around the idea of a self-fashioned ‘myth of Venice’ which emphasized the city’s auspicious origins in God’s election, its special protection under Mary’s cloak, and its particular destiny in the divine plan.<sup>28</sup> The ‘most serene republic’ was a particularly complicated clockwork with a multitude of moving parts, and the very fact of its many divisions made choreographing its regular ritual processions all the more complicated. Each class and institution had its place, but all moved together around the city and towards a common destination.

Venice’s particular myth and civic religion mediated some deep and critical divisions. The city deliberately fashioned itself as being geographically and culturally between Western Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, and it divided the lay liturgical roles of its civic religion between a noble and a citizen class. It was not ecclesiastically Orthodox in any significant way beyond a rhetoric built on its early history as a Byzantine imperial outpost, but this stance provided a source of visual and architectural imagery and a pretext for asserting independence from Rome. The class dynamics highlight the more interesting side of civic religion. Citizens were essentially those excluded from political office by the 1297 ‘closing’ of the Great Council by those henceforth designated the nobility. Nobles monopolized the most remunerative roles in the government and military, but ceded to the citizens control of the confraternities (called *scuole*) which effectively structured society and culture. The smaller *scuole* functioned as neighbourhood associations, immigrants’ organizations, and the guilds that were otherwise banned from Venice. The larger *scuole* gave rich cultural form to the civic religion by commissioning artwork and patronizing

composers and musicians, and also ran much of the city's social welfare service through an impressive network of major charitable hospitals for the sick and destitute, extensive aid given to worthy poor in their homes, and even pension benefits for naval veterans. Venetian *scuole* worked together with political bodies in a common goal of ordering and ornamenting the state. Processions got these socially distinct groups marching together in single file in the enactment of a destiny that all believed and a serenity that all proclaimed, even though it did not reach far beneath the surface.

It was not only the composition, but also destination and timing of processions that was critical. Natalie Zemon Davis' discussion of late medieval and early modern Lyons shows how seasonal processions to a bridge over the fast-flowing Rhône or to gates in the city wall kept these passageways for commerce and social life open.<sup>29</sup> The Lyonese certainly directed their processions to those spots that had been designated sacred by divine miracles, and in that way they enacted the conviction that it was God who mapped the spatial geography of the holy. Believers intent on securing his blessing on their community had to honour the spots that He, the Virgin Mary, or vigilant saints had marked.

Yet the processions to bridges and gates also marked a trip further down the road into pre-Christian traditions as they moved beyond recognizing divine action in the past towards recruiting and manipulating it for the future. Catholic space and time were bunched and punctuated with hot and cold spots on the land and on the calendar that demanded particular responses. An active spiritual engagement with locality and the seasons was a critical component of civic religion from the late medieval period and, as Zemon Davis shows, the later virulence of the Catholic reaction against the Huguenots in the Wars of Religion came less from any Calvinist catechism than it did from Huguenot efforts during their brief period of rule to desecrate ancient holy sites and redirect longstanding practices in ritual life. Huguenots were rejecting a late medieval civic religion based on reading the signs of space and time and using rituals to manipulate the holy for the health and prosperity of the body politic. They may have been cradle Catholics, yet their cradles hadn't rocked in Lyon; most of the iconoclastic Huguenots were from outside the city, and their actions underscored for locals that they had little investment in the spirituality of Lyonese space, time, community, and saints.

The deep divisions that exploded in Reformation iconoclasm remind us again that civic religion emphasized unity precisely because this quality was so hard to find in the medieval community. Elaborate rituals enacting unity and *communitas* required a willing suspension of disbelief, not to mention of faction. That unity should be a defining spiritual aspiration of urban civic religion went back in part to the efforts by mendicant peacemakers to heal factional rivalries in medieval communes by working with and expanding social kin groups. This helps to explain why confraternities (and other kin groups like guilds) actively mediated rivalries between members through inner tribunals, bans on gossiping, weapons, and violence, and by making regular visits to other confraternal quarters.

Yet as we saw above, performing *communitas* did not always guarantee achieving it, or even believing deeply in it. In light of ongoing differences between neighbourhoods, guilds, corporate groups, and families, peacemaking exercises were sometimes less about eliminating division than about keeping fences in good repair. Rules on deportment and robes that covered members from head to toe might advance the fiction of equality within the brotherhood, but these rituals never held back frequent expressions of division which were sometimes enshrined in other rituals. English and north European confraternities emphasized communal feasts on the principle that breaking bread with a neighbour might reduce the drive to break his bones. In the small towns of Piedmont, these feasts were all about using guest lists to set social and geographical boundaries. Confraternal saint's day



feasts were overtly about the unity of all members both high and low, living and dead. Yet they both marked and mediated hierarchies, since everyone knew their place, from the wealthy layman who footed the bill to the grateful poorer member who could imagine himself meeting on a temporarily equal footing his betters.<sup>30</sup>

Lyon's example also points out another element in the ritual forms of civic religion. An analysis that adheres too closely to the materials and designs of orthodox Catholicism misses the ways in which local communities and social groups wove into the fabric of their religion a host of other threads representing social dynamics, seasonally-organized rituals for fertility or protection, animistic magic, superstitions and fears, and much more. As Lyon's Huguenot purists banned or destroyed religious forms that they considered superstitious and pagan, there may have been some Catholic reformers and clerics discreetly cheering from the sidelines, since the assault on the rituals of popular and local religion was shared by clerical and upper class reformers of both creeds. Mayday fertility festivities were a common target, such as Vienne's ritual in which four men chosen by high ecclesiastics were stripped naked, blacked all over, and run from the archbishop's palace around all the key institutions including the town hall and the leading abbey to receive, in stages, a guard, a 'king', a 'queen', and an ever-lengthening trail of hooting and yelling locals.<sup>31</sup>

The ritual of the Blacked Men was more perplexing than the straightforwardly pagan sacrifice in Autun of a heifer to the Virgin to ward off plague, but there were many similar animistic rituals across Europe. These particular examples and many others beside were offered by the French historian Jean Delumeau to argue that the French laity were not broadly and clearly Catholic until at least the Christianization campaigns of the seventeenth century. This may put more stock in Jesuit definitions of Catholicism than either laity or clergy in medieval Europe would have recognized. Historians now are more willing to acknowledge their puzzlement at just how locals incorporated these apparently animistic and pagan elements into their faith, and most take the view that people who considered themselves good Catholics should be taken at their word. We can do little else when we understand that it was early Catholic missionaries who had engineered many of the transvaluations which had turned pagan deities into saints and redirected devotion from holy wells and trees to new saintly shrines. The concept of civic religion leaves more latitude for ecumenism here, since it can incorporate a host of local practices without worrying too much about dogma or orthodoxy. In this way, civic and local religion intersect, eroding the distinctions between urban and rural. Civic religion may add a more overtly political dimension, and reflect the aspirations of a political class and the needs of an urban population. Yet other ritual practices like beating the bounds, processions, scapegoating, and certain forms of magic and healing, are clearly continuous, and one task for civic religion is seeing where and how these intersect.

This opens up the question of the imaginary in civic religion, and of how certain devotions and rituals caught the imagination of laity and clergy both rural and urban. Saints cults were critical and grew in tandem with cities; civic authorities might seek representation in the courts of nobles or ecclesiastics, but what people could feel safe if they had no protectors in the court of heaven? The saints crossed some boundaries while upholding others, and they were above all the ones who assured the urban community a place in God's presence and a voice in His ear. The devotion to the Madonna of Mercy (the Misericordia) was one late medieval cult whose forms and meanings transferred readily across many social boundaries, assuming distinct meanings of *communitas* for distinct groups and triggering different actions over time. The image of the Madonna sheltering supplicants under her outstretched cloak seems to originate in the early thirteenth-century



*Dialogus miraculorum* of Caesarius of Heisterbach. Caesarius wrote in the period when Marian piety was expanding rapidly to incorporate ideas of the Virgin as an intercessor and even co-redemptrix with Jesus. His strongly clerical *Dialogus* offered tales of Mary protecting priests, nuns, and monks from thunderstorms and devilish temptation, and it closes with a Cistercian monk's vision of the Virgin surrounded by many high clerics, among whom he could see no Cistercians. When the monk asked the Virgin why his brothers were absent, she threw open her cloak to reveal a host of Cistercians in a privileged place under her mantle. This proved an extraordinarily compelling visual image, and clergy and laity competed for that favoured place under the Virgin's protective cloak. One of the earliest images was produced by the Sienese painter Duccio in 1280 shows Franciscan friars under the cloak, one of the earliest lay confraternities dedicated to the devotion was Florence's Compagnia di S. Maria della Misericordia in 1244, and an early hospital was Cortona's 1286 S. Maria della Misericordia described above.

The Misericordia image spread rapidly through the fourteenth century receiving a boost with the eponymous devotional movement of 1399, fed by a French peasant's vision of Mary pleading with an angry Jesus, who is preparing to unleash apocalyptic judgement on the earth. As she pleads for Mercy, she spreads her cloak protectively over the people whom Jesus wants to punish—we need to remember that in most cases the Virgin protects believers from God himself, who uses plague and sickness to punish his people and bring them to repentance. Preachers spread the peasant's vision, and the devotional movement that followed featured vast public processions of penitents dressed in white robes, calling out 'Misericordia', and moving from city to city until the climax in the 1400 jubilee in Rome. This movement took the name of the Bianchi (from the white robes) or the Misericordia (from the cry), and its spread across Europe helped push the concept and iconic image of Mary with her protective cloak as well: in Italy as the Madonna della Misericordia, through France as the Vierge de Miséricorde, and in Germany as the Schutzmantelmadonna.<sup>32</sup>

Whether it was courtiers, confraternal brothers, guildsmen, friars, nuns, or clerics, there was a spiritual equality and *communitas* under the Virgin's cloak. Above all, the Misericordia image had a compelling immediacy and comprehensibility. It animated civic religion and inspired many of its institutional forms into the fifteenth century. A host of new hospitals, confraternities, and shrines across urban and rural Europe owed their origins and their names to the Misericordia devotion, producing countless images of communities of believers huddling underneath the Virgin's robe. But that robe also had its boundaries, and spread a message that was as much about exclusion as inclusion. Mercy came with a price. The Virgin offered protection to those who repented and purified themselves by forsaking evil practices like blasphemy, usury, concubinage, and violence, and who worked to promote pure *communitas* by casting out sinful and alien presences.

The fifteenth century marks the high point of the Misericordia devotion in civic religion. It also marks the period when that religion began to turn more determinedly towards purgation of the body social. Purification of the *corpus christianum* could only come by purging the body of its contaminating and contagious presences. Any sick person who sought bleeding or who took diuretics and laxatives and emetics in order to expel bad humours or bodily obstructions knew as much. Moreover, towns had long been worried about social pollution, and sometimes pushed noxious trades like tanning to the city limits.<sup>33</sup> We can trace the origins of a persecuting society to a point centuries earlier when heretics, Jews, and lepers were its targets, but in the late medieval period the persecution intensified. Confraternities and guilds worked diligently to eject those impious members who by their immoral actions brought the group's *communitas* into danger of invoking

divine wrath. Through the fifteenth century and onwards the definition of the threat shifted such that it lay less in actions than in identity. The ones targeted above all were still the Jews, though in coming years Muslim converts, Anabaptists and radicals, simple dissenters, witches, and others would follow them into exile or flight. Christianity provided a legitimating discourse for these expulsions, with a fear of the devil looming large on the horizon of imagination. At a more mundane level, social discipline and the civilizing process would also send vagrants out of the gates, though more through a criminalizing than a demonizing of poverty.<sup>34</sup>

Political and economic rivalries lay behind many of these expulsions, and in a telling compromise the Jews were often forced no further out than the city gates, settling in suburbs outside the walls from which they commuted daily into the city. Walled ghettos like the one pioneered by Venice in 1516 were the inverse of this, and similarly isolated the contagious presence while keeping it close at hand for commercial benefit. There is no shortage of either hypocrisy or mixed motives in these expulsions, but what should also not be forgotten is that these actions were overtly justified and legitimated by appeals to religiously framed concepts of purity and contagion, and of the need to keep the *communitas* free of contagion through processes of purgation. Misericordia and medicine intersected in the spiritual imaginary, and in this context expelling the Jews was a deeply civic religious act.

The ongoing drive to purify the civic Body of Christ by expelling that which was thought to contaminate it carries on into the even more violent purgative exercises of the sixteenth century. A large number of the German cities which expelled the Jews from the holy community within their city walls in the fifteenth century, carried on in the next century to purge violently the Church itself. The same legitimating discourse of contamination and corruption, purgation and purification rings through the legislative acts with which these same cities and other civic and secular authorities expelled the regular clergy, dismissed the bishop, severed ties with the Roman hierarchy, banned the Mass, closed the shrines and confraternities, expropriated the hospitals, and rewrote the Church Orders.<sup>35</sup> Reformation theology made exiles of the saints themselves. Those behind the bans argued that the purged presences were at best unnecessary crutches that prevented the Body of Christ from exercising its own limbs. At worst, they were contagious obstructions that were the source of spiritual sickness and gangrenous rot. Removing these, too, was a civic religious act.

There is little exclusively theological in civic religion. Its political, economic, sociological, and anthropological dimensions allow us to explore how medieval people asserted their economic power, negotiated social inclusion and exclusion, managed politics, and haltingly pursued unity so they might achieve co-existence. Theological values and institutions gave them a framework and language, some valuable tools, and distinct goals. They also gave a narrative that allowed urban dwellers to see themselves and their communities as occupying not simply a space on earth but a place in eternity.

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# CHAPTER 10

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# LOCALIZED FAITH

## *Parochial and Domestic Spaces*

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KATHERINE L. FRENCH

### INTRODUCTION

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THE terms ‘local religion’ and ‘localized faith’ grow out of the conceptual inadequacies of the terms ‘popular religion’ and ‘traditional religion’.<sup>1</sup> The former implies the existence of an elite or clerical form of religion that was in some meaningful way different from the religion practised by the so-called masses; the latter eliminates the problem of two forms of religion driven by education and status, but implies a religion that is unchanging and theologically unsophisticated. The concept of local religion does not distinguish between elite and the popular, but it could, if necessary, within a defined geographical context. Local religion also allows for a discussion of religion based on the ways geography, gender, status, and ethnicity as much as theology and episcopal administration shaped and were a part of the religious practice of an area.

The parish, the basic unit of later medieval lay orthodox worship, has dominated scholarly discussions of local religion, particularly in England. As a primary source of contact with the Church as an institution, the parish attracted the attention of historians of the Reformation who were interested in questioning the pace and source of religious change. The parish also attracted the attention of French scholars, influenced by the *Annales* school, who wrote about religion as a lived experience or a set of practices rather than theologies; and was similarly of interest to those working on medieval urban and rural communities and their social function, economic viability, and cultural duration. While the parish was a part of all these research projects, it was an accidental by-product of questions about religious, social, and communal change, as the middle ages gave way to the early modern period. Only in recent decades has it become a focus of study in its own right.

Parish formation was an indication of Christianization, and a consequence of the spread of Christianity. The earliest parishes in France date back to the sixth and seventh centuries, while Venice’s parishes on islands across from the Realto were founded in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Parish formation was central to the *Reconquista* in Iberia and the spread of Christianity in eastern Europe. Parish boundaries were often rooted in pre-existing boundaries. After converting local inhabitants, monasteries often provided cure of souls to those living and working on their land. Sometimes they provided separate village churches, but sometimes the monks expected villagers to travel to the monastery. Once secular landlords and their families had converted they too provided churches for their dependants. In Scandinavia and Lower Saxony, early parish boundaries reflected court districts. The formation of parishes helped the church move beyond its dependence on the charismatic missionaries responsible for converting the locals to creating an enduring Christian community. Still, driven more by land holding than concerns over access to the church and its sacraments, the geographical expanse of these early parishes was often extensive.

Concerns about access to the sacraments prevailed in the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. This first major attempt to systematize religious practice mandated that rectors of parish

churches must have a sufficient benefice to be able to serve their parish, that each Christian go to confession and receive communion at Easter, and that the dead be buried in parish churchyards. These requirements helped to define that which was heretical and non-Christian, and provided a base-level of practice and belief into which the laity and the parish clergy could be educated. The Council's demands meant that parish churches had to be accessible to the laity and staffed with properly ordained clergy. These reforms created the expectation that parishes would be intimate communities, an expectation that drove much lay action in subsequent centuries. In communities with too many communicants or a distant parish church, the laity petitioned their bishop for the creation of a new parish, often around a pre-existing chapel. At the same time, bishops frequently wanted to even out the income (and influence) of incumbents by dividing parishes. Thirteenth-century episcopal records provide evidence that bishops divided some overly-large parishes into smaller ones: for example, in 1100 there was only one cathedral parish of Sens, but by 1300, it had been divided into 17 parishes. Yet the process was by no means consistent, nor was the resulting size of a parish uniform: by the late middle ages London was heavily parished with 110 parishes, an average of one parish per every 450 inhabitants, while Toledo had only 28 parishes—an average of one parish per 1,800 inhabitants.<sup>2</sup> Thus the centrality of parishes to local religious life varied across Europe.

By the fourteenth century, parish worship was a communal affair. Indeed the communal nature of medieval Christian life was a theological requirement. The second major commandment of Jesus, 'you shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Mark 12:31), formed the basic moral doctrine of *caritas*—charity, in the broadest sense of the word. Charity required social integration and fraternity and many medieval preachers taught Christianity as fraternity and community. One fourteenth-century English sermon states that 'the church is an ordained place where Christian people should come together in charity, to worship our God in peace, each one with the other'.<sup>3</sup>

## PAROCHIAL SOURCES

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The Fourth Lateran Council increased the administrative attention that parishes received from bishops and increased the laity's obligations to their parish. By the thirteenth century, in addition to paying tithes, canon law required the laity to maintain a portion of their parish church, usually the nave. This requirement necessitated the development of lay administrations, which furthered the parish's communal nature. Episcopal attention and lay obligation also meant that by the fourteenth century historians can begin to find a broad range of documents relating to the parish and its activities.

Two of the major challenges confronting scholars of local religion are that ecclesiastical source survival is very uneven across Europe and that few lay people wrote the sources that do survive. This means that episcopal and legal concerns frame most accounts of lay activities. Yet, used carefully, they can reveal a great deal about lay concerns, lay-clerical relations, and parochial administration. Some of the best-preserved and most studied parish records are in England, which boasts for example nearly 250 sets of pre-Reformation churchwardens' accounts, financial records that record what the laity raised and spent to maintain and furnish their parish churches. They are rarer for the rest of Europe, although not as rare as once thought.<sup>4</sup> Episcopal administrations required the laity to keep such records, to ensure compliance with the mandate to maintain the nave. The episcopal statutes

for the diocese of Exeter in south-west England, one of many produced in the wake of the Fourth Lateran Council, ordain that:

the custodians should come before the rectors or vicars of the churches (or at least before parochial chaplains and five or six trustworthy parishioners, whom the rectors or vicars have selected for this) and they should render every year a faithful account of the stock of the churches. And it should be recorded in writing, which writing we order to be presented to the archdeacon of the place when he should visit.<sup>5</sup>

Both the surviving churches and the churchwardens' accounts reveal that parishioners went well beyond the minimum requirements to keep the nave roofed and furnished. Adorning the nave became an important manifestation of religious devotion and a source of spiritual creativity. Churchwardens' accounts also illustrate how parishioners organized and administered themselves and comparisons reveal how different parishes could be. Parishioners recognized and celebrated these differences, making parish life a focus of the community's identity.

Another important source for studying parish life is visitation reports. Ideally, the bishop or his representative visited each parish in his diocese every three years to check on the condition of the church fabric, the behaviour of the clergy and laity, and the performance of the liturgy. In reality, they were more infrequent. Whether an episcopal or archdeaconal visit, the visitor asked the parish representative questions designed to uncover problems.<sup>6</sup> Visitation reports are filled with accusations of adultery, bigamy, clerical incontinence, financial impropriety, and failure to attend church services. Reliance on visitations alone suggests widespread anti-clericalism and religious disinterest, yet we would do well to remember that these records are skewed because they were created to identify and correct problems. In 1405, parishioners in Wanting, Wiltshire complained that when their parish clerk William Hardyng took the vestments home for his wife to wash, his children slept in them, and he and his wife had sex while wearing them 'causing scandal to the church'.<sup>7</sup> This example suggests either the laity took seriously the requirement to provide and maintain clerical vestments, and resented their improper use, or they were willing to use episcopal requirements to punish an otherwise problematic clerk. This example notwithstanding, English visitations are not as condemnatory of the clergy as some continental ones. This may not only relate to the survival of the sources, but also to differences in national experience. The very process of participating in a visitation shows the coercive nature of parish membership. Since reports of illicit sexual behaviour, suspicious religious activities, and lackadaisical church attendance were mediated through the male voices of those parishioners attending the visitation, we might imagine that those outside the clique running the parish received harsher treatment than those inside.

Another important source of lay concerns for their parishes are wills. Wills survive in the thousands all across Europe, and historians have used them to study a wide variety of topics. Central to a will's contents are pious bequests and tracking and tracing them over time, by location, status, and by gender has revealed a great deal about lay piety and the role of the parish. While historians have questioned the sincerity of bequests made at death, the creativity and necessary planning of many bequests suggests more than death-bed conversions. One well-thought out bequest came from 1537, when Joan Pernaunt, bequeathed to her Bristol parish of All Saints 'the sheet that shall lie upon me when I shall be brought to church'. The sheet was ultimately to be divided, with one half becoming an altar cloth for the high altar and the other half an altar cloth for the Jesus altar.<sup>8</sup>

Last, but not least, are the surviving churches themselves, which display the results of individual and collective efforts to maintain the nave. Surviving decorative schemes reveal

negotiations between local elites, clergy, and the rest of the parishioners. The elaborate wall-painting scheme in the Swedish parish of Tenstra in Uppland was the product of a wealthy and ambitious patron, Bengt Jönsson. In 1437, he hired German painter Johannes Rosenrod to execute thematically sophisticated paintings that drew upon Bridget of Sweden's revelations. Already a national figure, Bridget was Jönsson's ancestor; he felt this connection would further his career. In contrast, the bishop of the Finnish diocese of Turku required his approval for all artistic and artisanal work in parish churches, seemingly out of fear of pagan survivals and because of his clergy's minimal education.<sup>9</sup> Surviving wall paintings, stained-glass windows, and floor plans all testify to the liturgical and spiritual interests of the donors. Some churches, like Tenstra were quite coherent, while others show the multiple and evolving interests of generations of parishioners.

None of these sources are without their challenges. Historians have to look hard to distinguish between lay choices and ecclesiastical mandates, yet these sources also illustrate the role of ecclesiastical administrations in creating local religious life. Parish life did not exist independently of the administrations that organized it.

## PAROCHIAL ADMINISTRATION AND PIETY

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At the peak of the parish's lay administration was the churchwarden. Churchwardens were a ubiquitous office in medieval Europe, but their responsibilities and powers varied from parish to parish, making some quite influential and other less so.<sup>10</sup> Local customs and the parish's legal connection to the manorial or civic government further shaped this office and the resulting parish administration. English churchwardens' accounts frequently say that the parish 'chose or elected' their wardens, giving rise to the nineteenth-century notion that the roots of English democracy lay in the medieval parish. While some parishes did have a democratic flavour, parish communities selected their churchwardens in a variety of ways, most of them hardly democratic. Many urban parishes had a junior-senior warden system, which helped ensure smooth transitions and financial consistency. In the parish of St Cuthbert's in the English cathedral town of Wells, the city council chose the wardens, while the rural parish of Nettlecombe, in the same diocese, rotated the office among 15 householders. In the archdeaconry of Josas, outside Paris, most churchwardens served for an average of four to nine years, but one man held office for 22 years, implying an oligarchic rather than democratic administration.<sup>11</sup> The variety of appointment and tenure practices gave churchwardens variable amounts of power, with some making and implementing parish policy, while others just carried out policies they did not set.

Most parishes had two churchwardens, who typically came from the ranks of respectable middling householders. It is rare to find rural or urban elites in this office, although it could be a stepping stone to higher civic office. In Wells, England nearly 20 per cent of the churchwardens were weavers and another 18 per cent were merchants. Eleven per cent of the churchwardens went on to serve as the city's mayor.<sup>12</sup> Women also occasionally served as churchwarden. Nettlecombe's rotation system allowed widows to take over from their deceased husbands. Eleanor Mychell assumed her husband's place in the churchwarden rotation after his death. She served again in 1537 and died in office.<sup>13</sup> Where the wills of former churchwardens survive, we see that they were frequently generous to their parish church, suggesting a long-term commitment to their community. The office was as much a pious duty, as a means of augmenting their civic reputations.



Churchwardens had responsibilities to both their parish and to their bishop. Churchwardens reported at visitations on the moral, financial, and physical conditions of their parish. In the archdeaconries around Paris, the churchwardens appointed the village midwife and registered her name to the bishop. Some were also responsible for monitoring suspected cases of leprosy.<sup>14</sup> At most, visitations happened once a year, while church maintenance was a daily concern. In practical terms, this means that the churchwarden's primary responsibility was fundraising, so the parish could maintain its church building and furnish the liturgy, all good works that benefited the soul of the donor. Parishes employed a variety of fundraising strategies that drew upon wealth, local resources, and the devotional interests of its members. Fundraising both determined the churchwardens' duties and shaped members' relationships to their parish as an institution. Parishes supported by rents had a different relationship to their members than parishes which relied on church ales and fairs: while the former might have had more income to build and support an elaborate church, the latter fostered neighbourliness and shared experiences, which contributed to their sense of community and local identity.

Clive Burgess and Beat Kümin suggest that we distinguish between parish income from the living, such as collections, ales, or fairs, and income from the dead, such as rental property left as a bequest.<sup>15</sup> Another way of conceptualizing parish fundraising is to look at the role of regional economies and local resources. The coastal parish of Walberswick, Suffolk, relied on income from fishing, while the rural French parish of Meldon owned some vineyards.<sup>16</sup> Both approaches highlight differences between urban and rural fundraising. Ales, entertainments, and sales of produce were common forms of fundraising in English rural parishes, while burgage tenure made rental property a frequent source of income for urban parishes across Europe.

Gifts of houses or property that the parish could rent out created endowments from which the parish could draw. Testators also gave household items to their parish, which could be sold or incorporated into the liturgical decoration. Much depended on the testator's wishes, and his or her wealth, gender, and relationship to the parish. Analysing testamentary bequests, whether recorded in wills or churchwardens' accounts, therefore exposes the roles of status and gender in local religious practice. Those of greater means, such as the gentry or liveried members of urban merchant and trade guilds could afford to donate property or even a new aisle, while those less well off might only be able to afford a small cash donation or a linen cloth for one of the altars. In the large urban parish of St Margaret's, Westminster, Henry Abingdon left the parish several tenements, which earned the parish as much as £4 a year, while an unnamed old woman left a silver ring.<sup>17</sup> Large or small, bequests often had the name of the donor inscribed on them so that the rest of the parish would remember them in their prayers. Lack of money then did not prevent parishioners from supporting the parish, but it did shape their pious donations.

Gender also played an important role in determining pious bequests. Women were more likely to leave their parish goods rather than money. Both men and women gave household items, but women gave them more often. Women gave tended to give sheets, table clothes, pots and pans, and dishes, while men, tended to give tools and furniture. Women were also twice as likely to leave clothing and jewellery to the church, while men were more likely to give books and liturgical items. Some of these differences can be explained by men's greater access to money, but some of these differences reflect women's roles as housekeepers. In most parishes and in most homes, women had charge of cleaning, mending, or altering the clothing, linens, and other household napery. The differences between men's and women's parish bequests may be a consequence of the greater care

women had for household and church items in their lifetime, and their practice of drawing on housekeeping as a vocabulary for their piety.

The expectations women had for how their parishes would use their gifts provides an example of how women modelled their pious behaviour on their household experiences. Women were more likely to leave explicit instructions for how to adapt their bequest to parish use. Their instructions mimic their involvement in the economy of makeshifts. Avice de Crosseby of St Cuthbert's parish in Lincoln left a wooden board to the parish clerk 'suitable for making wax tapers', '1 carpet...to cover the bodies of the dead', and '1 very little leaden vessel to mend the eaves or gutter of the church', while Agnes Bruton of Taunton in the diocese of Bath and Wells left her 'red damask mantel and [her] mantel lined with silk...to the Mary Magdalene play' for costumes.<sup>18</sup> For some women, frugality translated into pious expressions. The most common use of household items was for the adornment of statues of saints. Women gave rings, kerchiefs, girdles, and dresses, which went around the base or on the statue itself. The statue of St Mary in Pilton, also in the diocese of Bath and Wells had an extensive wardrobe. By 1503, its mantel was adorned with 14 rings, three scallop shell Santiago pilgrim badges and three Henry VI pilgrim badges, two sets of amber beads and five of jet, four kerchiefs, and a cushion. Many of these items had been the gifts of women.<sup>19</sup> Women also asked that their sheets be turned into altar cloths, gowns and dresses into copes and vestments, and kerchiefs into *corporas* (cloth envelopes, which protected the host). These donated items not only adorned the liturgy, but placed personal possessions close to the body of Christ. This sort of gift sacralized the everyday items that made up women's lives and work.

## THE PAROCHIAL CHURCH

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Despite clerical warnings, the parish church was frequently a source of pride. In the didactic dialogue between a rich and a poor man, found in the Middle English text *Dives and Pauper*, the two men discuss this very issue. Dives states 'I think that it would be better to give money to poor folks: to the blind and the lame whose souls God bought so dearly, rather than spend it in solemnity and pride on building a church or rich vestments or curious windows and great bells'. Pauper responds that one should not spend money on a church for prideful reasons, but rather with the intent of glorifying God. He adds that both the Old and New Testaments justified building a beautiful place of worship; a beautiful church was a source of comfort and succour to all.<sup>20</sup>

Throughout the middle ages, parishioners across Europe rebuilt or added on to their parish churches. Some projects, such as that at Westminster's St Margaret's, were rebuilt all of a piece because of an expanding population.<sup>21</sup> Others were rebuilt because of decay. England's occupation of France during the Hundred Years' War had destroyed so many churches that visitations routinely noted their poor condition. At the French parish of Saint-Michel-sur-Orge, visitors found the church ruined, no regular services, and no churchwardens.<sup>22</sup> Similarly in Spain, as the *Reconquista* progressed, new parishes required new buildings and the laity had to be taught to care for their churches. Some initiatives to rebuild or refurnish the church were communal projects. In the fifteenth century, the Parisian parish of Saint-Séverin purchased the houses surrounding the church so they could expand. The cathedral chapter at Notre-Dame objected, but the parish persevered arguing that 'to augment the church and divine services [was] an honourable thing'.<sup>23</sup> Other initiatives were the work of wealthy individuals, who combined personal piety with family

or self-aggrandizement. At the end of the fifteenth century, Dame Isabel Newton of Yatton in Somerset served as churchwarden so she could oversee the building of her family's chapel, dedicated to St John the Baptist, where her husband was buried and she would be buried.<sup>24</sup> The resulting buildings reflected sacred and profane motivations, communal and individual concerns, and local aesthetics and building practices.

The church's space not only reflected liturgical interests—whether it be preaching, processing, or Eucharistic devotion—but also reproduced the parish's social and gender hierarchies. Parish communities included men and women of all ages from a variety of social classes. Lay or clerical status, wealth, and sex all determined one's place in religious processions, seating arrangements at mass, and burial location. While these arrangements show that parish communities were far from egalitarian, this reality does not mean they failed as communities, or that involvement was not a shared concern.

During mass, the clergy occupied the chancel, and the laity the nave. Throughout much of Europe, an elaborately carved screen sometimes with a loft and/or a rood separated the two spaces. In northern Europe, the screen had painted panels of saints on the bottom half and openings on the top half, which framed the laity's viewing of the elevation of the host. Lofts held organs, chapels, or even served as storage. Some of the best preserved screens are in England, in the West Country and East Anglia. The painted images and the crucifix made the rood screen in historian Eamon Duffy's words 'overwhelmingly the most important single focus of imagery in the people's part of the Church'.<sup>25</sup> Often the iconography was quite elaborate. In Ludham, Norwich the saints on the left are paired with those on the right, so that virgin martyrs match virgin martyrs, and king saints match king saints. Local saints or saints that reflected a donor's interests were also common choices.

The long conflict between the monks and parishioners at Dunster shows how important the rood screen could be as the demarcation point between lay and clerical space. The monks and parishioners shared a church, which generated disputes over maintenance, the schedule of services, and the care and feeding of the parish priest. In April 1498, the monks and parishioners took their conflict before the bishop of Bath and Wells. In their complaint, the monks argued that parochial processions interfered with their services. The bishop's settlement divided the church, giving the monks the chancel and choir and the parishioners the nave. Once each group controlled a portion of the building, they modified it. The parishioners erected an elaborate rood screen that effectively created a new chancel, and the monks lengthened the old choir and chancel to make it comparable to the 90-foot section controlled by the parishioners. These new architectural features inscribed in the building and in the liturgy the two groups' rivalry. The church now physically represented the antagonistic relationship that had motivated the two religious communities.

While the rood screen divided the church between the laity and the clergy, the nave also configured social interactions in terms of gender and social status. These concerns become especially visible when we look at church seating. Some churches attached stone benches to their walls and around pillars. Until the fifteenth century, however, this did not provide enough seating and most laity stood or brought their own stools for mass. The introduction of fixed seats in the fifteenth century is often associated with the increased importance of preaching, and a recognition that the laity would not stand for long sermons. Seating arrangements usually separated men and women, a practice that goes back to the third century. The early church seems to have placed women at the west end (the back), to keep them away from the chancel, because of concerns over female pollution. In the late middle ages, the usual arrangement placed women on the north side of the nave. One interpretation is that the north was associated with things dark, damp, and demonic. An alternate explanation is that women sat on the same side as Mary as depicted on the large crucifix

atop of most rood screens.<sup>26</sup> The Marian chapel was also usually on the north side of the church next to the chancel. In the Danish church of Vig, the permanent stone benches for men on the south side of the church were higher than those on the north reserved for women.<sup>27</sup>

Separating men and women during mass inhibited their talking or flirting. In the Lincoln parish of Grayingham, the churchwardens cited several women for sitting among the men and sharing the kiss of peace, creating concerns that this sign of Christian unity would be sullied by the mixing of the sexes. Seating arrangements also facilitated women's interaction with each other and marked out social divisions among them. Interaction included showing off their rosaries, clothing, and jewellery, the very items that appear most frequently in their wills. Interaction could also be information and gossip, as evidenced when the churchwardens of the London parish of St Martin Vintry brought suit against Mariot Harington, a prostitute, for sitting with the respectable women of the parish. St Margaret's, Westminster, seems to have had a widow's section, while the London parish of St Mary Woolchurch there was a section for unmarried women.<sup>28</sup> The records do not explain whether it was the women themselves or parish officials who created these sections. Whatever the case, seating arrangements grouped women together at mass according to social categories of communal importance. Charity was not undifferentiated or non-hierarchical, but absorbed into the social understandings of the time.

Seating arrangements made women's own concerns and priorities part of attendance at mass, but these categories also served as a means of social control. The clergy worried especially that women would use church attendance as an opportunity for gossiping and sparring. The German preacher Berthold of Regensburg complained that 'Men talk in church, but they talk as if it is a market, about things like what they have seen in other countries...whereas women talking in church talk about other things to each other—one about her maidservant, how good the girl is at sleeping and bad at doing work, or about her husband, who is causing trouble, another about her baby not putting on weight'. Wall paintings of two women gossiping with a devil recording their words appear in churches across northern Europe. The message was that gossiping was a female sin, and behaviour associated with their church attendance. By assigning seats that reflected marital status, the parish could assign expected behaviour. The *Ménagier* of Paris advised his young wife to attend church with older women so that she could emulate the demeanour, deportment, and dress of more experienced matrons.<sup>29</sup> Conformity was easier to enforce in an organized nave, making it harder for women to 'misbehave' and easier for authorities to identify absenteeism.

Seating arrangements replicated other social hierarchies. Some rural communities based seating on land holding. Larger landholders sat in the best seats, close to the front where they had the best view of the elevation, and where more people would see them when they walked through the nave to take their seat. The medieval bench-ends in Braunton, Devon, are carved with initials, heraldic devices, or occupational symbols, to identify occupants. Those seats with the best view of the high altar and chancel have the heraldic devices, meaning they belonged to those of high status.<sup>30</sup> By the late fifteenth century, many English urban parishes sold seats as a way of raising money, which tended to make seating arrangements not only a reflection of wealth, but also of social aspiration, as parishioners changed seats as their status changed, either through civic office holding, marriage, or economic prosperity.

The very elite sometimes sat in a family chapel, separated from the rest of the congregation. These could be very elaborate affairs, decorated with coats-of-arms, and other



meaningful images, with the pews themselves fitted with cushions and pillows for comfort. Many would be locked to prevent others from sitting in them. In some communities the local elite sat in the chancel. In 1456, the bishop of Tréguier in Brittany banished all women from the chancel, including noble women. Any caught violating this injunction was to be excommunicated and heavily fined.<sup>31</sup>

Buying a seat demonstrated the interconnection of piety and social status. The purchase of a good seat not only demonstrated the occupant's piety or devotion, but it also advertised his or her wealth. Because of the dual meaning behind seating arrangements, those in civic office or those aspiring to civic office often purchased seats as a way of both displaying their piety and promoting their visibility. Piety, or at least the performance of it, was a qualification for civic office.

Chapels and side altars were other features that organized the nave and reflected the priorities of the laity. Some saint cults were popular enough to warrant building an additional aisle and chapel, others only had a side altar against a wall or a pillar. As the popularity of saints grew or fell out of favour, side altars were added or rededicated to reflect changing pious interests. The popularity of different saints in different regions of Europe is one of the clearest examples of localized religious practices. Italian merchants brought their devotion to St Zita, a pious servant who fed the poor despite her master's orders, to England, where she became especially popular among servants and housewives. English merchants spread her cult to Iceland. The Virgin Mary transcended region and was venerated throughout Christendom. In some parishes, married and pregnant women specifically supported the Marian chapel. In Ranworth, Norfolk, the reredos (the screen behind the altar) sports images of St Margaret, the patron saint of childbirth, and the Holy Kindred: the three daughters of St Anne (Mary Salome, Mary Cleophas, and the Virgin Mary), with their children, the young saints James the Great, John the Evangelist, Jesus, James the Less, Jude, Simon, and Jose. All the children play with toy versions of their attributes: John clutches a toy eagle, while James the Less's fuller's club becomes a bubble pipe. The child saints also appear as adults elsewhere on the screen suggesting the hope that children would grow up. The Holy Kindred affirmed and sanctified motherhood, fertility, and family. Taken together, these images betray concerns for safe and successful childbirth and child rearing. In St Margaret's, Westminster, the altar to St Cornelius was of special interest to the Dutch and other Low Country immigrants in the area, while the St Katherine's altar was the focus of unmarried women's devotions.<sup>32</sup>

Even in death, parishioners maintained their social hierarchies when choosing their burial locations. Among the nobility, parish burials were rarer, with many choosing a monastery or convent for their final resting place. Most laity, however, were buried in or by their parish church. The most prestigious places were inside closest to the high altar or favoured saints' chapel. Jehan Paintour of Caen requested that he, his parents, and his heirs all be buried before the image of St Nicholas.<sup>33</sup> Local elites might also be buried in a family chapel inside the parish church, with the rest of their family. Burial inside the church cost more, making it the preserve of the local elite. The majority of parishioners were buried in the churchyard, although even here not all burial locations were equal. Proximity to the churchyard cross, and the south side were favoured over the north side, because of its associations with the devil. Criminals and convicted heretics were excluded from the churchyard altogether.

While maintaining the parish church was a financial burden for the laity, it was a flexible one that allowed parishioners to act out their own concerns. Subgroups based on status, gender, age, and occupation all emerged as sources for the expression of parish pious



displays. Piety was as much a prerequisite for civic office as wealth, and the parish provided a forum within which one could manifest these attributes.

## BEYOND THE PARISH

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Scholars have debated the primacy of the parish church as a centre of local religious life. While canon law still required the laity to receive their sacraments at the parish church, alternative forms of local religion either rivalled or complemented the parish. For many Christians, the parish was their focal point of religious practice, but for others, the parish church was too far away, the administration too oligarchic, or the membership too common to be fulfilling. Some of these distant settlements had a chapel for weekly services, and the parishioners attended the parish church only on major holy days, such as Easter, or for baptisms, confession, and burials. Those attending the chapel often resented the parish church. Sometimes the local gentry had a financial or political interest in the chapel gaining independence, in other cases the parishioners felt neglected by the parish clergy and begrudged the required support of the parish at the expense of their chapel. In an effort to address these problems, chapel goers could petition either their bishop or the pope for independent parochial status for their chapel. The Swiss parish church of Ufenau was on an island in Lake Zurich, but most of its parishioners did not live on the island, and had to cross over footbridges to get to services. Over the course of the middle ages, chapels broke off to form their own parishes that were easier to attend.<sup>34</sup>

There were also a host of sub- or supra-parish organizations. Guilds or confraternities provided many of the same social and religious services as parishes, but on a more intimate scale. In general, urban confraternities were highly specialized, while rural ones were less so. Dedicated to the promotion and veneration of a saint or religious concept, such as the Trinity or Corpus Christi, membership required adhering to standards of behaviour, such as regular church attendance, and not fighting with or gossiping about fellow members. The rural confraternity of San Gregorio in Radda in Chianti placed taverns off limits to members except when travelling or in an emergency. Unlike parishes, where membership was mandatory, guilds were voluntary associations and although often tied to a parish, they were not based on geographical boundaries. Some in the Italian countryside had charge of the physical maintenance of the parish church. For example, in the rural Tuscan parish of San Martino in Gangalandi, the confraternity of the Virgin claimed the right to decorate the baptismal font. Charity was also a common purpose. In the Spanish town of Zamora, 14 confraternities ran hospitals, while several others aided monastic infirmaries.<sup>35</sup>

Traditionally, scholars understood guilds as burial societies. Members sought insurance for a Christian burial and quicker salvation from purgatory. While guilds did provide burials for members, it was only one aspect of their function. Guilds were also a forum for shared devotion to a patron saint or Christ, conviviality, a source of social and political networking, and a place for members to seek financial help. Promoting the veneration of a saint included supporting a light or an altar dedicated to the saint in the parish church, or having a free-standing oratory. Guilds held celebrations on their patron's day, where members took part in public processions wearing a common livery. Afterwards there was an annual feast, a major event in the life of membership. Well-endowed guilds also had their own halls to hold the celebrations.

Guilds and confraternities date back to the beginnings of European Christianity, but changing fashions of spirituality meant that the creation of new ones reflected new pious

interests. In Italy, the rise of the mendicant orders in the thirteenth century attracted many urban lay people, who were interested in their rigorous piety, but unable or unwilling to join the order. In England, many guilds originated in the period just after the Black Death, where they served as burial societies. Guild membership created further hierarchies and avenues for local advancement and visibility.<sup>36</sup>

Guild members paid dues, but many guilds held fundraising activities as well. Like parishes, guilds relied on a variety of fundraising strategies. Some owned rental property, others hosted ales, and still others had stocks of cash, grain, and livestock from which members could borrow, purchase, or lease, giving them more flexible finances than those with just property. These guilds functioned in many ways like banks. Some guilds split their stock between male and female members, giving each group responsibility for one aspect of guild life, such as supplying the wax.

The exclusivity of guilds and confraternities waxed and waned over the late middle ages. In the fourteenth century, Italian confraternities were quite exclusive, but in the late fifteenth century, they expanded their membership. In contrast, the Spanish confraternities were quite inclusive. England seemed to follow another path, becoming more selective in the fifteenth century. Exclusivity applied not only to status but also sex. In both England and Spain women organized all women's groups, dedicated to women's spiritual and physical concerns. The English all-women's groups may or may not have been as institutionalized as full-fledged guilds, but they nonetheless provided women with both leadership and organizational opportunities. In 1500, the women of the rural parish of Chagford, Devon took control of the St Mary's altar in one of the chapels. Overseen by two female wardens, the women financed the chapel's restoration and decoration. In Italy, women were banned from the flagellant confraternities, but were increasingly admitted to those dedicated to charitable works, or support of the parish. Giovanna Casagrande has, however, questioned the significance of their increasing membership, as they could not hold leadership roles or influence policy decisions.<sup>37</sup>

Confraternities illustrate the problems of the term 'popular religion'. Clerics both formed their own confraternities, and joined ones with lay members. Some historians portray relations between parishes and guilds or confraternities as competitive, arguing that they met late medieval Christians' needs more readily than the parish, where membership and boundaries were set and immutable. However, medieval Christians joined and supported multiple groups simultaneously, suggesting that guilds nuanced or augmented parish participation rather than challenged it.

The house could be another focus of local religion. By and large the nobility were uninvolved in parish affairs, preferring instead to make their household a centre of religious practice. With more than one home many were at best only part-time members of a parish anyway. There is also debate about how involved the gentry were in their parishes. Some scholars argue that as a group, large landholders were withdrawing from public religion, while others find the opposite. To be sure, the gentry's greater financial resources gave them different religious options, which included building private chapels in their manor houses and elaborate and secluded stalls and pews in the parish church.

Opening a household chapel required episcopal approval, usually granted on a year-by-year basis. Typically, these licences added that on high holy days the licensee had to attend their parish church. Household inventories show that some domestic chapels were elaborately outfitted with several sets of vestments, multiple Eucharistic vessels, and liturgical and other devotional books, demonstrating that households followed the changing liturgical year. Having a private chapel also meant having a chaplain among the household staff. The contents of these chapels suggests that in addition to worshiping together,

families probably read or listened to religiously inspired readings, in order to foster pious discussion and behaviour.

The elite's greater level of literacy gave them the ability to develop their piety through religious readings. Many owned personalized Books of Hours and collections of sermons to guide their private devotions in their household chapel. The connection between literacy, home, and piety is made clear in a set of fifteenth-century instructions for a London layman. His instructions showed him how to turn parts of the house and household events into routine pious practices.

If dinner is not ready when you get home, go to that room and say another fifty of Our Lady.

When you dine, and also after dinner, say grace standing. Let the book be brought to the table as readily as the bread. And lest the tongue speak vain or hurtful things, let there be reading, now by one, now by another, and by your children as soon as they can read...

Let the family be silent at table, and always, as far as possible. Expound something in the vernacular which may edify your wife and others.<sup>38</sup>

His piety was not only tied to his ability to read, but to his role as head of the household. As such his duties also included instructing his family, including his apparently non-literate wife. Analysis of the accumulated dirt and finger smudges on Netherlandish Books of Hours suggests that readers read prayer books in bed, often falling asleep before finishing their devotions.<sup>39</sup>

Even among those without private chapels, the house could still be a place of religious contemplation. Repetition of the Ave, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, or the rosary did not require a special room. Household worship was, moreover, facilitated by any number of affordable religious objects, such as holy water stocks, and wall hangings with bible stories or saints' images. As printing became more common, wood-block pictures of the saints, the Crucifixion, or other scenes from the life of Jesus adorned walls. Surviving examples, particularly from Germany, show that these images were kissed, caressed, and otherwise handled as part of the family's devotions.

## CONCLUSION

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Among many English scholars, focus on the dramatic changes of the Reformation led to a denigration of the quality of religious practice at the parish level, but the study of the rise of the parish and its lay administration reveals that late medieval religious practice was not moribund or uninformed. Indeed the experience of running their own parishes and choosing a vocabulary of piety gave the laity high expectations for the quality of their local religious life. For better or worse, parishioners going to mass in 1515 had no notion of the radical changes about to disrupt this practice in the next few years, but as active participants in local religion, they were prepared to participate in one way or another in the religious reforms of the sixteenth century. By looking at late medieval local religion from the perspective of its own concerns and not those of the Reformation, we see that activity and agency were a requirement of parish life, and not a precursor for the Reformation.

# NOTES

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## PART III

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# PRACTICES

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# CHAPTER 11

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# CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN THE INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH

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IAN FORREST

HISTORIANS of religion have often contrasted their subject and method with older approaches to the 'institutional Church', emphasizing a shift towards the study of religious belief, practice and identity at the expense of structures, power and administration.<sup>1</sup> Much has been gained in the study of 'lived religion', but there have been two significant losses. First, belief and practice have ceased to be understood as social phenomena operating at the junction between institutions, culture, and individual agency. Apart from the records of inquisition into heresy, institutional records can seem unresponsive to the kinds of issues that historians of religion now find themselves interested in, such as the nature of individual religious experiences and expression. Second, when writing about the 'institutional Church' historians sometimes give the impression that there is a single entity that can be described in this way, and that its lineaments are sufficiently well-known to remove the need for any inquiry or explanation. Because institutions are everywhere in medieval religion, we have developed a 'selective deafness [to] the hold that institutions have on our processes of classifying and recognizing' forms of action and belief.<sup>2</sup>

This deafness is evident even when historians do address institutions. Thinking about 'the Church' or 'the institutional Church' as a single entity is a particularly lazy habit that medieval historians fall into from time to time. There is a good deal of truth in Gary Macy's argument that the Church is 'better described as a set of common traditions rather than as an institutional monolith'.<sup>3</sup> This encourages us to be careful not to make assumptions about the Church: it was not monolithic but diverse, and there was no clear normative centre. Thinking along the same lines, Andre Vauchez has highlighted the need for institutional histories of the Church to go beyond 'solid syntheses' and 'abstract and rigid schemas', prescribing the incorporation of 'informal power' into institutional studies.<sup>4</sup> Macy and Vauchez wrote in dismay at the dryness and unreality that pervades much institutional medieval history, but their solutions are also problematic. Vauchez makes a common mistake in assuming that institutions 'normally' exclude informal power, an assumption that is echoed in Macy's characterization of an institution as a 'monolith'. If we equate institutions with monoliths it can be hard to understand them. Institutions change; monoliths do not. But is Macy's term 'common traditions' a satisfactory way around this difficulty? 'Common traditions' is an interesting phrase to think with. It evokes processes of remembering and forgetting, selecting and rejecting, sharing and excluding; but even so, I think that the papacy, episcopal visitation, tithes (the list could go on and on) are all better described as institutions rather than common traditions. It's just that medieval historians have not thought very much about what an institution *is*—how they come into being, how they continue, and how they change.

This does not mean that medievalists have been unreflective about what 'Church' means, nor have they seen it as entirely monolithic. It is axiomatic that the middle ages was a period (if it can be conceived of as a single period) in which there were great disagreements in ecclesiology that left a rich legacy in the political and social thought of later periods. These have been deeply studied in modern scholarship. Ecclesiological debate was



especially prominent in political thought from the mid-thirteenth century onwards, but differing conceptions of ‘the Church’ can be read into the textual and material products of Christianity in the preceding 1000 years as well.<sup>5</sup> In the early middle ages there seems to have been only an abstract concept of the Church as a unified body of all the faithful, and certainly no concept of the existence or need for such universal institutions as would develop after 1100. Historians of this period have written ‘the history of many churches’ and explored the ‘micro-Christendoms’ within which faith and religious practice resided.<sup>6</sup> But from the Gregorian reform of the eleventh century onwards, a number of institutions grew that would encompass all Latin Christians to a greater or lesser degree. Indeed the appellation ‘Latin’, referring both to a common rite and a common obedience, was part of the rhetoric associated with this institutional development. Clearly many historians habitually think of the Church as variegated, contested, and changing, but there is still an instinctive need to find some solid ground or conceptual foil against which to highlight the lively discussions of belief, ritual, identity, and negotiation that have become the mainstay of the history of medieval Christianity. That foil is typically a ‘Church’ or ‘institutional Church’ whose character and existence is not critically examined or explained.

There is a range of approaches to institutions in the study of history and the social sciences. Three are particularly relevant to the study of the medieval Church. They can be characterized as the *clockwork* model, the *semiotic* model, and the *transactional* model. The clockwork model describes the ‘machinery’ of an institution that is designed and built for particular purposes. Continuity and change in the institution is described as ‘growth’ or ‘decay’ and is ascribed to how well the machinery is designed for its purpose and how well it is maintained. There is a tendency to focus on the achievements of ‘rational legislators’ reminiscent of Aristotle’s law-givers, and to describe bureaucracies uncritically, purely in their own terms. This model lies—largely un-stated these days—behind most treatments of the institutional Church of the middle ages. One persistent assumption is that local cultures and popular demands are variants of, or deviations from, a presumed hierarchical or central norm. This chapter assumes no such norm and seeks to view institutions as the product of interactions between organizations, groups, and individuals who are not ‘caught in the toils of a complex machinery that they do not help to make’.<sup>7</sup>

The *semiotic* model of institutions assumes that ‘the Church’ is composed of representations, some created by authority and some beyond its control. Representations create habits of thought and solidity of meaning, sustaining institutions in linguistic and semiotic ‘webs of significance’. Organizations are sometimes treated almost as epiphenomena in this model.<sup>8</sup> Because the values, terminology and internal features of an organization are part of the *habitus* and part of the language, its existence and legitimacy is seen as part of the normal way of the world. Its semiotic presence in the world is constantly reiterated through performance and display in the form of rituals. A major recent historian in this tradition is David d’Avray, significantly working with Max Weber’s ideas on rationality rather than those on bureaucracy. D’Avray’s analysis of ‘symbolic reasoning’ in marriage theology and sermons is a good example of how continuity and change in an institution—the canon law on marriage—might be explained through representations rather than rational design.<sup>9</sup> One of the strongest ways in which representations can influence institutions is when institutions are themselves the subject of beliefs. When an institution is more than the carrier of beliefs, and becomes the subject of beliefs, its continuation is made more likely, because beliefs are arguably harder to shake than, for example, financial fitness. The problem with this cultural approach to institutions, most trenchantly articulated by the medieval historian Philippe Buc and the anthropologist Ernest Gellner, is that it can suggest

a totality that appears to be more unified and functional than it really is. With representations supporting beliefs and beliefs supporting representations it runs the risk of being purely descriptive, or at worst wholly circular, and thus incapable of explaining continuity and change.<sup>10</sup>

The *transactional* model of institutions posits that they endure so long as they benefit someone, and change when that benefit ceases, alters or is transferred to someone else. An institution may benefit its own members, and if those members are sufficiently powerful, then the institution's endurance in society is made more likely. An institution may also benefit people on the outside, and if these people are powerful enough—in influence or numbers—then that will also encourage the continuation of the institution. These forces will also influence the directions in which institutions change and develop. Some versions of this model might lead to explanations for institutional history that are too cynical and a-historical for our purposes. For example, various attempts in the sociology of religion to apply rational choice theory to belief and church membership fall short of satisfactory explanation because strong values are relegated to being mere preferences adopted because they bring some measurable benefit to the individual.<sup>11</sup> An attempt has been made by a group of economists to explain the 'success' of the medieval Church as if it were a multinational firm, but this fails to take belief seriously and disregards the known history of the Church: the pope was never a CEO and certainly not an operations manager; there was relatively little central planning and local churches cannot be described as franchise operations.<sup>12</sup> As John Hall recently remarked 'religion is amenable to analysis in relation to theories of organizations, social movements, identity formation, and the like. However, it is not reducible to them, for religion is a phenomenon *sui generis*.'<sup>13</sup>

However, modern institutional theory is not confined to such crude attempts to deal with history. Rather more sophisticated efforts do exist, particularly those built upon the institutional economics of Douglass North, and influenced by the sociologies of religion and knowledge associated with Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann.<sup>14</sup> Their ideas come together in the 'analytical narratives' of economic historian Avner Greif, who has worked on high medieval Genoese and Maghribi trade networks. Greif's view of institutions is that they cannot be understood by only looking at formal organizational structure; we must also look at the use of those institutions and at 'transactions' that take place within them or under their auspices, because these are the facts that constitute the institutions and are, in aggregate, the enactment of institutional continuity and change. This approach allows us to see why Andre Vauchez's separation of informal power from an understanding of institutions is wrong, and why Gary Macy's assumption that institutions are 'monolithic' is too reductive.

In exploring the institutional history of Christianity in the middle ages, I will assume that institutions cannot be understood as machines; that they exist amid interactions between culture, society, economy, and religion; that they are forever being made and remade by actions that take place within, and in relation to, them. This essay will focus on the period between 1000 and 1500, which was dominated by a distinctive idea of reform and an accompanying institutional intensification.<sup>15</sup> The central question to be addressed by students of the institutional Church in this period is why and how there was so much institutional change affecting the papacy, canon law, bishops, and priests. Each of these institutions could be seen as universal, but equally all—even the papacy—can only really be understood in terms of local histories and social change. Institutional intensification took place amid significant economic growth and increasingly assertive military-judicial elites. Economic growth provided the means by which institutions could be supported, and to

some extent made those institutions necessary. Political intensification and military power might have produced different results, entrenching localism in Christianity, had it not been for the ideologies of the Gregorian reform, crucially clerical celibacy. The expectation of celibacy made it less likely that churchmen were competitors for political power and wealth in the same way as dynastic potentates. As R. I. Moore has suggested, this allowed churches to acquire power across political boundaries, and it was a precondition for secular elites' general acceptance of universal church authority in crucial facets of dynastic politics: legitimacy of marriages and births, and Christian burial as the imprimatur of dynastic validity.

## UNIVERSAL INSTITUTIONS: PAPACY, EPISCOPACY, CLERISY

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In the Carolingian period the papacy would hardly have known had someone burnt down a church in the world beyond the seven hills, but by the thirteenth century papal judgements were made upon the lives of humble individuals in the farthest corners of Europe. It was from the late eleventh century onwards, particularly from the pontificate of Urban II (1088–99), that the papacy began to look more and more convincing as a universal institution of the Church. Its fiscal administration, economic basis, and political influence grew stronger, first in the peninsula but soon well beyond. Bureaucratic and judicial reforms and the multiplication of offices are witnessed by an exponential increase in the records produced, and a body of rhetoric asserting a 'papal monarchy'.<sup>16</sup> The political and spiritual ambitions that drove this, usually known as the Gregorian reform after Pope Gregory VII (1073–85), have been impressively analysed in themselves, and as part of wider political and economic changes. The usual grand narrative posits this period of papal initiative as the stimulus to legal consolidation by the thirteenth-century lawyer-popes and the general councils of the Church, notably the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 under Innocent III (1198–1216). However, little systematic analysis has been made of exactly how the ambitions and ideas of a group of elite office-holders and intellectuals related to the growth of formidable and powerful institutions. Rhetoric does not convince purely on its own merits, and courts cannot solve the disputes of an uninterested population. In order to understand institutional intensification, one must look at demand as well as supply, and the circulation of information as well as the formulation of ideas.

'Demand' refers to the interests and actions of those who appealed to the papacy for judgements. Judgements could come in several forms, changing over time—decretal letters, decisions in the *curia*, decisions of the papal penitentiary—but what all of these had in common was their dependence on litigants (users) for their legitimacy. This can be briefly illustrated with two contrasting examples. In 1216 the canons of Braga cathedral in Portugal gathered testimony from 195 witnesses in their effort to prove that their archiepiscopal province was not subject to the primacy of Toledo. This dossier of witness statements and legal opinion was taken to Rome so that the case could be pleaded before the papal *curia*. A key feature of the statements was an implicit acknowledgement of papal authority. Witnesses were asked whether they had ever heard of Braga being subject to any church except that of *Rome*, and whether they knew of any *papal* judgement making Braga subject to Toledo. It was worth the huge expense of gathering testimony, hiring proctors, travelling to Rome, and sustaining a protracted lawsuit, because all concerned accepted the right of the pope to pronounce on such local political disputes. Proof of a papal judgement either

way would be difficult to ignore, and no-one suggested that the question could be settled without recourse to Rome.<sup>17</sup> In the early thirteenth century such cases were becoming common, though they typically dealt with the rights of wealthy corporations like cathedrals. In the 1470s a very different case was dealt with by the ‘papal penitentiary’, a special office that had been set up to provide dispensations to people who had fallen foul of the canon law through no fault of their own. Sten Henriksson and Anna Jakobsdotter were a Finnish couple who had discovered too late that they were so closely related as to be unable to lawfully marry. They sent three separate appeals to the penitentiary, striving each time to get the legal details just right. Why did they bother? This was not a case of one party distrusting the other as in the Braga-Toledo dispute, but of a couple not trusting that their society would recognize the legitimacy of their children, such was the reach of papal authority and the acceptance of canon law and reform theology.<sup>18</sup>

The legitimacy of papal authority emerged where it was accepted, and this depended to a large extent on how potential litigants expected other parties to act and think. Will my enemy/lord/neighbour accept papal authority or not? If he or she does, where will that leave me? In other words, papal authority became a universal institution not because of any inherent force or worth that it possessed, but because across Europe various types of litigant, from the individual lay person to huge corporate bodies, came to suppose that other litigants (or whole societies made up of other potential litigants and other institutions) were likely to accept it.<sup>19</sup> The papacy was an institution based on beliefs about the likely actions of others.

Written judgements in the form of decretal letters or decisions of the penitentiary spread information about papal authority and capacity to far-flung parts of Christendom. Some of these individual judgements were incorporated into popular scholastic collections of canon law such as Gratian’s *Decretum*, which became the definitive legal teaching text in European universities, and into papal collections of *decretals* such as the *Liber Extra* and the *Liber Sextus* in the thirteenth century. These collections spawned endless commentaries and specialist treatises, and everywhere this body of ‘common law’ (the *ius commune*) was the touchstone of legal validity. Local judgements had to be rationalized in terms acceptable to specialists in the *ius commune*. The canon law was a universal institution, but it was not rigidly identical in every region, as will be discussed further below. Some debate is possible over whether scholasticism and the *ius commune* unified Europe or provided the materials for local differentiation; it seems likely that the two processes of institutional intensification—universal and local—proceeded in tandem.<sup>20</sup> Crucially, one cannot understand canon law and papal authority without a reflexive model of information circulation. Ideas were not simply disseminated from above; local actions and decisions incrementally affected the direction taken by parts of the whole.

For all that written communication was important to the circulation of information, the circulation of a clerical elite was indispensable. This was true at every level, but some key features of this elite can be illustrated through the example of papal legates. Legates carried delegated papal authority, and through them the papacy hoped to demonstrate to provincial churches the legitimacy (and also the usefulness) of papal power. Wherever legates were received papal authority was tacitly accepted as legitimate and a natural part of the ecclesiastical order, regardless of secular political, or vernacular linguistic, boundaries. For example, two important legations to England were carried out by the Italian cardinals Otto and Ottobono in 1237–41 and 1265–8 respectively. Both missions were received positively by the English church and both left substantial series of constitutions behind them that were constantly referred to in fourteenth century episcopal administration, and given a place in the synodal books that comprised English canon legal written memory. The much frostier



reception given to a French former archbishop, Jean d'Abbeville, as papal legate to Spain in 1228–9 cannot detract from the recognition of papal authority implied by local co-operation in calling three provincial councils at Valladolid, Salamanca, and Lérida.<sup>21</sup> Both examples demonstrate the mobility of the clerical elite across language zones, something which has been cited as a pre-condition for institutional growth in pre-modern societies.<sup>22</sup>

All office holders in the medieval Church operated in circumstances that were to some extent determined by local political realities. However, distinct commonalities of practice, values, and experience gave the offices of bishop and priest the character of universal institutions. In the secular sphere the concepts of 'kingship' and 'lordship' embodied the ambitions of those who exercised authority and the expectations of those who lived under it.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the culture of episcopacy that developed in the high and late medieval centuries asserted Gregorian ambitions for reforming bishops, but also renovated episcopacy as an office, that is to say, as a recognized set of expectations for what a bishop should be and do. This was achieved partly through innovations in ritual and display, with distinctive episcopal liturgy, dress and building styles emphasizing the bishop's place in the apostolic hierarchy. More importantly the duties of bishops were substantially elaborated in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, with the concept of 'ordinary jurisdiction' over and above that of smaller churches and monasteries becoming an ideal in all dioceses, and increased emphasis being placed on visitations and synods as vehicles for disciplining the clergy and laity.<sup>24</sup>

The promotion of the episcopal image began with the elaboration of a truly episcopal liturgy c.1000 and grew into a habitual recycling of concepts and images in all media as the power of Church government expanded. As bishops sought to define their constitutional and financial relationships with cathedral chapters, so their domestic architecture began to make statements about episcopal office and dignity. Episcopal tombs, such as those in León cathedral arranged in the late thirteenth century into a 'pantheon' by Bishop Martín Fernández, could express ideals of charity in order to associate bishops with the needs of their people as well as with the values of reform.<sup>25</sup> Reforming bishops might commission depictions of themselves as patrons of particular local devotional cults, such as Bishop Thomas Spofford's series of windows in fifteenth-century Yorkshire and Herefordshire associating him with Anne teaching Mary to read.<sup>26</sup> Certain forms of behaviour came to be expected of lay persons in the presence of bishops, which we can perhaps see most clearly in Margery Kempe's anxiety about appropriate bodily control during an audience with the archbishop of York in the early fifteenth century.<sup>27</sup> All of this embedded episcopal office and dignity within localities, even within people's sense of self, while forging connections with international movements and universal institutions. Episcopacy was enhanced as a crucial institution of the Church through the establishment of its local as well as its universal legitimacy.

Just as the bishop's status created a culture of episcopacy that contributed to the universality of the Church, so the Gregorian and Lateran periods saw the active promotion of a universal culture of priesthood. Churches were redesigned to emphasize clerical status; celibacy was demanded, legislated for, and pursued; parochial tithes allowed churches to be freed from direct secular control, and the new laws against 'simony' (purchase of ecclesiastical office) *demand*ed such a separation. Across the regions of Latin Christianity priests, like bishops, faced some very different challenges, modifying the universal elements of the institution. In places the limits of socially-acceptable behaviour amongst priests departed significantly from the ideal, but this did not break the unity of the Church because a common culture of priesthood created a clear status group whose basic position in



relation to secular authorities, bishops, and the ordinary laity, gave more-than-superficial unity to the institutional Church regardless of regional variations.

What these universal institutions—papacy, episcopacy, clerisy—enabled was a degree of bureaucratic efficiency in papal administration and canon law. Bishops and priests everywhere were formally expected to do the same things and adhere to the same standards, so no matter what realities prevailed, local disputes and claims had to be made to conform to these universal expectations if they were to be heard. This benefited not only the papal ‘centre’, allowing its business and therefore power to grow, but also local churches, prelates, priests and even laity, who sometimes (though not always) wanted a strong universal legal system that could determine cases and enforce judgements, thus protecting their position and day-to-day activities, as we have seen in the case of jurisdictional disputes and marriage litigation. Efficiency was sometimes sought by tidy-minded bureaucrats, and was sometimes asserted as a value—in the guise of ‘justice’ or ‘equity’—by users of institutions, but it is not an absolute value that can be measured, and in the medieval Church any efficiency was largely a by-product of organizations and individuals pursuing other ends.

## LOCAL CONDITIONS

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However efficient—that is, bearable or acceptable—the institutions of the Church became, their universal character was surely only rarely apprehended by the people at the sharp end of episcopal government or disputes in canon law. What they saw were the immediate forces acting upon their own situation. This is easily forgotten when reading the sources for institutional history, which have usually been produced by organizations whose rhetoric and bureaucratic practice arrogates to themselves all agency and legitimacy. This tends to make local actions look like the application of some papal, canonical, or episcopal blueprint, but perhaps they are best thought of ‘not as the unfolding of the inherent implications of rules or instructions but as a makeshift effort to proceed in analogy with custom and precedent’.<sup>28</sup> Universal institutions might be strengthened, though incrementally changed, by local events, but this will only happen if the institution has the capacity to partake in local histories and memory as much as in universal over-arching structures.

Bishops were one of the major dynamic forces in the Church between 1100 and 1500, partly because of the common culture described above, but also because they were so well placed to make the links between local circumstances and universal values. The importance of bishops as carriers of a putative single institutional culture during Latin Christendom’s phase of territorial expansion, has been strongly argued by Robert Bartlett, but in order to see how this expansion played out in different regions a good deal more comparative work is needed.<sup>29</sup> [Robert Brentano’s \*Two Churches: England and Italy in the Thirteenth Century\* \(1968\)](#) is a good example of what can be gained by looking at two regions in some detail. However, future work might proceed best if ‘Church’ is disaggregated and narrower questions asked of several or many regions.

General studies of the medieval Church have sometimes assumed a broadly similar diocesan structure across Europe, and the model has usually been the experience of England and northern France where large or wealthy dioceses were the attractive rewards of royal service. A good income and close links to burgeoning royal bureaucracies supported technical specialization in chanceries and the multiplication of administrative and judicial office holders. In these much-governed regions the systems for pastoral care—synods,

visitations, courts, and so on—were well-developed by 1300. There were of course dioceses (Barcelona, Verona and Città di Castello for example) which shared or even exceeded this purportedly ‘Anglo-French’ ideal type but much of Europe produced alternative diocesan structures. Paradoxically, the most anomalous area was central and southern Italy. Here, small and poor dioceses were unattractive to high-powered administrators, and financially unable to support the intensive work of administration and pastoral care. They were vulnerable to papal interference and traditions of institutional practice were harder to establish.<sup>30</sup> In Poland and the Baltic polities extremely large dioceses were necessitated by a more dispersed population and less economic and governmental activity; bishops gained some power in the thirteenth century at the expense of monasteries, but were unable to step from the shadow of magnate politics and become independent agents of church reform until the later fifteenth century.<sup>31</sup> Some northern areas that developed fast in the later middle ages had to improvise with regards to ecclesiastical institutions. Utrecht diocese, for example, was very large, taking in almost all of the modern Netherlands, but urbanization necessitated additional pastoral and administrative labour and so the archdeacons became startlingly autonomous mini-bishops. This was in complete contrast to Lincoln diocese across the North Sea, where a similar-sized territory was ruled with a high degree of centralization and archdeacons were closely tied into the episcopal household.<sup>32</sup> In parts of Germany powerful prince-bishops wielded secular as well as spiritual power, which was not always conducive to the elaboration of distinct ecclesiastical institutions and spheres of activity. These comparisons are extremely provisional, and much more work needs to be done on comparative diocesan government before a clearer general picture can be drawn.

The two primary means by which bishops were enjoined to reform their clergy and people in line with the ideals of the Fourth Lateran Council were visitation and the holding of synods.<sup>33</sup> Synods of the diocesan clergy were meant to equip them with the texts of reforming constitutions, and visitations by bishops or archdeacons were meant to ensure that the clergy were resident, capable, and assiduous in their duties. Detailed comparative histories of synods, visitations and the reform movement across Europe have yet to be undertaken, and much more could still be done on the social histories of these institutions in individual provinces of the Church. Comparative work is necessary because although synods and visitations were universal institutions, their particular nature and social meaning was peculiar to each region.

Visitation, for example, has often been taken to be a universal feature of ecclesiastical administration, unchanging across Europe and across the centuries, from Regino of Prüm’s *Libri duo* of the tenth century to the reform tracts of Jean Gerson in the fifteenth. Historians have also tended to assume that the visitation of secular clergy and laity in the parishes was merely an extension of the visitation of the regular clergy in monasteries. In fact the history of parish visitation is tightly entwined with local histories of political intensification and legal change that differ from region to region. England and northern France provide good examples—perhaps epitomized by the efforts of Robert Grosseteste as bishop of Lincoln and Eudes Rigaud as archbishop of Rouen—where as early as the mid-thirteenth century parish visitation was a regular means for bishops and the laity to police the clergy, and for the laity to police each other. There is also evidence of this in late thirteenth-century Città di Castello in central Italy, and by the early fourteenth century in Barcelona.<sup>34</sup> In the relatively young dioceses of the Baltic area, by contrast, what little we know about visitation in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries points to an overriding concern with rights and income, with no evidence that visitation was a vehicle for clerical or lay reform. The difference seems to lie in the intensity of government in general in particular regions, be it

monarchical, aristocratic, ecclesiastical or urban. In heavily governed England and Normandy, secular and ecclesiastical administration drew upon and strengthened each other in complex feedback loops of inexorably increasing density. Barcelona in the early fourteenth century was similarly 'taking off' as the administrative and economic powerhouse of the western Mediterranean. Medieval Poland provided few opportunities for ecclesiastical administration to co-evolve with intense state or urban structures.<sup>35</sup>

By the fifteenth century visitation was used right across Europe as a means of reforming, regulating, and disciplining the clergy and the laity, checking on the fabric of churches, and securing income for episcopal and archidiaconal households. The main reason why visitation became such a prominent activity of the episcopate was not that bishops became more attentive to the reforming decrees of church councils, implementing a top-down programme of reform. Rather it was because visitation was a mechanism that suited the needs of the laity as well as those of bishops. Visitation brought a public means of dispute settlement and social regulation within reach of people who would not normally find themselves in contact with such elevated figures as bishops and their commissaries. Local elites could use visitation to enforce their own moral standards and reinforce their own social position, something which can be seen in the different agendas pursued by the parishioners of neighbouring churches. The evolution of visitation was thus a symbiotic process that benefited both bishops and the lay elites of villages and towns. As the judicial-pastoral use of visitation became more widespread, more and more opportunities were furnished for the reiteration of the bishop's 'pastoral presence'.<sup>36</sup> Because visitation responded to lay concerns, reform-minded lay people would see their bishop and his administration reflecting local issues. Pastoral reform would therefore have been, and have been regarded as, a very local phenomenon. The more local and responsive it was, the more the universal institution was strengthened (but also altered).

Synods had been a common feature of ecclesiastical organization for many centuries before the Gregorian reform, but they varied enormously from place to place. One synod might be a meeting of diocesan and monastic prelates, another a meeting of higher clergy and the lay aristocracy. In the eleventh century synods became more of a forum in which churchmen expressed their own corporate identity independent of the aristocratic hierarchies with whom they shared local power, and by the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, the synod was seen as the fundamental medium for spreading reform ideas and practices across Europe. In England and France there were important reforming synods at Westminster in 1200 and Paris in 1208, whose constitutions fed 'upwards' into decrees issued at the Fourth Lateran Council on clerical status and behaviour, the creed and lay participation in the Church, the separation of ecclesiastical and secular jurisdictions, heresy, usury, and a host of other issues.<sup>37</sup> The Lateran decrees were then influential in a 'downwards' movement through many dioceses, but the circulation of ideas was always as much horizontal (or peer-to-peer as we say today) as it was either top-down or bottom-up. With active circles of reforming bishops, who were often alumni of Paris University, English, French, and German provinces and dioceses were extremely active in implementing reforming constitutions of their own throughout the thirteenth century. In France one of the driving forces was Eudes de Sully, bishop of Paris; in England Stephen Langton as archbishop of Canterbury and Richard Poore as bishop of first Salisbury and then Durham, had the most influence; in Germany bishop Friedrich I of Eichstätt and the archbishops of Mainz and Salzburg seem to have played a crucial role.<sup>38</sup> However, significant areas of Europe saw no reforming synodal tradition before the fourteenth or fifteenth century, including the dioceses of Lugo, Tuy, Astorga, and Salamanca in Spain, Coimbra, Evora and Guarda in Portugal, Prague and Olomouc in the Czech lands, and

Florence and Turin in Italy, by which time the bishops of France and England had retreated from synodal constitutions as a means of governing their dioceses.<sup>39</sup>

While some provincial churches seem to have adopted the programme of 1215 wholesale, others selected those issues that were most relevant to local conditions, leading to some distinctive institutional cultures across Europe. In Uppsala province, for example, synodal constitutions were especially concerned with Church hierarchy and the dangers of unregulated clergy. There was suspicion surrounding itinerant German, Danish, Frisian and English clergy (perhaps mendicants) and in 1279 the Council of Tälje, Sweden, warned of the moral danger posed by clerics travelling to synods without episcopal consent. This seems contrary to the spirit of the decrees elsewhere that enjoined clerics to attend synods regularly.<sup>40</sup> The Polish and Scottish churches, meanwhile, were more than averagely exercised by the question of the secular control of churches. This was an issue of universal concern, but in these two kingdoms regnal power was insufficient to counter aristocratic designs on Church property, making it a more pressing problem.<sup>41</sup> Once again, the reform agendas of regional churches is a subject lacking detailed comparative study.

In Spain the course of conciliar reform provides an interesting example of how a set of universal values could furnish the linguistic and conceptual resources for distinctive local institutional cultures to develop, and how that process could feed back upon itself. In 1229 legate Jean d'Abbéville had implemented the fourteenth decree of the Fourth Lateran Council on clerical concubinage at the council of Lérida, but in 1251 there was a dramatic papal u-turn that allowed local bishops to issue dispensations for illegitimacy to the sons of clerics, and to change excommunications into fines.<sup>42</sup> This was in effect a licensing system for clerical concubines, and a valuable source of episcopal revenue, which we can see in action in early fourteenth-century visitation returns from Barcelona.<sup>43</sup> The belief retained in this volte-face was the principle that sons of clerics could not inherit their churches. This interesting Spanish accommodation to the universal rhetoric of reform demonstrates that the salient doctrine of high medieval Church reform was not clerical morality or the purity of the Church, but the necessity for unity and the impossibility of salvation outside the Church. The Lateran constitution demanded clerical celibacy and threatened excommunication for offenders, but the refusal of the thirteenth-century Spanish clergy to give up their women would have meant so many excommunications that the unity of the Church would have been shaken and salvation of a large body of its people put in jeopardy. Papal pragmatism consisted in prioritizing certain values over others, and it is interesting to see that the doctrine given priority—no salvation outside the Church—was the one that was theologically necessary to building a universal institutional Church. There could be no better example of how local flexibility and variation was integral to the making and administering of the Church.

## CONCLUSION: INTEGRATION AND FRICTION

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The period of reform and state growth between about 1050 and the fourteenth century was a time of institutional intensification in the Church. Christian life became more entwined with institutional expectations and the mechanisms of government. However, these expectations and mechanisms were not simply the expression of an inherent will to power emanating from a papal centre. The expectations surrounding institutions were the product of a symbiotic relationship between those inside organizations and those outside; a relationship that was embodied in every single interaction that took place under the auspices of such



institutions. Every time a parishioner reported suspicions about a parish priest during a visitation, every time a priest made a copy of some synodal constitutions, and every time a bishop found himself mediating between conciliar decrees and local values, the institutions of the Church were given deeper roots but also incrementally changed in the process. Thus continuity and change in the institutional Church happened together and by the same processes.

This loose model of institutional history rejects the ‘clockwork’ assumptions of those histories that have described the Church purely in the terms of its own documentation, and relies more on questions arising from studying the semiotic and transactional character of institutions. The institutional Church cannot be separated from the ideas and images by which it was represented, nor from the mass of everyday interactions that went on within it. These two approaches, the semiotic and the transactional, are mutually supporting. One focusses on the content of communication, the other on the media of communication (including face-to-face contact). They do not, however, amount to a teleological functionalism. It would be wrong to think that ideas and images flowed smoothly between regions and social groups, and wrong to think that interactions within the Church were undertaken *in order to* deepen the institutional roots of the universal Church. Local events and individual actions were generally guided by more immediate aims, and the character of institutional continuity and change was a by-product of those aims.

Because institutional structures were not merely designed by a group of rational legislators, but evolved through innumerable interactions, there were significant challenges of integration and friction for those who sat in mediating positions within the Church, be they parish visitation representatives, local priests, archdeacons, or even bishops. The universal and the local were not always compatible and they were never identical. Sometimes this meant that bishops could not access the local cultures they sought to order and reform, while lay people might struggle to make their voices heard when trying to communicate with a diocesan administration. Such asymmetries of power and information were what gave the medieval Church its particular institutional characteristics, and there is enormous scope for innovative study of the ways in which values, individuals, groups, and institutions were formed through interaction and communication with one another.



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# CHAPTER 12

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# PILGRIMAGE

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## MARCUS BULL

THE assemblage of beliefs, conventions, and rituals typically associated with the practice of pilgrimage and the cult of the saints may fairly be described as the medieval Church's most enduring and socially resonant point of devotional interaction and cultural exchange with the faithful.<sup>1</sup> An inhabitant of Merovingian Gaul familiar with the forms of pilgrimage described in the hagiographical works of Bishop Gregory of Tours (d. 594), if transported forward in time to a cult centre in the fifteenth century would perceive, albeit within a much different built environment and human landscape, important continuities in terms of the motivations driving pilgrims and their deportment, as well as in the institutional and ritual frameworks into which pilgrimage was channelled.<sup>2</sup> Evidence of the success of the medieval Church in locking pilgrimage firmly and prominently into the apparatus of devotional and penitential practice can be found in the ways in which pilgrimage's importance was carried through into the post-medieval world, for example as an instrument of Counter-Reformation ideology and as a major element of the religious forms transplanted to, and then culturally modified within, the Catholic New World. A somewhat more indirect but nonetheless compelling indication of the same success is the emergence in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of pilgrimage centres at the locations of claimed appearances of the Virgin Mary, often to children or teenagers from poor backgrounds who functioned on the socio-economic and physical margins of their small and remote worlds, typically as shepherds or shepherdesses. The modern pilgrimage destinations of La Salette in south-eastern France and Fátima in central Portugal fall into this category, while apparitions similarly lie behind the cults of Our Lady of Knock in Ireland and Medjugorje in southern Bosnia-Herzegovina. The foremost such pilgrimage centre is Lourdes, in the French Pyrenees, a major pilgrimage destination catapulted to prominence first by the Marian visions claimed by Bernadette Soubirous in 1858, and then by the local ecclesiastical hierarchy's decision, in a time-honoured move, to overcome its initial wariness of Bernadette's claims and declare her visions worthy of belief.<sup>3</sup>

Commentators often extrapolate backwards from modern-day pilgrimage venues such as Lourdes to their medieval equivalents, but there is a danger in eliding distinct phases in the history of Christian pilgrimage rooted in different conditions and directed towards satisfying different needs. There is much about the modern pilgrimage experience that is heavily freighted with the discourses of ecclesiastical reactions to social and political changes since the Enlightenment. Moreover, this experience also speaks specifically to the Church's characteristically complex and sometimes paradoxical appropriations of selected aspects of modernity in the interests of resisting secularism: in the case of Lourdes, emblematically, this included the early exploitation of the railway to facilitate pilgrim access on a large scale. On the other hand, there is also much in the experience of a cult centre such as Lourdes that has analogues with conditions at the larger pilgrimage churches of medieval Europe. Two similarities stand out. The first is the structural importance of the quest for a cure or some form of remission or relief on the part of the substantial number of pilgrims who are ill or disabled; healthy, able-bodied pilgrims, the majority, are co-opted into participation in a collective, purposive mood in which the bodies of the cure-seekers reify or stand for the intangible psychological needs of all the pilgrims. The second is the



use of ritual and the control of movement through sacred space to homogenize and channel the discrete motivations and impulses of individual pilgrims into affirmations of communal identity and purpose. It might be argued that both these characteristics operate at a sufficiently general level to have analogues in pilgrimage practices in multiple religions, times, and cultural settings. But the popularity of pilgrimage venues such as Lourdes and Knock also owes something more specifically to continuities, both organic and contrived, between the medieval and modern Church. The reasons why pilgrims are encouraged to visit modern shrines, and the ways in which their experiences there are choreographed, evoke 'medieval' conditions to the extent that the Church is acting in a self-consciously medievalist manner in restaging forms of mass participation in religion that have their roots in the middle ages.

Without stretching the comparison too far, a further link between medieval and modern-day pilgrimage is to be found in the broad social range of pilgrims. Medieval pilgrimage was one of the more socially inclusive forms of devotional activity that the Church devised, or at least professed in its rhetoric and visual language. Within social formations characterized by caste-like stratification and rigid hierarchies, as well as by extremes of wealth and poverty, pilgrimage was the nearest that the Church came to expressing at an institutional level the notion of human equality on the basis of individual possession of a soul. An extreme but revealingly vivid demonstration of the broad social appeal of pilgrimage is provided by the First Crusade, which was preached by Pope Urban II in 1095–6 as a combination of a holy war of Christian reconquest and a pilgrimage directed towards the Holy Land in general and the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem in particular. Certain of Urban's surviving pronouncements reveal that he was concerned that controls should be placed on the participation of monks and clergy, but beyond the personnel of the institutional Church there were severe limits to how far the pope could, in the interests of maximizing the crusade's military effectiveness, determine who chose to take part.<sup>4</sup> By framing the crusade in large part as a pastoral message Urban inevitably enlarged the recruitment base, for to have limited the crusade appeal to those best able as warriors to make a contribution to the expedition would have been tantamount to a declaration that what Guibert de Nogent described as the 'new way of attaining salvation' in practice meant that heaven should be preferentially populated by young, fit, rich, aristocratic males who owned a horse. The distinction beloved of older generations of scholars between the so-called Peasants' Crusade, an undisciplined rabble that foundered on its lack of experience relative to the challenges it faced, and the main, more aristocratic, wave of the crusade, better led by nobles schooled in military matters, is certainly overdrawn to the point of caricature. There was a substantial aristocratic presence in the first waves of crusaders, while the main cohort included numerous women, children, clerics, and a large and amorphous group of non- or intermittent combatants that were categorized by contemporary sources as simply the 'poor' (*pauperes*).<sup>5</sup> As long as crusades to the eastern Mediterranean travelled from western Europe by land, there was the likelihood, indeed the expectation, that a wide range of people would attach themselves to the enterprise as a corollary of the socially broad appeal of ideas of pilgrimage and penance that informed crusading ideology. The Third Crusade (1188–92) marks a turning point, for one of the three European monarchs who took part, the emperor Frederick Barbarossa, travelled east by the traditional land route (and died on the way), while the two others, Philip II of France and Richard I of England, went by sea. Thereafter travelling by sea, which made participation much more expensive and selective, became the norm for eastern crusades, erecting a substantial barrier to mass participation. The outpourings of popular religious agitation known as the Children's Crusade (1212) and the Shepherds' Crusade (1251) owed

much of their impetus to the continued attraction of crusading, and by extension Jerusalem pilgrimage, among social groups that were becoming marginalized from it.<sup>6</sup>

It is sometimes reckoned that before mechanized transport the world felt 15 times larger to its inhabitants than it does today. This may, if anything, be an underestimate. Pilgrimage gave medieval Christendom one of its few shared points of trans-regional and trans-national cultural reference. It did so, moreover, substantially before the emergence from the eleventh and twelfth centuries of more rigorous co-ordination of the different levels of the Church's hierarchy under papal direction and new multi-national, centralized religious orders began to give effective institutional expression to the belief in a united and single Christendom, or at least its western, Latin part. That pilgrimage and the cult of the saints acted as a sort of conceptual glue in an atomistic world emerges most clearly from miracles stories (*miracula*) that narrate the wanderings of a long-range pilgrim alighting on a cult centre that satisfies his or her needs after a frustrating and extended tour of multiple other pilgrimage sites.<sup>7</sup> For example, the early twelfth-century miracle collection compiled in the monastery of Ste-Énimie in southern France includes an account of a 'prodigious' miracle.<sup>8</sup> A man noted for his evil, sinful ways repented and was bound in penitential iron bands fixed around his arms before embarking on a grand tour of major pilgrimage destinations in the expectation that the breaking of his bonds would signify that his sins had been forgiven. The narrative itemizes at great length the places visited, including Jerusalem, Bethlehem, India (to venerate St Thomas, though his principal cult centre was by this time in Edessa in modern Turkey), Constantinople, Rome, Venice, Mont-Saint-Michel, Santiago de Compostela, and a Who's Who of the most prominent saints' cults in France such as St Remigius at Reims, St Dionysius at St-Denis, St Faith at Conques, Our Lady at Le Puy, St Martial at Limoges, St Martin at Tours, St Saturninus at Toulouse, and St Hilary at Poitiers. At the end of all this one arm-band still remained unbroken. When the pilgrim was directed in a vision of St Enimia to her shrine, which significantly he had not heard of beforehand, the final bond shattered spectacularly. This story, told in verse, is heavily stylized and its factual basis may be more tenuous than those of the more prosaic *miracula* found in the same collection and many others like it, which are a little fuller on 'reality effect' detail. But its significance lies in its mapping out of a maximal space of Christian devotional and penitential behaviour within which the interaction between the faithful and the sacred follows predictable and familiar scripts while satisfying powerful expectations that remain constant whatever the location, as symbolized in this particular story by the fixed and enduring quality of the iron bands on the much-travelled pilgrim's body. If the pilgrim actually existed, even on just the French legs of his epic wanderings he would have traversed a highly fractured political framework and encountered diverse human geographies, cultural norms, and dialects, all militating against the creation of stable and enduring senses of large-scale community. Pilgrimage, however, functioned as a countervailing force.

The motif of a plurality of holy sites adding up to a collective frame of reference not only emerges longitudinally in quest narratives that take a central character from holy site to holy site, but also laterally in miracle stories in which human stand-ins for cult centres are placed together in situations of collective need. The most common such story involved travellers by boat threatened by a storm and moved to invoke the protection of the saints with whom they were most familiar, the underlying assumption appearing to be that moments of extreme and immediate crisis strip away the layers of individuals' religious identities to leave an irreducible core of devotion to the saint most identified with one's home. In one such story, a ship full of reinforcements bound for the First Crusade carrying people from diverse places such as northern France, Burgundy, Aquitaine, Gascony, Spain, Italy, and

Sicily is caught in a violent storm in the Mediterranean.<sup>9</sup> When the prayers of the monks and clerics on board—evidence of the appeal of the crusade to these categories despite Urban II's strictures—prove unavailing, in the next stage of the hierarchy of resort each passenger is encouraged to call upon his 'peculiar' local saint. There follows a long list of regional saints' cults, several of which overlap with those mentioned in the Ste-Énimie story. None quietens the storm. Finally, a devotee of St Richarius, whose cult was centred on the monastery that he was believed to have founded, St-Riquier in Ponthieu, suggests to his fellow-passengers that they pray to his patron. When they do so, the storm abruptly abates. The staginess and plot artifice of stories such as these are themselves important evidence for the transcendent cultural resonance of identification with saints' cult and of pilgrimage as the enactment of that sense of identity.

Pilgrimage in various forms is found in many faiths and at many times, though it has seldom been as prominent within the whole apparatus of an organized religion's operations as was the case with medieval Christianity. At a basic level medieval pilgrimage was an outlet for values and needs that transcended its cultural specificity: for example, the value that most societies at most times have placed on physical approach to and contact with the numinous; the tendency to create differentiated mental maps and human landscapes in which certain places are invested with particular power; and the trans-cultural appeal of stories of travel, exile, and quest, significantly a theme regularly explored in societies' earliest written literatures. It is noteworthy that in later antiquity the *Odyssey* was allegorized as an argument in favour of renunciation of the world. While these general patterns begin to fix some of the basic psychological and cultural needs that pilgrimage satisfied for medieval Europeans and explain something of pilgrimage's chronological and geographical reach, the precise forms that these needs and impulses assumed in the middle ages owe much to two specific sources: the social and cultural environment in which early Christianity developed, and, those elements of their experience that the early Christians exploited in order to fashion senses of identity and community that, they believed, sharply differentiated them from other, antagonistic groups.

In the Pentateuch and the historical books of the Old Testament, Judaism bequeathed to Christianity a body of scripture that valued a precise and detailed sense of holy topography. The Promised Land and the scenes of the Jews' exiles and wanderings are carefully mapped by the many named locations within them. In addition, the stories of the people of Israel's wanderings in the desert acted as a powerful source of metaphors of the Christian religious life as exile from and return to knowledge of God. God's instruction to Abraham in Genesis 12:1 to abandon his home and family for a land that would be shown to him was considered a prefiguration of various similar injunctions in the New Testament, such as Peter's call to the faithful (1 Peter 2: 11) to abstain from carnal desires 'as strangers and pilgrims', and Christ's command (Matthew 19: 29) to forsake home, family, and lands for his name's sake in return for a hundredfold reward. But while the Judaism of the Old Testament could be interpreted exegetically to support Christianity's self-fashioning use of metaphors of exile and travel, contemporary Jewish practice had somewhat less of an impact on the emergence of early Christian pilgrimage.<sup>10</sup> Jews were forbidden from entering Jerusalem between 135 ad and the fourth century, that is during Christianity's formative years as an organized faith; and when they returned, Jerusalem was already being transformed by Constantine and his successors into a monumental Christian space and pilgrimage destination. In medieval Europe, Judaism was a minority religion of dispersed communities physically removed from the geographical focus of their faith; this militated against the emergence of the dense networks of holy sites that characterized contemporary Christianity. Jewish travel narratives reveal some analogues with the Christian pilgrimage experience, albeit realized in very

separate mental spaces: Benjamin of Tudela, the most famous of the Jewish travel writers, who visited much of Christian Europe as well as Syria, Persia, India, and Egypt in the 1160s and 1170s, traverses spaces rich with Christian resonance but makes little or no acknowledgement of that fact.<sup>11</sup> Where Benjamin most resembles contemporary Christian writers is in his interest in trying to map the topography of the Holy Land he encountered onto that of the Old Testament, much as pilgrimage narratives and pilgrim guides that were especially in vogue in the twelfth century, when Jerusalem was in Latin Christian hands, tried to read the Old and New Testaments onto contemporary landscapes.<sup>12</sup>

The emergence of pilgrimage traditions in late antique and thereafter medieval Christianity probably owed more to antique pagan religious beliefs and practices than is often supposed, in spite of the oppositional rhetoric and discourses of condemnation, persecution, and fundamental difference that dominate early Christian treatments of pagan religiosity.<sup>13</sup> Many structural similarities are evident. There were, for example, healing shrines in the ancient world such as those of Asclepius at Epidaurus in the Peloponnese and on Kos. Several parallels between the actions of supplicants at these shrines and the actions of later Christian pilgrims are evident, such as the making of *ex voto* offerings, incubation (sleeping as close as possible to the shrine), and reports of visions. Inscriptions from healing shrines survive whose tales of benefits hoped for or received resemble the small narratives of distress and relief in Christian *miracula*. Festivals, such as the Panathenaea depicted on the Parthenon frieze and the Olympiad, were a common feature of Greco-Roman religious practice. Perhaps the best evidence for the links between pagan and Christian practice—more in the nature of syncretism and acculturation than direct borrowing—is to be found in Pausanias's *Description of Greece*, written in the second century ad, which moves through a world of multiple sacred sites that function as focal points of feelings of civic or regional belonging.<sup>14</sup> The variety of the (sometimes bizarre) rituals and cultic practices that Pausanias catalogues so carefully was much greater than would have been experienced by a Christian traveller traversing the same space from church to church some centuries later. But they are evidence, alongside the mystery cults that gained in popularity in the later Roman period (and which at some level early Christianity resembled), that the popular image of ancient religiosity as nothing more than the cool and detached performance of civic duty fails to take into account the degree of emotive engagement, group loyalties and identities, feelings of connectedness to the past, and local patriotisms that also animated Christian communities' enthusiasm for the cult of the saints and the development of pilgrimage centres. Late Roman Christianity retained much of the affect of late antique religiosity, and it was largely by means of the apparatus of the cult of the saints and pilgrimage that this fundamental posture was communicated onwards into the middle ages.

Christian pilgrimage was also rooted, however, in the specific circumstances in which early Christianity had developed as it effected the transition from a persecuted to a tolerated and then officially promulgated religion in the late Roman world.<sup>15</sup> The cult of the martyrs from the periods of persecution was the original stimulus to the emergence of collective memories, group identities, and cultic practices focussed upon what Peter Brown has called the 'special dead', but it was the expansion of the parameters of sainthood to include the category of confessor that created the potential for extensive growth and a capacity for self-renewal on the part of the cult of the saints that propelled it past the dissolution of the Roman empire in the West and on into early medieval conditions. It is important to remember that, for all its pre-Christian antecedents and analogues, late Roman Christianity had also come with the shock of the new. As is well known, one of the most conspicuous



cultural shifts that Christianity introduced was closer interaction, physical and conceptual, between the living and the dead. Whereas pagan Roman society had parked its burial sites at some remove from its urban spaces, Christians announced themselves by proximity to their dead, especially those honoured as saints. In due course, and by extension, Roman taboos about direct contact with, and *a fortiori* dismemberment of, the dead were overcome, allowing the proliferation of bodily relics and the geographical spread of saints' cults. This process of a myriad bodily dispersals is what created the scale of the landscape of medieval pilgrimage. Indeed, the centrality of the cult of relics came to be seen as a signature characteristic of western, Latin Christianity in contradistinction to the eastern Christian emphasis upon icons—to the West's advantage, in this view, for a saint's bodily remains would be reintegrated at the time of resurrection, and corporeal relics thus partook of the eternal, whereas an image was merely a representation of something else. This contrast was clearly overstated. An important part of Constantine I's project for his new Christian capital of Constantinople was to adorn it with relics, many of which much later found their way to western Europe when the city was looted by elements of the Fourth Crusade in 1204. Moreover, from the thirteenth century onwards devotional energies in Latin Europe were increasingly directed towards images, especially those of the Virgin Mary, and towards crosses (in due course prompting Lollard and other dissenting revivals of centuries-old discourses of iconophobia). But even in this later period relics retained much of their emotive charge and drawing power for pilgrims.

It used to be commonly assumed that the cult of relics was in the nature of a concession on the part of the educated clerical elite to the uneducated many, people whose access to the divine required tangible and visible reinforcement in order to compensate for their incapacity for abstract thought. This old binary severely underestimates the imaginative and intellectual resources of so-called ordinary medieval pilgrims, the range and complexity of whose responses may be glimpsed in the insights brought to bear on modern pilgrimage by cultural anthropological approaches. From the other end, the traditional opposition also misses the potent combination of heightened affect and intellectual engagement, sometimes bordering on the sublimation of personal identity, that many literate ecclesiastics brought to bear upon saints and their relics. The *locus classicus* of extreme clerical enthusiasm is the behaviour of St Hugh, bishop of Lincoln (1186–1200). On a pilgrimage to the Norman abbey of Fécamp in the company of his eventual biographer, Adam of Eynsham, Hugh asked for, and was granted as a mark of his status, the rare privilege of being able to hold and venerate the monastery's most prized relic, an arm of Mary Magdalene. Using a knife to loosen the wrappings in which the arm was tightly bound, and to the great alarm of the abbot and his monks, Hugh bit off two chunks of the bone to add to his private relic collection.<sup>16</sup> This was not a momentary aberration: Adam tells us that Hugh did something similar to St Oswald in Peterborough abbey. What is striking about Hugh's actions is how on so many counts he was wholly unrepresentative of the cultural and social milieux of his contemporaries: as a Carthusian he had been a member of the most ascetically rigorous and numerically elitist of the new religious orders of the twelfth century; he became a bishop, responsible, in fact, for the largest diocese in England; and he was able to do what few senior ecclesiastics of his generation managed, which was both to stand up to King Henry II and to get a sympathetic hearing. Hugh's relic-mania is a vivid demonstration of enthusiasms that ran through all levels of medieval society. In this light, it is noteworthy how frequently foci of devotion that did not formally require physical manifestations nonetheless acquired them. Relics of the Virgin Mary were claimed, for example, by northern French Marian pilgrimage centres whose relative proximity to one another encouraged a degree of competition.<sup>17</sup> The cult of Our Lady at Walsingham in Norfolk,



which became one of the foremost pilgrimage venues in late medieval England, was reified by the Holy House, believed to be a replica of Mary's family home in Nazareth.<sup>18</sup> Another English pilgrimage site that achieved conspicuous prominence in the later middle ages—it became one of the main targets of Thomas Cromwell's commissioners in the late 1530s—was Hailes in Gloucestershire, which housed a phial of Christ's blood. And three consecrated hosts that in the later fourteenth century survived a fire but became stained with what appeared to be blood became the focus of a major cult with an international clientele at Wilsnack in Brandenburg.<sup>19</sup>

Miracle collections constitute our best evidence for the motivations that drew pilgrims to shrines. The micronarratives that they preserve, telling of benefits wished for or achieved through a saint's intercession, are the closest that we can now come to the perceived value of pilgrimage at the grass roots of Christianity. Caution is of course necessary in interpreting these sources, for they are not only heavily stylized and formulaic exercises in publicity on the part of the monks, nuns, and clergy who supervised shrines. On a practical level their plot contents rely heavily on internal mechanisms of self-selectivity: one tends not to encounter unheeded invocations and misfires in the operation of the miraculous apart from the fairly small subset of *miracula* in which competition between cult centres is more or less overtly at stake when the benefit that a pilgrim cannot secure by means of pilgrimage to one or more other destinations is secured by pilgrimage to the shrine in question. Many of the hazards of life faced by men, women, and children—the last an especially vulnerable category who feature in many *miracula*—are recorded in these stories, though not, it should be emphasized, a comprehensive catalogue of possibilities, given that we are confronted here with the traditions and in-built expectations of a literary genre at least as much as we are reading the results of a sort of proto-anthropological gaze out onto actuality.<sup>20</sup> Deliverance from violent storms at sea or shipwreck (the quintessential self-selecting sample, of course), liberation from imprisonment, and vindication of one's rights against unjust challenge are among the stock plot types. A minority of pilgrimage centres were able to prosper by cultivating reputations for saintly specialisms in deliverance-type miracles. The cult of St Leonard at Noblat in the Limousin, for example, was noted for its particular appeal to prisoners. Major pilgrimage churches tended to take a more inclusive approach, subsuming such specialisms within a full range of miracle types: witness, for example, the depiction of freed prisoners' foot-irons or manacles given as offerings and placed on display in the abbey church on the twelfth-century tympanum above the west door at Conques.

In round figures, about 90 per cent of medieval miracle stories, especially from the eleventh century onwards, involve the cure of or relief from the effects of illness, disability, or injury. Attempts to mobilize these sources in order to reach diagnoses of pilgrims' maladies are notoriously fraught with difficulty, for the texts' discourses are heavily formulaic and often vague; they tend to concentrate on one symptom only, and their language gravitates towards the lexicon of the miracles of healing described in the New Testament as well as in authoritative hagiographical models. Common catch-all categories included madness, blindness, dropsy (which could subsume multiple forms of inflammation), and lameness or contraction (likewise a blanket term for the effects of congenital disabilities or neurological disorders). It is tempting to try to rationalize miracle cures with reference to, for example, the morphology of self-limiting illnesses or those whose symptoms can fluctuate, the effects of a better diet during the warmer months during which most pilgrimages were conducted compared to the malnutrition that to a greater or lesser extent must have been the lot of most people over the winter, and the potentially therapeutic value of detaching oneself from one's routine environment with a sense of goal-

directed purpose.<sup>21</sup> All these arguments have much to commend them, but they are insufficient as explanations for belief in miracle cures. They do not apply equally to all the types of condition that medieval pilgrims presented at shrines or claimed to have been cured of. And what they further overlook is the central fact that medieval miracle stories are primarily about participation in collective belief systems; even stories involving luridly described physical symptoms are ideational, not physiological, in their ultimate emphasis.

What miracle collections cannot give us is evidence of the relative numbers of all ill or disabled pilgrims in search of a cure or cured pilgrims offering thanks relative to the other visitors to a shrine who had come for other reasons, devotional, penitential, or other. The choreography of the rituals and the dress codes at a modern shrine such as Lourdes make this distinction very plain, but it is unlikely that boundaries were as obvious at medieval pilgrimage sites. There is reason to suspect, however, that, when due allowance is made for the heightened dramatic quality of the small anecdotes played out in *miracula*, they nonetheless capture something important about the ‘mainstream’ functioning of cult centres. It would be mistaken to imagine the thaumaturgic dimension of saints’ cults as in some sense an intrusion into anterior structures of belief and practice under the propulsion of people’s desperation and medical ignorance. Healing, including the exorcism of evil spirits in the possessed, was an important dimension of early Christianity that was carried forward into the diffusion of Christian cult sites in the early and central Middle Ages. The fact that many such sites had associations with water through wells or springs is one indication of this powerful connection. In addition, when prefaces to miracle collections routinely declare that many more miracles had occurred than could be put in writing, it does not follow that these claims were always hollow, nothing more than a rhetorical trope serving the interests of economy and self-highlighting. Many miracles stories make a point of mentioning, often in terms that are superfluous in strict plot logic, that the beneficiary of a claimed miracle recounted, even publicly performed, the story of her or his healing. It has been suggested that what might appear to be a narrative ‘throw-away’ in fact takes us to the centre of the faithful’s participation in pilgrimage, which was for them not so much, or not only, a matter of travel to a privileged site of holiness, but an expression of a relationship with a saint as a powerful patron and friend, a figure who could be emplotted into life’s narratives big and small as an almost routine dimension of one’s self-fashioning.<sup>22</sup>

All but the most modest of pilgrimage sites were, of course, also communities of professed religious or clergy, and this created the potential for tension—sometimes creative tension but often taking the form of anxieties about decorum and due reverence. The discordant clash of the screams of mentally ill pilgrims against the orderly performance of the liturgy is a recurrent motif of the *miracula* genre, neatly encapsulating the pressures of competing demands on a church’s space. Female pilgrims were a particular concern: the guardians of St Cuthbert’s shrine in Durham were notoriously hostile to women visitors, and special dispensations had to be sought when some Cistercian abbeys become sites of pilgrimage. More generally, the need to both accommodate and control pilgrims informed changes in ecclesiastical architecture, most obviously in the proliferation from the eleventh century of ambulatories. From the thirteenth centuries onwards there is evidence of greater attention to the management of pilgrims’ movements by means of limiting access to certain times and days and by erecting grilles and screens that segmented the space within churches more than before. Surges of pilgrim numbers at a shrine’s major feasts was always a particular problem: in 1018, about 50 pilgrims died in a crush on the vigil of the Feast of St Martial in Limoges, and several other such mass accidents are reported. Nonetheless, most religious communities most of the time had good reason to welcome pilgrims. This is borne out in the many indications in *miracula* that shrine guardians fêted those who they were

persuaded had benefited from a miracle, for example by staging some form of public telling of the pilgrim's experiences. Likewise, the display of *ex votos* left by pilgrims is emblematic of the sharing of ecclesiastical space and of the mostly co-operative dynamic within the relationships between religious communities and pilgrims.

A great many of the discourses that surrounded medieval pilgrimage emphasized themes such as exile, conversion, dislocation, and hardship that spoke to the separation of the pilgrim from his or her normal world, if only temporarily. Likewise, the influence of social anthropological approaches to pilgrimage in modern scholarship, in particular the work of Victor and Edith Turner, who argued that pilgrimage was, and is, an experience that detaches pilgrims from their regular societal constraints, has cemented the association of pilgrimage with ideas of separation and liminality.<sup>23</sup> While these insights have added enormously to our understanding, it is important to remember that a particular feature of Christian medieval pilgrimage was its multiple layering of shrines that ranged from cult centres with a very modest, local appeal to the major destinations, among which Jerusalem, Rome, and from the tenth century Santiago de Compostela stood out. This meant that at the lower end of this scale, what could be described as pilgrimage behaviour blended into the devotional routines and the rhythms of the Christian year that animated the interactions between the faithful and churches with only local or at best regional reputations. At the church of St John in Beverley in Yorkshire, for example, a twelfth-century text describes how on the Feast of the Ascension, a procession of the faithful from the area (*cum immenso totius regionis populo*) would gather to take part in a procession around the church, then pass underneath the shrine, which had been carried to the church door on a bier.<sup>24</sup> Within the network of local, regional, and international cult centres, there was a tendency for upward pressure to enhance a given cult within the overall matrix; this is evident, for example, in the inflation of saintly value that saw several churches claim apostolic status for their respective patron saints, while the pilgrimage to Compostela drew heavily on the model of that to Rome. The long-distance pilgrimage goals differed from most others in not being generally associated with healing miracles—though this seems to have been an element in Jerusalem's early pilgrimage history in the late Roman period, and associations with healing persisted, for example at the Pool of Siloam, just outside the Holy City, whose waters were believed to cure the blind. Whatever the particular emphases of individual pilgrimage sites, however, and in spite of evidence of competition between shrines, the depth and range of the coverage of cult centres is one of the most important features of western medieval Christianity, and possibly its most distinctive marker in relation both to Christianity at other times and in other places and to other religious systems.

In spite of the wide variety of destinations available to pilgrims, or perhaps as a corollary of this diversity, pilgrimage in the Christian tradition differed from the Muslim *hajj* to Mecca in that it was not regarded as a formal obligation placed all the faithful (though some late medieval prelates came to close to arguing as much in response to proto-Protestant criticisms of the practice). Pilgrimage was instead perceived as one outlet for devotional and more especially penitential needs that might in principle be addressed in other ways. In this, pilgrimage resembled monasticism, which, although a major part of the institutional Church in almost all areas of Latin Christendom, especially in the period of its greatest prestige and impact between the eighth and thirteenth centuries, was strictly speaking a supernumerary element in relation to the structures of the secular Church. In these circumstances it is not surprising that there were many close and enduring links between pilgrimage and monasticism on multiple ideological and practical levels. Many major cult centres were monasteries; they account for the majority of, for instance, the French shrines mentioned in the miracle stories from Ste-Énimie and St-Riquier discussed above. The

growth of pilgrimage to Jerusalem that is discernible in the eleventh century owed much of its impetus to monks: the monastic reformer Richard of St-Vanne, for example, led a party of pilgrims several hundred strong to the Holy Land in 1026–7. An important dimension of monks' and nuns' interactions with lay benefactors was to encourage pilgrimages: many charters survive, in particular from the tenth to twelfth centuries, that record property transactions that monasteries entered into in order to facilitate the funding of pilgrimages, and these documents are among the most important forms of surviving evidence for pilgrimage as practised at the grass-roots level. In ideological terms pilgrimage was a ready source of metaphors for monastic spirituality as a journey towards the heavenly Jerusalem, tapping into venerable associations between travel and enlightenment that were exemplified in the Christian tradition by St Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus. This figurative language could easily slide into action. Between the fifth and eighth centuries Irish and, under their influence, Anglo-Saxon monks would engage in pilgrimage *ex patria*, not journeys directed to specific shrines but a form of ascetic and penitential wandering akin to exile. A greater emphasis on monastic stability and orderly communal life from the eighth century onwards pushed this practice out to the fringes of eremitical practice. But the image remained potent, as is borne out by the large number of surviving manuscripts of the *Navigation of St Brendan*, a probably ninth-century text that narrates a journey of this type in the north Atlantic as an allegory of the monastic life.<sup>25</sup>

It is noteworthy that the new religious movements of the late eleventh and twelfth centuries were heavily influenced by pilgrimage language and imagery: the attraction of the *vita apostolica*, in itself an old ideal, was lent some of its renewed cultural valency by a growing tendency to imagine the apostles, and even Christ himself, as pilgrims. Several new religious foundations, such as Fontevrault in western France, began as ad hoc communities attached to wandering preachers and hermits. And the undertow of pilgrimage within reformed monasticism could remain strong. Stephen of Obazine embarked on his monastic career by leaving home to follow Christ naked and go into exile.<sup>26</sup> In the 1120s, Bernard of Clairvaux wrote to the pope to warn him that the abbot of Morimond and several of his monks had decided to travel to Jerusalem. What makes this letter so remarkable is that Morimond was not some distant outpost of the fast-growing Cistercian monastic empire that was in some way especially difficult to police, but a central element of the order's structure, one of Cîteaux's four daughter houses.<sup>27</sup>

Bernard's letter is one of a large number of texts about monks, and nuns, going on pilgrimage or aspiring to do so. It is in fact in the context of discussion of the relative spiritual values of the monastic vocation and pilgrimage that much of what might be termed medieval theorizing about pilgrimage survives.<sup>28</sup> Without this stimulus, pilgrimage might largely have dropped below the intellectual radar, a routine part of the faithful's behaviour that required little overt comment and intense scrutiny outside the discourses of those genres, such as miracle collections, that directly engaged with aspects of it. Not that educated ecclesiastics were casual about pilgrimage and the cult of the saints. The encouragement of pilgrimage and the provision of suitable venues for its staging were major dimensions of many monastic churches' institutional identity and the central dynamic of their interactions with the outside world: the southern French abbey of Conques, home to the cult of St Faith, and the monastic cathedral of Christ Church, Canterbury, catapulted to prominence as a pilgrimage goal after Thomas Becket's murder in 1170s, are but two of many possible examples. On the other hand, pilgrimage was generally considered something collateral to but separate from the monastic life, an exercise better suited to lay people. In the second quarter of the eleventh century the reformer Peter Damian wrote to Rainierus, marquis of Tuscany, reproving him for failing to perform the penitential



pilgrimage that Peter himself had imposed upon him, and contrasting the suitability of such an exercise for people immersed in the world with its redundancy for those living under a monastic or canonical Rule.<sup>29</sup> It was accepted that pilgrimage could serve as a suitable precursor to entry into the religious life. Such was the route taken, for example, by the twelfth-century English hermit Godric of Finchale, his extensive pilgrimages to Rome, Jerusalem, and elsewhere facilitated by his having started out as a merchant familiar with travel in and around the Mediterranean. The same hierarchy of intrinsic value and status was expressed in the axiom that the taking of monastic vows superseded and obviated any vow to go on pilgrimage: this was the burden, for example, of a stern letter written by Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny, to a knight named Hugh Catula who had decided to postpone his commitment to enter Cluny in order to go to Jerusalem, possibly on the Second Crusade (1147–9).<sup>30</sup> What most alarmed monastic critics in such cases was the danger of an inversion of the hierarchy of merit flowing from a conflation of the literal and the metaphorical understandings of pilgrimage. The Rule of St Benedict ([chapter 1](#)) inveighed against *girouagi*, wandering monks journeying not only to sample different forms of the monastic life but also, one must assume, to move about from shrine to shrine. One of the most quoted aphorisms in this context became St Jerome's remark that it was more laudable not to have been to Jerusalem but to have lived well for Jerusalem.<sup>31</sup> Carolingian conciliar legislation, much of which entered later canonical collections, shows a mounting unease at the enduring appeal of the elision of ascetic rigour, exile, and motion that animated pilgrimage *ex patria*. This was to become the dominant view: in a letter of 1086, for example, Anselm of Bec was moved to remark that monasticism and pilgrimage even to Jerusalem were scarcely compatible.<sup>32</sup>

Beyond the immediate context of observations directed to the relative merits of the monastic life and pilgrimage, further criticisms spoke both to the fundamental premises that underpinned belief in the meritorious potential of pilgrimage and to practical problems of order and control. There was some unease, expressed for example by St Augustine despite his own support of the cult of the saints and his endorsement of miracles reported at shrines, that pilgrimage distended the omnipresence of the divine in the world by creating a landscape where some places claimed greater holiness. Similarly, Gregory of Nyssa observed that God did not dwell in Jerusalem more than in other places. Additionally, pilgrimage was vulnerable to criticisms that it was wasteful. Proto-Protestant criticisms voiced by the Lollards in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, to the effect that pilgrimage was a costly waste of money that could be better spent on alms to the poor and other good works, were in fact voiced earlier in the middle ages, for example by the twelfth-century popularizing theologian Honorius Augustodunensis.<sup>33</sup> Such high-mindedness drew much of its strength from suspicions about the purity of pilgrims' motivations and the propriety of their conduct. Such concerns were of long standing. Already in the early medieval period the sentiment that long-distance pilgrimage, typically to Rome, was for most people an occasion for idleness (*uacandi causa*) had become a truism to the extent that it could be written into a seventh-century formula letter of introduction for a pilgrim, one of the minority who departed from this norm.<sup>34</sup> Later, in 813, the Council of Chalon attacked the belief that pilgrimage provided an easy and automatic means to undo the consequences of one's sins. The many accusations of vacuity, frivolity, and curiosity that one encounters in medieval critiques of pilgrims seem to trivialize what must often have been a costly, burdensome, even dangerous exercise conducted in a serious-minded, purposive manner, and seem to be grounded in forms of purist prejudice and the tendency of medieval educated elites to judge the world against normative standards. What was most at stake in



such criticisms, perhaps, was a fear of disorder and a loosening, or worse, of social certainties. The frequent equation of pilgrimage and vagabondage, given its *imprimatur* in the Rule of St Benedict, was one articulation of this anxiety. Another was unease at the potentially disruptive ripple effects of individual enthusiasms within tightly formed and mutually reliant social groups: Bishop Hildebert of Le Mans wrote to Count Fulk V of Anjou in about 1127 that his desire to go on pilgrimage to Compostela was not only fraught with dangers for himself—his enemy the duke of Aquitaine lay en route—but also ran counter to his responsibilities as a ruler.<sup>35</sup> (The irony here is that a few years later Fulk left Anjou entirely to pursue another pilgrimage-related goal, namely to become ruler of the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem.) The concern that pilgrimage gave lay people an opportunity to detach themselves from the pastoral supervision of their local clergy was widespread. And most potent of all was the fear that pilgrimage allowed women, including nuns, to transgress the social boundaries that should contain and control them. A famous letter from Boniface to Archbishop Cuthbert of Canterbury written around the middle of the eighth century, bemoaning the fact that matrons and nuns who had gone on pilgrimage to Rome ended up as prostitutes serving the pilgrim traffic through Gaul and Italy, captures the feverish tone of much subsequent medieval unease at the conflict between the strict gendering of social roles and the liminality that pilgrimage potentially granted.<sup>36</sup> It should always be borne in mind, however, that the remarks of critics of pilgrimage, and attempts to legislate controls upon it, were almost invariably reactions to actual conditions. To this extent, sources voicing criticism actually form part of the considerable body of evidence for the sustained and multivalent significance of pilgrimage throughout the medieval period.

# NOTES

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17. B. Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record and Event 1000–1215*, rev. edn (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1987).
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36. See Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage*, 89–98.

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# CHAPTER 13

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# USING SAINTS

## *Intercession, Healing, Sanctity*

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GÁBOR KLANICZAY

THE cult of the saints is one of the central cult-forms of Christianity from late antiquity to the end of the middle ages, and continues to preserve this role in the Catholic and Orthodox Church until the present day. This cult developed from the veneration of the martyrs, those ‘witnesses’ who testified to their faith with their own blood, were tortured and executed for being Christians, and were regarded as special heroes by their followers. One of the oldest martyr’s passions, the *Martyrium Polycarpi*, in 156 used the following words to describe how the community started to venerate the memory of St Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna:

[C]ollecting the remains that were dearer to us than precious stones and finer than gold, we buried them in a fitting spot. Gathering here, so far as we can, in joy and gladness, we will be allowed by the Lord to celebrate the anniversary day of his martyrdom, both as a memorial for those who have already fought the contest and for the training and preparation of those who will do so one day.<sup>1</sup>

We learn from this account that the memory of the saints was celebrated on the day of their martyrdom (that is, their heavenly anniversary), and that this commemoration occurred near their earthly remains, their relics. The cult was generated from and sustained by the community which witnessed the passion of the martyrs. Though more well-known martyrs, such as the victims of the infamous executions in Lyon in 177, were commemorated across a broader territory, the liturgical veneration was concentrated in the places where the saints continued to be present, via their earthly relics: the *loca sanctorum*.<sup>2</sup>

As a reward for their merits, the souls of the martyrs were believed to ascend directly to Heaven, to the proximity of God; this is the explanation for the ‘joy and gladness’ which surrounded their commemorations. It was believed that they could use this position to help those still alive, so believers increasingly addressed prayers *to* them, instead of praying *for* their souls. Their graves were visited by pilgrims hoping to receive miraculous healing, and these miracles started to be collected by the guardians of the shrines. The supernatural power attributed to relics made them precious to those believers who tried to acquire fragments of them, incorporating them in talismans, erecting around them home altars, or seeking to be buried close to them. The bond between the saint and the believer increasingly took the form of the late Roman *patronus-client* relationship: the saints assured protection to those who cared about their relics, who asked for their mediation at their graves and their anniversaries, and who wore their names.<sup>3</sup>

This role of patronage became even more evident after Constantine the Great ended the persecutions (313) and the cult of the relics of the saints emerged from the catacombs to public spaces, to be redefined there by the bishops, the emerging leaders of the communities of the believers, becoming subsequently a central public cult of Christianity. The graves of the saints, such as those of St Peter and St Paul in Rome, St Cyprian in Carthage or St Martin in Tours, came to be venerated as contact points between Heaven and Earth, and they became the centres of new, redefined, Christian urban communities.

At this point the question emerged: who would control these cults, which became so central in transforming Christianity to the status of an established religion, offering its services to the entirety of late Roman society? At this point the invisible patrons were

themselves placed under the patronage of the bishops, who had to triumph over those believers who wanted to ‘privatize’ the cult of the saints. The bishops took the relics under their own supervision, and raising them upon the altars of the churches, they secured their accessibility for the whole community. In 401 the Fifth Council of Carthage ordered that all consecrated altars should contain a relic, and with this decision the cult of relics definitively came under the authority of the bishops.

With the aim of satisfying the increasing demand for relics, the bishops and the popes of the fourth century (Damasus, Ambrose, Augustine) unearthed from the catacombs and the cemeteries more and more relics of martyrs of the age of persecutions, transported them in a solemn procession (*translatio*), and ordered that their feasts be celebrated liturgically. Another crucial role for bishops was to provide relics to those newly Christianized domains which had less access to martyrs’ graves. This was solved by the dismemberment and division of the corpses of the saints. A famous precedent for such donations was provided by St Ambrose, who in 396 sent to the recently founded Gallic church parts of the bodies of Gervasius and Protasius, two Milanese martyrs from Nero’s time, recently discovered by himself. This prompted Victricius, bishop of Rouen to compose his treatise *De laude sanctorum*, wherein he emphasized that the tiniest fragment of a relic had the same miracle-working power as the whole body, since the saints were entirely present in each piece of their earthly remains.<sup>4</sup>

The multiplying cults and the martyrologies of the fourth and fifth centuries ensured that martyrdom did not immediately lose its importance as the principal model of sainthood. Nevertheless, in the fourth century one could observe the emergence of another type of sanctity, the ‘confessor’ saints: the ‘holy men’ who earned veneration in their own lifetime because of their exemplary life and charismatic gifts.<sup>5</sup> This group comprised hermits and monks leading ascetic lives in the Egyptian and Syrian deserts, such as Antony, Paul the First Hermit, Pachomius, Symeon the Stylite,<sup>6</sup> and also ‘virgins of God’ such as Macrina and Melania the Elder.<sup>7</sup> The outstanding bishops—leading personalities of the new Christian society—also belonged here: Athanasius, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, John Chrysostom, and those who took upon themselves the task of conversion and the fight against paganism in Gaul or Ireland, such as Martin of Tours or Patrick.<sup>8</sup> This line is continued by the saint abbots, founders of monasticism in the West (Benedict of Nursia, Columba, Columban), and a new aristocratic form of devotion, the royal nuns (Radegund, Bathilde, Aethelthryth).

In this enlarged concept, sainthood could be located in a combination of exemplary life and supernatural gifts. This evolution had important consequences for the cult of the saints. It instituted a distinction among Christian believers as a reward for their virtues, elevating a few of them higher than all the others. This also provoked some violent criticism, rebutted in the late fourth century by Jerome, who insisted upon the salvatory virtues of asceticism. The moral virtue of voluntary renunciation (of a worldly life, comfort, pleasures, property, family, free will, but also of food, sleep, speech) and the heroic acceptance of pain and disease (whether inflicted by God, the Devil, or by oneself) became a permanent feature of sainthood, combined with one of the two major moral life-alternatives: action (charity, service, manual labour) or contemplation (prayer, solitude, meditation). Two principal kinds of supernatural gifts are joined to the three moral virtues enumerated above: miracles (healing, exorcism, nature miracles, prophecy, curses) and visions (apparitions, auditions, rapture). The superiority of action or contemplation, the measure of asceticism, and more generally the relative importance of exemplary life or supernatural gifts were frequently and passionately discussed in the centuries to come.<sup>9</sup>

These changes in the phenomenon of sainthood naturally led to transformations in the process of establishing new cults. Whilst the sainthood of martyrs was evident to the immediate community who witnessed their suffering and passion (and thus in the case of a later *inventio* of their bodily remains only the authenticity of these relics had to be verified), for confessor saints two additional elements were needed. One was public knowledge of the exemplary religious virtues of the saints, during their life or immediately after their death—the *fama sanctitatis*. The dissemination of such a reputation of sanctity was regarded as a divine sign: *vox populi—vox Dei*. The second requirement was confirmation of the supernatural power of the saints by the miracles that occurred through their intercession, via their relics. All this was then consecrated by a solemn ceremony arranged by the bishop, elevating the (incorrupt) corpses of the saints (from which a good odour emanated) and transferring them to the altars of their churches. There was no need of higher permission for these newly established cults: their presence in the local, diocesan, or regional calendars, the continuing veneration of their relics, and the regular celebration of their feasts were sufficient to make them local or regional patrons.

If one wants to understand how early medieval society had been ‘using saints’, the early medieval cults provide a good starting point. They were copiously documented in the sixth century by Gregory of Tours (especially for Julian of Brioude and Martin of Tours), Venantius Fortunatus (Germain of Auxerre, Radegund and Hilary of Poitiers) and Pope Gregory the Great (especially for Benedict of Nursia).<sup>10</sup> The saints’ patronage could bring protection in warfare, remedy against natural calamities, and support in political struggles. Their shrines became sources of local pride, symbols of local identity, and if they achieved a broader celebrity, they also attracted pilgrims from far away. The miraculous power of the saints manifested above all in healing, but they could also punish: miracles of vengeance struck the violators of the sacred space of the shrines, all those offending the saint or its sanctuary, or committing other sins against church prescriptions (such as working on Sundays) or church property.<sup>11</sup> In some cases such vindictive actions by the saint were even challenged by the communities under their protection, leading to the curious ritual ‘humiliation of saints’, where their relics or images were symbolically ‘punished’ by the community.<sup>12</sup>

The cult of the saints in the early middle ages was essentially the cult of relics. In 794 and 813 the Carolingian clergy twice reiterated the canon of the Fifth Council of Carthage that each consecrated altar should have a relic. At the same time they also underlined that only the relics of those saints should be venerated who really earned this title with their martyrdom or their saintly life. This warning was very timely, because in the preceding centuries there had developed a large-scale trade in relics, serving the needs of the churches of northern Europe through an increased exploration of Roman catacombs for the remains of more-or-less known martyrs, leading to a kind of inflation in this market, and bringing into circulation an increasing number of dubious relics. It also occurred that some monasteries or cities obtained relics by theft or robbery (Conques, Venice), and these *furta sacra* (‘sacred thefts’) strangely found support in the related religious narratives, which argued that the theft was carried out in obedience to the call of the saint.<sup>13</sup> The most famous relic robbery occurred somewhat later, in 1087, when Bari organized what was essentially a pirate expedition to acquire the relics of St Nicholas from Myra, in order to counterbalance the popularity of the patron saint of Venice (St Mark the Evangelist), their big rival in the Adriatic.<sup>14</sup> The criticisms prompted by the relic trade, and the quarrels related to relic-thefts, led in the ninth and tenth centuries to the requirement that *translationes* of relics happened only with the permission of the relevant bishop or *princeps*. And to allay

emerging doubts over the authenticity of some relics, a special ritual was elaborated: the fire ordeal of the relics.<sup>15</sup>

The early middle ages gave birth to a new kind of use of the cult of the saints: the cult of the holy rulers. The sacrality of rulers had originally been the symbolic antipode of the 'holy man'. The latter was deprived of worldly power, suffered a martyr's death in many cases precisely because of his refusal to recognize the divinity of the emperor, but could triumph over him after his death. Nevertheless, in an evolution lasting several centuries, sainthood came to be appropriated as one of the instruments providing sacral legitimacy to Christian kings.<sup>16</sup> At first this title was usually given to insignificant rulers, who lost their kingship or died a martyr's death fighting pagan enemies, or became victims of struggles around the throne. Martyrdom, however, became a powerful tool to liken their deaths to the Passion of Christ, and thus contributed to the constitution of a highly successful new ideal of royal sainthood.<sup>17</sup>

The early formation of this model comes with the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms (Oswald of Northumbria (d. 642) and Edmund of East Anglia (d. 870)), but the same pattern is to be observed in Eastern Europe with the cult of the Bohemian Prince Wenceslas (d. 936), the two assassinated Kievan princes Boris and Gleb (d. 1015), or the Norwegian king Olaf Haraldsson (d. 1031), killed in the battle of Stiklestad. The cult of martyr kings gradually made the concept of royal sainthood acceptable even without the halo of martyrdom. Saint Stephen (d. 1038), the 'apostle' of the Hungarians and their first Christian king, was the first holy ruler to accede to this title (in 1083) only on account of being a *rex iustus*.<sup>18</sup> Around the turn of the first millennium the imperial dynasty of the Ottonians even strove to appear as an entire *beata stirps* ('holy lineage'): two queens, Mathilda (d. 968) and Adelheid (d. 999), the bishop brother of Otto I, Bruno archbishop of Cologne (d. 965), and the last emperor of the Saxon dynasty, Henry II (d. 1024, canonized 1146), together with his wife, Cunegond (d. 1033) all became saints.<sup>19</sup> The cult of holy rulers endowed the cult of the saints with an important new potential: these cults could seal the co-operation of Church and State in newly Christianized countries. The cult of saintly ancestors gave sacral prestige to these new dynasties and the example of saintly rulers, as elaborated in their legends, served well the clerical endeavours to promote new ideals of Christian kingship.

Beyond local and regional patronage, beyond everyday use and dynastic-political exploitation, there were a few saints who managed to acquire universal appeal in medieval Christendom by the turn of the first millennium. This was indicated by the increasing popularity of pilgrimage to a few key locations. The most prominent of these was the grave of an apostle, St James the Elder in Compostela, to which several itineraries developed, visiting also some other relics such as the ones of St Foy in Conques, St Martin in Tours, or St Sernin in Toulouse. Another privileged destination was Rome, with the relics of the apostles Peter and Paul and many other saints. But above all there was the Holy Land, with the supreme relics relating to Christ himself, but also innumerable sanctuaries connected to the apostles and other saints.

Pilgrimage was itself a complex religious manifestation: beyond its culminating moment—the miraculous healing at the shrine—the pilgrim's liminal way of life, and the vicissitudes of the whole process of pilgrimage, contributed to its sacral benefits.<sup>20</sup> Around the new millennium, pilgrimage stimulated the emergence of a new model of sainthood, based on renunciation, voluntary exile, and poverty (obligatory *insignia* of the pilgrim's status). This is exemplified by the huge increase in popularity in the eleventh century of the legend of St Alexis, a well-to-do late Roman youth who left behind his bride and his entire family on the wedding night, in order to become a pilgrim and one of the poor of Christ.



The crusades had another consequence for the cult of the saints. The crusaders' encounter with biblical landscapes, and their return home with a quantity of Christ-related relics, turned attention in Latin Christianity toward the New Testament. The figures of Christ and the Virgin Mary increasingly obscured the images and cults of saints and relegated them to the background of religious life. At the same time this change of religious orientation also generated a new type of sainthood, based on the *imitatio Christi* and, on the female side, associating oneself to him as *sponsa Christi*, or via the glamorous image of the Virgin.<sup>21</sup> From the typological point of view this also meant a further shift from the centrality of the cult of relics (seriously criticized in the twelfth century),<sup>22</sup> to the popularity of the late antique 'holy men', to the emergence of what would be called the 'living saints' in late medieval Europe.

The formation of this type of sanctity had been foreshadowed by the hermit movement of the turn of the millennium and missionary activities in east-central Europe: by St Adalbert, a major actor in the Christianization of Bohemia, Hungary and Poland, who died a martyr's death in Prussia (d. 997) or by Romuald, founder of the hermit order of Camaldoli (d. 1027).<sup>23</sup> The new living saints became more visible with the movement of the itinerant preachers and monastic reformers of the early twelfth century, such as Robert of Arbrissel, founder of Fontevrault (d. 1116), Norbert of Xanten, founder of the Premonstratensians (d. 1134), and above all Bernard of Clairvaux, the leading figure of the Cistercians (d. 1153). The *vita apostolica* provided the core of this new kind of sainthood, with visible signs of renunciation, ascetic, poor dress, active preaching, spectacular public miracle-working, and exorcisms.<sup>24</sup>

In the twelfth century this kind of holiness—related to an exemplary, ascetic way of life and charismatic preaching—showed up also in various heterodox forms. The ideal was to return to the spirit of the gospels and the forms of the *primitiva ecclesia*, and this *reformatio* involved both the critique of the secular power affiliations of the Church and the monastic orders, and the appearance of large-scale heretical movements such as the Cathars and the Waldensians.<sup>25</sup> The Cathar elite (who referred to themselves simply as 'good men' or 'good Christians'), or the Lyon merchant, Valdes, who distributed his fortune in 1172 to the poor and decided to live in voluntary poverty—and many other itinerant preachers labelled by the Church as heretics—were probably respected by their disciples as 'living saints'; and if executed, as martyrs.

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries the papacy had to confront all these transformations in the field of the cult of the saints. They had to condemn heretical manifestations, discipline the reform process, put the autonomous inclinations of the clergy within the emerging national kingdoms under some central control, and deal with the sacral ambitions of secular rulers. The pontificate of Alexander III (1159–81) is a very important turning point in this process. Following two centuries of increasing papal involvement in canonization, in a letter addressed to the Swedish king in 1171 or 1172 Alexander declared that any new cult of a saint could only be instituted by papal approval.<sup>26</sup> This claim defied simultaneously the sacral ambitions of the Holy Roman Empire (where an anti-pope had recently canonized Charlemagne (1165)), the local cults of dynastic saints promoted by their national churches, and also the increasing spread of spontaneous veneration of (both heterodox and orthodox) 'living saints'. Furthermore, it responded to recent rationalist critiques of the miracle-working power of relics. Pope Alexander III also provided an example of how the sanctity of a new candidate should be authenticated. The great political martyr of the century, Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury, murdered in 1170 by the partisans of King Henry II with whom he came into conflict, was immediately regarded as a



saint. Nevertheless, the pope insisted that a prolonged bureaucratic investigation, documenting the miracles occurring at his grave, should precede the decision to authorize his elevation to the altars.<sup>27</sup>

The detailed elaboration of the new papal procedures of the canonization of saints occurred during the pontificate of Innocent III (1198–1216). Truth-finding in these matters had to conform to the emerging new inquisitorial technique, based on Roman Law, the systematic questioning of reliable witnesses for the evidence of the supernatural *signa*—that is, the miracles occurring at the relics, through the mediation of the saint. And the whole procedure had to be initiated, controlled, and decided by the papacy: legates were mandated to carry out the investigation, and they were to decide with the help of the consistory, composed of cardinals. An important further dimension, underlined by Innocent III, was that the proof of *post mortem* miracles (*virtus signorum*) was not sufficient itself, because Satan could also cause miracles to happen. There had to be a trustworthy documentation of sanctity in life (*virtus morum*) as well. This second criterion also increased the role of the papacy in influencing the models of sainthood, to shape ‘living sainthood’ to fit official standards. The papal monopoly of canonization was completed at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) through the canon which ruled that no new relic could be venerated without the authorization of the papacy. The new bureaucratic procedure for recognizing the sanctity of a locally venerated candidate constituted an important filter. According to André Vauchez’s calculations, during the later middle ages only about half of the requests from local churches were successful in obtaining a papal mandate to initiate a canonization process, and from those seventy-one investigations initiated, only thirty-six led to effectual canonization.<sup>28</sup>

The reform of the procedures for the institution of new cults of saints occurred in the same decades as the formation of the two mendicant Orders, the Franciscans and the Dominicans, which became henceforth the leading forces of Latin Christianity. Not surprisingly the most popular saints canonized with the new-style processes were mendicants; and it is with these examples that I will illustrate how saints were used in the later middle ages.

The most important of these new saints was doubtless Francis of Assisi, the champion of the new ideal of voluntary poverty, the paradigmatic representative of ‘living sainthood’, venerated as *alter Christus* by his contemporaries, a trait underlined by the unique novelty of his stigmatization.<sup>29</sup> His canonization on 16 June 1228 was the first such procedure directed by Pope Gregory IX (1227–41). Though he was to become the pope who invested the most into the legal standardization of canonization procedure, he started with a conspicuous exception for St Francis. True, he arranged a brief interrogation at the grave of Francis for the authentication of his ‘innumerable’ miracles, participating personally at some of the witness-hearings (this involvement justified by the fact that he used to be the cardinal-protector of the Franciscan Order before becoming pope). Nevertheless, if we can give credit to the description by Thomas of Celano, the first hagiographer of St Francis, according to Gregory and his cardinals there was no need for a detailed investigation of this evidence. ‘There is no need for miracles ... to attest the holy life of such a holy man. We have seen it with our eyes, handled it with our hands, and proved it in the school of truth’.<sup>30</sup> After this Francis was declared a saint by the consistory with almost immediate acclamation. In any case, the pope’s subsequent bull equally indicated that miracles, as divine signs, would help to ensure that the light of his sanctity would not be obscured but rather be set in a fine *candelabrum*.<sup>31</sup>

The slight irregularity of this procedure, and also the first decades of the subsequent cult of Francis, demonstrate that the powerful image of a living saint could not be easily tamed by bureaucratic procedures. In the eyes of his most ardent followers, the sainthood of Francis resided in the firm refusal of any compromise that might mitigate his commitment to radical poverty, and when the ‘official’ legends and the politics of the Franciscan Order seemed to deviate from this, the radicals disseminated ‘apocryphal’ legends, and the Spiritual Franciscans kept on fighting for this interpretation. Another novel feature of the cult resided in the richness of his iconography. Panel paintings, miniatures, and fresco cycles popularized not only Francis as an iconic figure (*imago*) but also a series of striking episodes from his life, just like the scenes of the Gospels for Christ (*historia*). Some of these, such as his stigmatization or his sermon to the birds, became emblems of late medieval spirituality.<sup>32</sup> The richness of this new kind of hagiography, the truthful biographical details provided by his companions, the *exempla*-like stories, and the accounts of *post mortem* apparitions by Francis, render this cult more alive and also more polyphonic than that of any other contemporary saint. After a prolonged debate over Francis’ heritage, when Bonaventure in 1256 wrote a decisive new legend about Francis, the Order felt constrained to stop the debate by ordering the destruction of all previous legends of the saint.<sup>33</sup>

After elevating Francis, Gregory IX organized a series of subsequent canonizations related to the mendicants, which served him in the elaboration of the new canonical procedures. In 1232 Anthony of Padua, a prominent Franciscan preacher, was canonized, and in 1233 the process of St Dominic was initiated. In both cases the investigation of witnesses was promptly carried out. But the most elaborate procedural example was provided by the investigation into the sanctity of Elizabeth of Hungary, a royal princess and widow of the Landgrave of Thuringia, who had been converted to a mendicant-style religious life by a Franciscan preacher, and who provided an example of a life of charity and piety without joining a religious order, working as a widow in the hospital for lepers she had founded and dedicated to St Francis in Marburg, where she died in 1231, at the age of 24. A first collection of sixty miracles occurring at her grave was sent to the papal curia by Conrad of Marburg, the saint’s confessor, supplemented by a first brief biography of Elizabeth, petitioning for the opening of canonization procedures. Pope Gregory IX soon appointed three legates, among them Conrad; and the letter sent to the latter in the autumn of 1232, instructing him with the precision of a lawyer or an inquisitor on how the eye-witnesses should be meticulously questioned, became an obligatory part of all subsequent bulls ordering canonization investigations. The legates in the process questioned 700 witnesses in a few months and recorded 106 cases of miraculous healing. They also documented how the virtues of the saint-candidate were propagated by the ardent preaching of Conrad, who brandished the example of the pious and charitable princess to convince heretics to repent and convert. In July 1233 Conrad was murdered by heretics, so a new committee had to be nominated in October 1234, with the increasing support of the family of her husband, the Thuringian Landgraves. The second committee added twenty-four new miracles to the previous list, and at the request of the pope, completed it with a detailed set of testimonies on Elizabeth’s life given by her ‘Four handmaidens’. This text, the *Dicta quatuor ancillarum*, became the basis of her most popular legends—an abundant hagiographic corpus which could well be compared to that of St Francis, as could her rich iconography.<sup>34</sup> The documents sent to the curia had been discussed in detail by the cardinals, ‘to prevent any calumny’, and she was then canonized on 27 May 1235, the Sunday of Pentecost in Perugia. Her remains were elevated in Marburg a year later, on 1

May 1236, in the presence and with the active participation of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II, and the splendour of all royal and aristocratic families related to her.<sup>35</sup>

The explosion of Elizabeth's popularity convincingly exemplifies how sainthood came to be used by various actors in the religious field. The mendicant Orders relied upon her example as the ultimate success story related to their teaching: the renunciation and the voluntary poverty of a king's daughter is the most compelling of all. Besides the Franciscans and the Dominicans, who both tried to promote her cult, the Cistercians and also the Teutonic Order (patrons of Elizabeth's Marburg hospital) took part in this competition. As to her exemplary life of charity and care for leper and sick children, she set the model for a new kind of urban spirituality, and became the patron saint of hundreds of hospitals and charitable institutions. The Franciscan Third Order, which came into existence towards the end of the thirteenth century, also claimed her as patron.<sup>36</sup>

Another domain of Elizabeth's sweeping popularity was the milieu where she came from and lived: the courtly societies of central and northern Europe. Her example was emulated by a number of saintly princesses, affiliating themselves with one of the mendicant Orders in their royally or princely founded convents; and several of them became saints or at least 'blessed' (i.e. candidates for sainthood). Many of them were also close relatives of Elizabeth: her aunt, Hedwig of Silesia, directed first by Cistercian then Franciscan confessors, but like Elizabeth remaining a pious layperson, was canonized in 1267; Elizabeth's cousin, Agnes of Bohemia, who entered the Poor Clares, and Elizabeth's niece, Margaret of Hungary, who lived as a Dominican nun, were only eventually canonized in the twentieth century, but had their canonization processes initiated in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth's example was also emulated in the equally closely-related French royal court by Isabelle, sister of King Louis IX, himself also a prospective saint, again much influenced by the Franciscans and the Dominicans.<sup>38</sup>

All this points to a paradox. These saintly princesses followed, on the advice of their mendicant confessors, the Italian urban ideal of the *poverello* of Assisi. Yet, their lives and cults became instrumental in the hand of the friars to discipline the manners and morals of royal and princely courts all over Europe, and influence there the exercise of power in line with their religious ideals and goals. All this also leads back to the dynastic use of these cults: in the later middle ages, in the writings of these friars, the notion of *beata stirps* returns.<sup>39</sup> The head relics of St Elizabeth, who in her life refused to wear her crown, were placed in a splendid head-reliquary prepared from a crown donated by Emperor Frederick II, and her cult became a constant reference point of dynastic pride in all European dynasties related to her.<sup>40</sup> The course of canonization procedures towards the end of the thirteenth century allow similar observations. For a few decades the successful processes continue to show the dominance of saints related to the mendicant Orders. The canonization of the murdered Dominican inquisitor, St Peter Martyr (1253)<sup>41</sup> and St Clare, companion of St Francis (1255)<sup>42</sup> are followed by the Franciscan-related Hedwig of Silesia (1267) and the unfinished process of the Dominican Margaret of Hungary (1273–6). The two latter were, however, rather *dynastic* cults promoted by mendicants.

André Vauchez has observed that after an intensive period of canonization activity in the first half of the thirteenth century, the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries brought a conspicuous slowdown in the authorization of new investigations. Only a significant pressure could successfully open new procedures, and in the early fourteenth century it was above all the dynasty of the Angevins of Naples and Provence, the principal protectors of the papacy, who could have their saint-candidates canonized.<sup>43</sup> The prolonged but finally successful process of Louis, King of France (1272–97) was the first case in the series.<sup>44</sup>

Together with the Franciscan Spirituals, the Angevins also supported the canonization of the ‘angelic pope’ Celestine V, who stepped down from his position after a few years, and was canonized in 1313.<sup>45</sup> The principal dynastic saint of the Angevins was Louis of Anjou, eldest son of King Charles II of Naples, who waived his right to the throne in favour of his brother Robert, to become bishop of Toulouse, and then renounced his bishopric to become a Franciscan friar, and was canonized in 1317 after an early death.<sup>46</sup> The canonization of Thomas Aquinas (1323), the Dominican scholastic theologian, was also due rather to his south Italian origin than his academic excellence.<sup>47</sup> Other saints whose process had been successfully initiated with the support of the Angevins include the south Italian hermit Nicholas of Tolentino (1325–1466),<sup>48</sup> the Provence aristocrat, Elzéar of Sabran, Count of Ariano (1351–69) and his wife Delphine of Sabran (1363), ultimately not canonized.<sup>49</sup> Though one cannot claim that late medieval canonization processes supported the ideal of dynastic sainthood, the Angevins seem to have constituted an exception.

Besides the use of these cults in the large political and ecclesiastical context of late medieval Europe, one should also note the remarkable new field of studies the ample canonization documentation has opened up in recent decades. The hundreds of testimonies recorded with legal precision at the investigations allow a micro-historic examination of the social, cultural, and religious context in which these cults emerge. Witnesses of different social status present experience-based accounts of how the protection, the mediation, or the direct intervention of saints have been helpful in different calamities—war and violence in Italian cities, dreadful storms on the sea, natural disasters, and, above all, in the healing of all kinds of illness.<sup>50</sup>

Anthropologists and psychologists might observe that these judicially framed (and often, naturally, stereotyped and distorted) witness-accounts still provide an eloquent testimony to a new kind of dramaturgy and dynamics of miraculous healing. The investigations create a significant campaign for the promotion of new cults. The exhibited relics of the saint-candidate become a temporary shrine for faith-healing, a magnet attracting a select crowd of pilgrims asking for help and the various groups of relatives, friends, patrons accompanying them. The public communication and the notarial recording of successful healing constitutes a new kind of ritual that is susceptible to triggering succeeding similar events.<sup>51</sup> At times some exceptionally documented cases allow a ‘thick description’ of the role assigned to saints by the believers of the age: the miraculous saving of a ‘hanged man’,<sup>52</sup> the rescue of hundreds of children,<sup>53</sup> the understanding of the curious events in a south Italian convent where the nuns became possessed by the devil.<sup>54</sup>

Beside the miracle accounts in the acts of canonization processes we should also take into account the late medieval flowering of hagiography, not only in Latin, but increasingly in the vernacular languages as well. We have seen that the witness-accounts of the lives of the living saints like Francis of Assisi or Elizabeth of Hungary provided a new kind of raw material for their legends, which have been written and re-written in an unexpected quantity.<sup>55</sup> One should add that the increased influx of ‘reality’ did not limit the ongoing success of ‘fiction’: late medieval hagiography developed to become a locus of vernacular literature with the new genre of ‘hagiographic romance’.<sup>56</sup> The cult of the saints was a magnet drawing to itself all kinds of beliefs, myths, narratives of marvels, and related symbols and rites—the most extreme case was the veneration of St Guinefort, a ‘holy greyhound’ whose sanctuary was healing ill infants, believed to be ‘changelings’ (i.e. exchanged by the devil).<sup>57</sup> Legends of saints were collected in cycles,<sup>58</sup> since the increased preaching activity, especially by the friars, needed raw materials and elaborated them in a



series of model sermons, a new medium to expound upon the specific virtues and the pedagogic utility of the cult of the saints.<sup>59</sup> The most popular of these legend collections, prepared, not surprisingly, by mendicant authors, was the *Golden Legend* by James of Voragine, one of the most copied books in late medieval Europe, developed in the thirteenth century, completed in various 'national' versions, and figuring prominently among the religious readings that were reproduced in vernacular translations.<sup>60</sup>

While late antique and contemporary saints (both real and fictitious figures) filled every day of the calendar, were honoured on the altars, depicted on frescoes and panel paintings and miniatures, represented in relic collections, praised in sermons and offices and legends, late medieval Christianity continued to produce startling examples of *living* sainthood. Mystics seeking intensive, personal contact with God, visionaries inundating their followers with a torrent of new revelations, accompanied by amazing and moving bodily manifestations: excessive fasting,<sup>61</sup> cruel discipline and self-castigation, flagellation,<sup>62</sup> merging into theatrical spectacle: trance, ecstasy, rapture, possession, mystical pregnancy, stigmata.<sup>63</sup> The representatives of ecstatic and mystical sainthood, these 'unquiet souls' were fascinating for the devout, and suspect to the Church hierarchy. Some of the great mystics ended up accused of heresy: for example, the Beguine Marguerite Porete was burnt in 1310 for her mystical love-confession to Christ, the *Miroir des simples âmes*.<sup>64</sup> The celebrated Dominican master of theology in Paris, and fascinating mystic preacher in Saxony and Cologne, Meister Eckhart was incriminated for heresy at the papal court in Avignon, and died there while waiting for his absolution.<sup>65</sup> The Augustinian nun, Clare of Montefalco, claimed to have impressed, during a visionary experience, the instruments of Christ's Passion onto her heart, which were indeed 'discovered' by autopsy after her death. She was the object of a canonization process begun in 1315 and concluded only in the eighteenth century.<sup>66</sup> At the same time, this amazing claim raised suspicions—a Franciscan witness at her investigation accused the nuns who extricated and opened her heart, of cheating, and her of having only pretended to fast whilst eating in secret, of being simply an epileptic instead of falling into saintly ecstasies, and of having also had suspicious relations with the heretics of the Free Spirit.<sup>67</sup>

Such ambiguities become the accompanying feature of ecstatic-visionary sainthood in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Beside some impressive mystics or spiritual directors, such as the most efficient disciple of Meister Eckhart, Henry Suso,<sup>68</sup> the scene is increasingly dominated by women: Bridget of Sweden, Catherine of Siena, the female prophets of the Great Schism,<sup>69</sup> arriving finally at the amazing success of Joan of Arc. There was, however a price for this success: while Joan was a saviour, a prophet and saint for the French, she was captured, condemned as a heretic, labelled also as a witch and burnt alive at the stake. In fact, since the beginning of the fifteenth century mystics and visionaries have been treated with increasing caution, submitted to a strict 'discernment of spirits' by leading religious authorities of the age, such as Jean Gerson, Chancellor of the University of Paris, or Johannes Nider.<sup>70</sup>

The paradox of the history of medieval saints is that this late medieval attempt to repress or discipline popular cults could not prevent a new, even stronger upsurge of the veneration of a multiplicity of old and new saints. In popular practice saints get frequently grouped into new practical ensembles, such as the Fourteen Holy Helpers, having a specialized saint for each different category of illness or misfortune; and the popular cult of relics, incorporated in an ever increasing multiplicity of pious images, personal devotional objects, *ex voto* pictures, and pilgrim signs, continue to make the saints more present than ever. On the opposite pole of this field, the instantly recognized sainthood of charismatic preachers from



the Franciscan and Dominican Observance merit attention: Bernardino of Siena, John of Capistran, or later Girolamo Savonarola, and the following of the latter, a new cohort of stigmatized female *sante vive*, devout followers of Catherine of Siena.<sup>71</sup>

As a kind of epilogue to this dichotomy of an everywhere-present but rather banal cult of relics, and the extremely intensive manifestations of mystic-ecstatic sainthood, I should briefly mention the two late medieval rivals of the cult of the saints: the new cults devoted particularly to Christ: Corpus Christi, bleeding hosts, *arma Christi*, the devotion to the sacred heart of Christ (cultivated above all by female visionaries),<sup>72</sup> and the cult of the Name of Jesus, promoted by Bernardino of Siena. The same devotional forms which developed around late medieval living saints and miracle-working relics also restructured and reframed the veneration of Christ, such that this central cult nearly obscured the variety of saint cults. The flow of Christ-related relics expanded during the crusades, and especially after the Fourth Crusade and the pillage of Byzantium (1204), with the constitution of the Sainte Chapelle in Paris to house the Passion relics acquired by Louis IX.<sup>73</sup> A special place among these was occupied by Veronica's Veil, the *Volto Santo* or *Sudarium*, that was to obscure, from the thirteenth century, the earlier fame of the Byzantine counterpart, the *Mandylion*.<sup>74</sup> All this was then matched and even superseded by Christ's renewed and repeated presence in the visions of late medieval ecstasies, and all the devotional literature addressed to him.<sup>75</sup> The *stigmata* of Francis of Assisi, and all the other late medieval stigmatics add a special bodily dimension to this devotion: caring about and being assimilated to the suffering body of Christ, and actually performing the Passion in minute bodily detail.<sup>76</sup> This is then visualized in the strange late medieval icon-type, the *Vir Dolorum* originally called *Imago Pietatis*.<sup>77</sup>

The other, even mightier rival of the cult of the saints was the cult of the Virgin Mary.<sup>78</sup> Relying upon powerful Byzantine antecedents, the cult of Mary emerged in Latin Christianity in the twelfth century, with the support of the Cistercians, then, in the thirteenth, with the Dominicans.<sup>79</sup> The thirteenth-century miracle collection by Gautier de Coincy, the popular mystery play about Theophil or the abundantly illuminated *Cantigas de Santa Maria* commissioned by the Spanish king, Alfonso X 'El Sabio' (1221–84) provide the image of the Virgin Mary as the mightiest intercessor of all.<sup>80</sup> Marian relics were very rare, because of her bodily Assumption to Heaven, with only her clothes left behind—these appeared and were guarded in the chapel of Blachernae in Byzantium, then a tunic of Mary was acquired by Charles the Bald and kept in Chartres; Notre Dame of Soissons boasted that it possessed her slipper.<sup>81</sup> The scarcity of corporeal relics is, however, compensated by a multiplicity of miracle-working images and statues, which allow the cult of the Virgin a limitless expansion. It started with the famous Lucas-images, the *Hodegetria*-type depictions of the Virgin and the Child in Byzantium, which inspire the innumerable painted and carved black Madonnas (at Le Puy, Rocamadour, Mariazell, Częstochova), which all became famous pilgrimage sites, competing with the biggest saints.<sup>82</sup> All this is then completed by the additional presence, and the resulting bodily relics from Marian apparitions, such as drops of Mary's milk related to miracles happening with Fulbert of Chartres or Bernard of Clairvaux.<sup>83</sup> The cult of the Virgin develops its own devotional practice: the Rosary prayers. Its importance is indicated in the fifteenth century by the passionate debates around the emerging dogma of the Immaculate Conception.<sup>84</sup> Finally, Mary's cult is also enlarged by that of St Anne and the entire Holy Kinship.<sup>85</sup>

Towards the end of the fifteenth century the cult of the saints was definitely waning in comparison with the expansion of the cults around Christ and the Virgin Mary. There were

also new upsurges of sanctity, new emerging saint-candidates, but they met with increasing critique and scepticism.<sup>86</sup> The arguments had always been there in the middle ages,<sup>87</sup> coming not only from the side of disrespectful lay persons but also from devout mystics: Meister Eckhart asked once ‘People, what is it that you are seeking in dead bones?’<sup>88</sup> This critical attitude was reinforced by the Hussites’ and the Lollards’ criticism of the veneration of saints. In the early sixteenth century excessively fasting, and ecstatic living saint ‘celebrities’ such as Anna Laminit were unmasked while cheating, and executed for fraud.<sup>89</sup> Martin Luther’s devastating criticism of relic collecting and the veneration of saints, and the subsequent Reformation, relied on centuries of hostility to this cult within medieval Christianity.<sup>90</sup>

However this did not prevent the survival of the cult of the saints, not only in Catholic and Orthodox Christianity, but in some transmuted forms (the veneration of their own martyrs and prophets) even in Protestantism.<sup>91</sup> The cult of the saints is still with us, but they may never again have been used as extensively as during the thousand years of the middle ages.

# NOTES

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# CHAPTER 14

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# *MISSARUM SOLLEMNIA*

## *Eucharistic Rituals in the Middle Ages*

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ERIC PALAZZO  
TRANSLATED BY JOHN H. ARNOLD

### INTRODUCTION

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IN medieval studies in general, and the history of the liturgy in particular, researchers have always treated the Eucharist with particular care because the rite is considered in various regards, rightly or wrongly, to be the most important in the Christian liturgy. In his classic work on the origins of Christian worship, in regard to the Eucharist and its rites Louis Duchesne fashioned a clear line of interpretation connecting the liturgy of antiquity and the middle ages to the forms taken by the Roman rite.<sup>1</sup> In comparison Anton Baumstark constructed a theory of ‘comparative liturgy’ between East and West by studying certain essential aspects of the rites of the mass such as, for example, liturgical prayer.<sup>2</sup> It must be noted that, in the eyes of Christians from antiquity to the middle ages, the rite of the mass was instituted by Christ himself, in person, during the Last Supper; in the course of which the memorial dimension of the celebration was also instituted. Thus, for good reason, the study of the Eucharist and its rites has strongly presented itself to specialists of antiquity and the middle ages. But beyond the effects of current academic fashion, one must recognize that the Eucharist has a strong attraction for historians because of the notable fact that its rites condense pretty much all the key themes of importance to specialists, not only in history but also theology, and indeed in liturgical studies and anthropology, the history of art and sociology. This chapter will attempt to communicate the richness of the study of the Eucharist for the history of the middle ages, with a particular focus on the sensory and material enactment of the liturgy, and thus will demonstrate the complexity of the Eucharist and the rites attached to it.

*Missarum sollemnia* is the celebrated expression which Joseph-Andreas Jungmann gave to historians of the liturgy, as the title of his monumental work which traces the history of the mass and its theology from the earliest time in antiquity up to the modern era. In the historiography on the Eucharist, Jungmann’s work is both the final word and the point of departure for historians of the liturgy. The three volumes of *Missarum sollemnia* have inscribed themselves first in the renewal of the place of historical studies of the liturgy at the heart of the Church, for the pre-conciliar period; whilst also, in many respects, contributing to the preparation of the reformed liturgy at the Second Vatican Council (1962–5). Second, Jungmann’s book provides a synthesis, unequalled even today, of the history of Eucharistic practices and theology, which traverses the centuries from antiquity to the middle ages and indeed beyond. Across its pages, the author furnishes a primary study of exceptional richness, assembling and commenting on a multiplicity of textual sources which concern, in one way or another, the history of the mass, its theology and its historical, cultural, and political functions. The structure of Jungmann’s three volumes follows relatively faithfully the unfolding of the rite of the mass, preceded by a lengthy introduction to the history of the Eucharist across a very long chronology. Each moment of the rite, each



text, each actor or indeed each object, is presented, analysed and interpreted via textual evidence, drawn largely from what are, properly speaking, liturgical sources. But not only from those materials: one finds equally cited conciliar texts, juridical texts, chronicles, and indeed exegetical commentaries on the liturgy of the mass.

The particular place which Jungmann's book occupies in the history of research on the liturgy of the mass rests not only on the quality of its documentation and the author's thoroughly historical approach. Its renown is equally founded on Jungmann's theoretical stance regarding the mass and its theology. The subtitle of the book indicates the author's main intention: to provide a genetic explication of the Roman mass. To put it another way, Jungmann not only traces with extreme precision the history of the mass in the West across a large period of history, but at the same time attempts to discern the genesis of what we now call the Roman mass, and in so doing, provides a model for understanding the history of the mass in general. Whilst various other theologians and historians of the ecclesiastical liturgy in Jungmann's epoch for the most part saw their work as guided by the movement to erudition which came to serve the reform theology of Vatican II, in his *Missarum sollemnia* Jungmann wished, at heart, to demonstrate the primary originality of the Roman liturgy of the mass; and thus, from the first Christian centuries onward, to legitimate in the same way the contemporary pre-eminence of the Eucharistic practices of Rome, among all other liturgical traditions. More precisely, Jungmann's goal was to demonstrate that the rite of the Eucharist set out in antiquity by the papal liturgy—that is to say, in the custom designated by the *Ordo romanus I*, around 690–700 ce—constituted the most successful model of the rite, thus explaining its adoption almost everywhere in the West during the Carolingian period. Without diminishing the appraisal of the structure strongly elaborated in the *Ordo romanus I*, this viewpoint somewhat occludes the ideological aims of ecclesiastical authors like Jungmann in the academic and erudite work they carried out in the service of modern papal ideology. But despite noting this ideological reservation, it remains the fact that Jungmann has offered a very remarkable work to the history of the liturgy and to medievalists, which one cannot do without when one studies the mass, its history, and its theology.

Following Jungmann's book, a number of historians of the liturgy, theologians, medievalist and modernist historians have produced important work on diverse aspects relating to the Eucharist in history.<sup>3</sup> Amongst these publications, one can distinguish between those which focus upon certain aspects of the theology of the mass in relation to the study of the rite of the Eucharist and the exegetical commentaries of medieval theologians, and those which attempt a more sociological, cultural, or indeed anthropological interpretation of the history of the mass.<sup>4</sup> In the abundance of publications concerning the mass in the middle ages, we should mention also those which throw light upon certain particular themes, for example the *memoria* or private mass, from which we can gain a better knowledge of the history of the Eucharist.<sup>5</sup> In addition, historians of art, specializing in reading and interpreting images (iconography), and archaeologists, have also been interested in very specific and multiple artistic and archaeological implications of the rite of the mass in antiquity and the middle ages.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, we must be grateful to Miri Rubin and to Irène Rosier-Catach for having developed a fresh approach, first to certain well-known aspects of the history of the Eucharist, and second, to other elements less frequently explored by specialists of the area. In *Corpus Christi*, Rubin considers the rites and the theology of the mass during the second half of the middle ages, from issues relevant to social and political history to historical anthropology.<sup>7</sup> In a work which is extremely well researched and of considerable depth, the

author suggests that the Eucharist, in the journey from its creation to the development of the mass and to the office of *Corpus Christi*, is located at the heart of social and cultural strategies even more than liturgical and theological issues. Irène Rosier-Catach approaches the theme of the Eucharist from a linguistic perspective in order to demonstrate what was principally at stake both theologically and philosophically in the formula of the consecration of the Eucharist.<sup>8</sup>

## HISTORY AND THEOLOGY OF THE MASS

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In antiquity and the middle ages, the mass takes a premier place in Christianity and Christian theology because of its sacramental value in light of the realization of the divine plan of redemption.<sup>9</sup> According to Christian theologians, Christ himself instituted the Eucharist at the moment of the Last Supper, just before his Passion. In the theological tradition, that New Testament episode well and truly constituted the moment at which the Eucharist was instituted by Christ, who offered his body and his blood in an act which was destined to be commemorated by the celebration of the mass, and which anticipated his sacrifice on the cross during the Passion. In Christian theology, the theme of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, commemorated in the ritual of the mass, was at one and the same time a moment of remembering the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper, and also part of a continuity with certain Old Testament episodes such as the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham. Anchoring the theology of the Eucharist from antiquity and the middle ages in the biblical tradition of the Old Testament—a characteristic part of customary appeal in biblical typology—finds certain echoes in passages of the euchology of the mass; in particular, prayers from the canon of the mass, notably where they present for example the great sacrificial figures of the Old Testament (Abel, Abraham, Melchizedec) as prefigurations of Christian priests. In antiquity and throughout the middle ages, the essential debate around the theology of the Eucharist concerned the theme of the real presence of the body of Christ in the consecrated 'species' of bread and wine, at the conclusion of the consecration of the bread and wine in the celebration of the Eucharist. For many centuries this debate constituted *the* major subject of theological discussion on the Eucharist, leading to numerous controversies between liturgists and theologians. The essence of the debate rested on how transubstantiation was supposed to happen 'in reality', during the consecration of the species by the priest, in the central moment of the celebration of the mass. The evolution of the Eucharistic rites across antiquity and the middle ages evinces the different positions taken by the Church and its theologians on this subject.

The forms which the rites of the mass have taken across the centuries have varied, following the evolution of the liturgy itself, as with the changing cultural, social, and political conditions which served to frame the production of the ceremonies. Within that framework, as with other rites from the Christian liturgy, the mass had to relate itself to a fairly rich typology of celebrations which corresponded to the theological, pastoral, and liturgical needs appropriate to specific occasions. We can mention for example the practice of *fermentum* (a piece of the host broken off during the pope's mass and circulated to other churches) in the liturgical and urban space of Rome, put in place by at least the fifth century, as we see in the letter of Innocent I to Decentius de Gubbio, dated 19 March 416;<sup>10</sup> or the development of private masses principally for penitential purposes in monastic churches during the Carolingian period; or indeed the *Corpus Christi* processions which filled the urban spaces of the great towns of the later middle ages. Within these broad lines, the

liturgy of the mass was made up of many successive phases within the overall development of the rite. First of all there is the unfolding process of everything to do with the entrance, particularly the procession of the *Introit*, which concludes with the ‘Collect’, the first prayer pronounced by the principal celebrant. Introduced by different sung elements, it leads on, secondly, to the spoken phase of the liturgy, the ‘Parole’, during the course of which the officiating priests move on to biblical readings, two or three in number depending on the liturgical tradition and the precise point in the annual cycle. In the Roman liturgy, which had considerable influence across all the medieval West, the custom was to read a passage extracted from the Epistles and a pericope taken from the Gospels. On the occasion of the grand feasts in the liturgical calendar, the Roman use added an Old Testament reading, usually taken from the books of the Prophets or from the Apocalypse. This phase of the liturgy of the mass, more than all the others which are performed before or after it, calls particularly upon various officiants (lectors, cantors, deacons, priests) to deliver readings, to sing hymns, or to recite prayers or participate in processions. After that, one enters fully into the rites of the consecration of the Eucharist, properly speaking: the offertory procession permitting the laity and the clergy to carry to the altar offerings and the material species ready for consecration, the moment of consecration performed by the priest by pronouncing the prayers from the canon of the mass and carrying out suitable gestures as set out in the ritual, then the communion given to the clergy and the assembled worshippers. The ceremony finishes finally with a brief moment of conclusion marked principally by a last prayer spoken by the celebrant who carried out the consecration. In understanding all of the phases of the ritual of the mass—well known from diverse liturgical sources, mostly normative in nature, designed principally to codify the rite (*ordines*, sacramentaries, lectionaries, antiphonaries, ordinals), and from canonical texts and diverse liturgical sources—one is tempted to apply an overarching framework drawn from the ecclesiology of the liturgy, as founded on the key ideas of the theology of the Eucharist and guided by the diversity of roles held by different actors within the ritual. In this way, each officiant plays a specific role within the rite, such that the congregation—that is to say, the laity—takes full part in the performance of the ritual, such that the participants affect and render life to the profound theological significations contained therein.

It is in this fashion that one must understand and interpret the insertion of liturgical ‘drama’ or ‘play’ within certain Christian liturgical rites of the middle ages; in particular, those relating to the Eucharist do not ‘play’ in a form of liturgical theatre, but rather perform an action which refers to the life of Christ and is designed really to ‘make present’ the scene in the ritual.<sup>11</sup> In that sense, the unfolding of the liturgy of the mass, more than other Christian rites during antiquity and the middle ages, is entirely founded on the performative precision of actors using objects, performing gestures, and moving themselves within a very particular space. That space is principally that of the church, but not only, as I have tried to demonstrate and analyse via a study of different Eucharistic celebrations which took place outside the church during pilgrimages, on the field of battle, or again within the context of the liturgy for the dying, making use of a portable altar.<sup>12</sup> A good witness to this genre of practices is given to us by the Venerable Bede who, in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, relates the efforts of two Anglo-Saxon priests sent to evangelize in Frisia, bringing with them a portable altar—which Bede calls a *tabula altaris*—on which to celebrate the Eucharist daily. In the same fashion, I think also of the recommendations which Hincmar of Reims addressed in the ninth century to priests in his diocese, that they should have available a portable altar to facilitate the celebration of mass in the open air.<sup>13</sup> The essential idea is a double conception of sacred space within Christian practice, one where the fixed notion of the place of a cult, the church, cohabits with that of a mobile

sacred space, defined principally by the different rituals which require the use of a portable altar. In the eyes of the liturgists and exegetes of the liturgy in antiquity and the middle ages, the portable altar is not only a functional object designed to facilitate certain itinerant rituals which take place in the open air, but also an image of ‘the Church’, in its doubled ecclesiological and material meanings. In effect, Christian theology considers the portable altar as the sacred ‘locus’ *par excellence*, an ‘image’ of the Church which moves itself across the world in order to expand Christianity and to bring about one of the essential vocations of that religion. In addition to its liturgical usage, the portable altar is thus the marker of the sacred within the infinite space of the world, making ‘real’ the presence of the itinerant Church. The iconographic decoration and inscriptions on portable altars in the high middle ages express in a particular fashion the idea that the object is a miniature reproduction of the church building wherein the liturgy of the mass takes place, in a way which is both permanent and reiterated, to commemorate the sacrifice of Christ for the Redemption of the human race.<sup>14</sup>

From antiquity—but in particular, from the Carolingian era, with great theologians such as Amalarius of Metz (d. c.850)—the exegesis of the liturgy has presented an interpretive reading of the principal rites of the Church, and most of all of the mass. For the commentators on medieval liturgy, such as Amalarius but also Jean Beleth (fl. 1135–82), Rupert of Deutz (c.1075–1129), Sicard of Cremona (1155–1215), and above all Guillaume Durand in the thirteenth century, all the elements which compose the ritual—actors, objects, places, liturgical music, clothing—are carriers of a symbolic signification, in direct relation to the biblical reading at the mass and its theological meaning. For exegetes of the Eucharistic liturgy, it is a matter of inscribing the ritual of the mass within the ‘historical’ continuity of the rituals of the Old Testament, in order to contribute to the establishment of the concurrence between the Old and New Testaments, in which the history of the ‘present time’ is written within that of the Bible. Thus one must recall the importance that the exegetes accord to the construction of a theology of the liturgy in the rituals of the mass, where a symbolic interpretation imposes itself in a preeminent fashion, emphasizing particularly the idea that the liturgy is nothing other than the *re-presentation* of invisible, sacramental reality.<sup>15</sup>

A number of historians and specialists in the history of the liturgy have also argued that the rituals of the mass provide a privileged viewpoint onto the cultural, social, and political history of antiquity and the middle ages.<sup>16</sup> Certain cultural, social, or political issues made echoes within the liturgical practices connected with the rituals of the mass, demonstrating very clearly the place which liturgy in general, and the mass in particular, occupied within medieval society. At times the evolution and development of the practices of the liturgy of the mass fell under the influence of debates and historical issues which arose within the political domain, or in regard to the organization of society, or indeed connected with the cultural identity of a society.

## THE RITES OF THE MASS AND THE FIVE SENSES: FROM THE INVISIBLE TO THE VISIBLE

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As has often been noted in regard to the culture of antiquity and the middle ages, we must look to the Bible to understand the place of the senses within theology and liturgy. First, it must be noted that numerous Christian authors freely associate the symbolism of the number ‘five’, and its multiple occurrences within the Bible, with the five senses. Second,



many passages from the Old and New Testaments emphasize that the Revelation of God is passed on through sensory perception, in order to be intelligible to human beings. Finally, in biblical texts the activation of certain senses is fundamentally important to permitting knowledge of God. Thus, in the Bible, sight and hearing appear to be indispensable for conversion, and for the contemplation of God. Equally, the Song of Songs and the psalter place greater emphasis on the sense of touch and taste, in a discourse on the perception of God by parts of the body. In antiquity, and subsequently through the whole middle ages, the perception of the senses in Christian culture also depends upon the reception of the works of Patristic authors, and theologians of Platonic philosophy—where primacy is accorded to that which is not intelligible—and to the writings of Aristotle, where the body and the senses are revalorized, in order to permit knowledge of God. To that we can add that it is the importance of the Incarnation which positions the body and the senses at the heart of the debate over the reconciliation of Man and God, following the Fall into Original Sin. The study of the senses in antique and medieval Christian thought therefore concerns once again the harmony of the world, where ‘Man-as-microcosm’ reflects the world via his body and the five senses.

Thus the essential element in Christian theology and liturgy—and particularly the mass—with regard to the five senses concerns how Man may be permitted to recover the harmony which was disordered, disorganized by the senses at the moment of the Fall. In the third century, doctrine privileged the intellectual over the material and the sensory—one could say, the Invisible over the Visible—in line with Origenist thought, which invented the concept of the ‘spiritual senses’ in opposition to the five corporeal senses. The general idea developed by Origen and reprised by various theologians following him is that the corporeal senses permit the reception of the divine by the spiritual senses, centred inside the believer in the heart and the soul. Despite this, the dominant tendency in the high middle ages and particularly in the twelfth century (as notably with the great figure of Saint Bernard) was for theology and liturgy to accord an important place to the senses, by way of reconciling the material and the spiritual, the intellectual and the bodily, and going beyond this, to prove that the five senses played an essential role for access to the intellect and to the divine. For example, John Scot Eriugena, in the ninth century, in his commentary on the prologue to the Gospel of St John, affirms that the bodily senses observe the forms and the beauty of sensory objects because in them the intellect recognizes the Word of God. In the same sense, in the eleventh century, Bruno de Segni attributes to the senses the essential virtues of Christian theology.<sup>17</sup> Thus sight is associated with intelligence, taste to wisdom, touch to the knowledge by experience of Christ, and indeed the good odour which distinguishes Christians from heretics.

The theological and liturgical revalorization of the five senses finds its apogee in the writings of Saint Bernard in the twelfth century. Moreover, Saint Bernard avers that ‘sight’ has priority over the other senses. In doing so, he places himself as part of a long line of theologians from antiquity onward, most of all Saint Augustine, for whom the five senses possessed a clear internal hierarchy, at the top of which one finds ‘sight’, and thereafter ‘hearing’. Saint Augustine was also however the first to have developed the concept of synaesthesia, in which all the senses gain their importance and inter-agency from each other. Augustine’s concept of synaesthesia gained a rich posterity via the conception of the liturgy in the middle ages, and particularly in the rites of the mass. Nevertheless, the dominant tendency among medieval theologians—as we find with Peter the Venerable and Rupert de Deutz for example—was to allow ‘sight’ to predominate, as one of the ‘five gates of the citadel’ which represented the human body, following the metaphor presented by Gregory the Great and repeated many times after him, notably by Peter Damian in the



eleventh century. In addition, ‘sight’ took the major role in the directions for ritual action, notably in regard to the liturgical gestures carried out in the celebration of the Eucharist—principally those of the consecrating priest—which carried particular theological significance in the controversy over the Real Presence of Christ’s body in the consecrated host. In a certain fashion, one might say that for medieval theologians, to admit to the sensory dimension of man—in particular the corporeal senses—was to recognize the Incarnation, as one of the modalities of visibility produced by the ‘seen host’ within the liturgy of the mass.

The liturgy belongs to the general category of the *signum*, the theological concept of the sign which held an important place within medieval Christian theology, following in particular the Augustinian theory of the sign, which in turn took its heritage from the tradition set out by antique theologians. The liturgy in general, and the mass in particular, is a ‘sign’ and in itself consists of ‘signs’, whether vocal, linguistic, visual, or spatial, via which the sacramental workings must produce affect in order that one can ‘see’ the ‘realities’ of the mysteries of the Church. By its nature, the sign offers itself to sensory perception, as within the liturgy and in visions; and it permits the passage from the known to the unknown, the visible to the invisible. Thus, according to Augustinian theory, each ‘thing’ is susceptible to transforming itself into a sign, so long as it is capable of being perceived as such. The liturgy takes on the strongly operative character of the sign, which permits the sight and perception of certain invisible things, relating to the theological mysteries of the liturgy. The sign is that which offers itself to the senses in order to produce other knowledge. This is exactly the effect produced by the liturgy. Following Augustinian thought and scholastic theology influenced by Aristotle, the sign makes known and reveals the ideas which are contained within things. As a consequence God, creator of all things, can be looked for by Man in all things via their perceived, sensorial nature.

Now, the medieval liturgy is itself a sign because it makes God known via perceivable things. Thus the liturgy is a sign in a profound theological sense, because it makes God known; and it makes known the ideas within things, in both a sacramental and a sensory dimension. It is not a symbol which functions by placing emphasis on the analogy between one thing and another; rather, the sign in itself permits intrinsic knowledge of a thing. In this context of understanding, the liturgy establishes the connection between the visible and the invisible. To put it another way, for Christianity and the Church there was a dilemma between combating and rejecting the senses (because of their harmful consequences on human destiny), whilst keeping alive the possibility that it is via sensory perception of things that man is brought to intimate knowledge of God and Creation. In this context, the liturgy—theological ‘signum’ *par excellence*—is a privileged example of the expression of that dilemma, as a theological ‘place’ where the senses play their full role in service of the knowledge of manifest ‘signs’ contained within the rituals. The fundamental point which separates this interpretation from earlier viewpoints is that it sees the liturgy of the mass as not only composed of places, actors, and sacred words or indeed sacramentals, but as also made from touch, sight, sound. That is to say, all that relates to the sensory dimension is manifest in all the elements of the ritual—and most particularly in the art which covers liturgical objects, the monumental images which decorate the space of the church, and indeed the clothing of the participants.

From this perspective, one can escape from the strictly ‘utilitarian’ or ‘functional’ conception of art within the liturgy, and instead move toward a perception of a philosophical and theological nature, within which the liturgy is placed within the realm of sensory experience, mainly presented and expressed by the ‘placing’ of the ritual and its effective performance via all the elements which compose it—and most of all, art. This

approach to the sensory world by the liturgy presents certain similarities with the phenomenology of perception. That is, one must recognize the ‘sensory space’ *par excellence* of the Christian liturgy. The ‘sensory space’ of the liturgy is above all composed of elements which make particular appeal to the senses (such as visual decorations and representations), brought into contiguity within the ritual sequences of a ceremony, and leading to an ‘inter-sensoriality’ or a ‘crossing’ of sensory modalities. Given this important interactive dimension between the different elements of the liturgy, it manifests itself as what I have called the ‘placing in action’ (*mise en action*) of the common faith, and particularly of elements which create and make possible the bringing-into-presence of the Invisible contained within the Visible, by the activation of the sensory dimension of ritual. In the ‘placing in action’ of the different elements of the liturgy, the experience of sensory perception plays a major and determining role in access to the knowledge and essence of these sensory elements. To put it another way, one can argue that one of the major issues of the liturgy consists of the lived, phenomenological experience of the sensory world, because it and it alone—by means of the effective performance of the liturgy within its ‘sensory space’—permits the ‘placing in action’ of sensory reality, which must reveal the Invisible within the sacramental *signum* and make it possible ‘*in presentia*’.

## THE THEOLOGY OF THE MASS AND THE FIVE SENSES IN LITURGICAL MANUSCRIPTS

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The liturgy of the mass is thus above all the place of the sensory activation of ritual, in order to make apparent the invisible contained within the visible (see [Figure 14.1](#)). In this way, everything within the ritual contributes to the sensory activation designed to ‘make really apparent’ the heart of the theology of the Eucharist, via the unfolding celebration of the mass. The places, the people, the sacred texts, and the different objects used within the rite contribute not only by playing precise individual functions, but by bringing into existence this inter-sensory space, creating ‘sense’ for the theology of the Eucharist. Among the objects designed for liturgical use within the mass, books—such as the sacramentary or lectionary—occupy a special place, because of their capacity to be ‘embodying books’ (*livres-corps*) as well as functional objects. I have elsewhere tried to demonstrate the sensorial activation performed by the lectionary of Godescalc (c. 781–783) in ritual performance across all sensory dimensions, by considering its iconography and the whole ensemble of its materiality.<sup>18</sup> This leads me to suggest that other liturgical books than simply those used for gospel readings during the mass could also be interpreted within the modalities of the Incarnation of Christ through the performance of the liturgy, anticipating in a certain fashion the Real Presence of Christ within the host after the consecration of the Eucharist, such that they similarly can be considered as examples of ‘embodying books’, made sensorially active within the frame of the liturgy. In addition to the gospel and lectionaries, we could cite for example the *libellus* of the canon of the mass, the text, illustrations, and iconography of which—and the material manuscript itself—are activated by the senses during ritual performance, such that this sort of ‘functional’ object becomes an ‘embodying book’—in this case, the body of Christ—and takes a full role in the expression of the theological signification of the ritual. And thus, by making possible this mode of the Incarnation of Christ via the liturgical book which contains the prayers of the canon of the mass for performing the consecration and facilitating the Real Presence of the Lord within the consecrated bread and wine, the sensorial action of ‘sight’ is established. In

effect, the liturgical use of the *libellus* implies a strong solicitation of the visual sense, in regard first of the gestures made by the celebrating priest during the consecration, as he uses the manuscript which contains the prayers of the canon; and second, in certain iconographic characteristics of the illustrations of the codex which evoke the ‘placing in action’ of sight by those who are celebrating the mass: the iconography of the *Maiestas Domini* showing Christ elevating the host, the image of the crucifixion, *Te igitur*, and its sensorial activation for liturgical and theological purposes by the priest who contemplates that scene with the eyes of his heart.



**Figure 14.1** Representation of the liturgy and its synesthetic effects. Charter, Saint-Martin du Canigou, 13th century, Paris, Bibliothèque des Beaux-Arts, coll. Masson 38.

In the Carolingian era there were also other modes of illustration of the canon of the mass which aimed, like the *libellus* from the Bibliothèque Nationale in France, to make Christ ‘present’ in one way or another, or indeed to make present the theological exegesis on the Eucharist via the liturgical book, in the process of the performance of the liturgy. It is in this sense that one can read and interpret the accompanying architectural decor framing the principal prayers of the canon of the mass in the sacramentary of Drogo, bishop of Metz

(Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS Lat. 9428), created in the middle of the ninth century at Metz; and indeed the illustrations in the same manuscript of certain prayers for Easter, in relation to the symbolic signification which Amalarius of Metz gives in the same period in regard to the altar and the holy sepulchre. In essence, for Amalarius—one of the great commentators on liturgy—an aspect of the exegetical symbolism of the altar lies in the comparison that one can make between that object and the holy sepulchre (the tomb of Christ). In this sense, one must interpret the altar as an image of a ‘place’, of the sacred space that is the holy sepulchre. One can see the reflection of Amalarius’s symbolic and exegetical reading of the altar and the holy sepulchre in the architectural iconography which was designed to frame and highlight the sacred texts of the canon of the mass and the prayers of the Easter mass in Drogo’s sacramentary. The presence of these decorative motifs in the manuscript—that is to say, in the sacred space of the liturgical text; and, what is more, in connection with the prayers of consecration—work not only to augment the sacred dimension of reading those texts in relation to their sacramental value, but contribute to the creation of a ‘place’, of a ‘sacred space’ within the manuscript itself. This is thus symbolically associated with other sacred places and spaces: the choir of the church, where the celebration of the mass is played out at the altar, and where the Eucharist is consecrated; and the holy sepulchre, the pre-eminent sacred Christian space, where Christ defeated death for all eternity and where the glory of the Resurrection was known. With the architectural and decorative ornaments of Drogo’s sacramentary, one can thus say that the place of the liturgy, the sacred space, is also present in the manuscript itself. The illustrations of the canon of the mass in this sacramentary form sensory elements, mainly visual, but this time not liturgically ‘placed in action’ by the text and the object of the book which contains it (as with the lectionary of Godescalc or indeed another sacramentary of Metz, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS Lat. 1141); but rather the ‘placing in action’ of the exegesis of the liturgy, via the canon of the mass and the consecration of the Eucharist at the moment of their ritual performance. To put it another way, during the consecration of the Eucharist—during which the prayers of the canon of the mass play a key role, along with ritual gestures and other sensory signs—the celebrant is given a visual prompt by the exegetical images contained in the manuscript, making present the liturgical commentary upon the mass, thus bringing into operation the relation between the Eucharistic liturgy and certain aspects of its exegetical interpretation. That ‘placing in action’ of the exegetical images from the sacramentary of Drogo in order that via the senses (sight, in this particular case) the exegesis of the liturgy is activated at the moment when the liturgy itself is performed, thus making ‘present’ in the ritual performance both the sacramental ‘Invisible’ and its exegetical theology. We can thus strongly suspect that, at the moment at which the celebrant consecrated the bread and the wine, he made use of this sacramentary.

As another example of the pre-eminently sensory discourse which developed around the liturgy of the mass in service of its theology, we can cite the very complex iconography of the Carolingian ivory at Frankfurt ([Figure 14.2](#)) which bears remarkable witness to the richness of the visual discourse on the liturgy of the mass and its theology.<sup>19</sup> Amongst the precise elements of the ritual described in the *Ordines Romani* (principally the *Ordo Romanus I*), the scene represented on the Frankfurt ivory demonstrates a flowing combination of two successive moments in the liturgy of the mass: the performance of the *Sanctus* by the choir, and the beginning of the consecration by the priest during the canon of the mass. The characteristics of the iconography of the scene demonstrate that those who conceived and composed liturgical images in the middle ages were little concerned with the ‘real’ representation of the ritual itself, even if when composing such images they did rely upon precise and real elements in the action of the liturgy, as described in the *ordines*. In



general, their iconographic preoccupation was, rather, to attempt to construct images which combined multiple moments from the ritual, in order to speak to a theological discourse on the liturgy.



**Figure 14.2** The Frankfurt Ivory: Frankfurt am Main, Stadt- und Universitäts-bibliothek, MS Barth. 180, cover.

On the Frankfurt ivory that theological discourse on the Eucharist takes a very sophisticated form. It wishes to ‘show’ things other than simply the ritual moments of the *Sanctus* and the canon of the mass, via invisible iconographic themes which are veiled but also ‘present’, and suggested by multiple indices which are both iconographic and textual. The ‘invisible’ themes are those of the Crucifixion or the cross of Christ and the *Maiestas Domini*. I would suggest that in its totality, the Frankfurt ivory represents a theophany (an appearance of God) that is, of Christ revealed in the daily sacrament of the Eucharist. In that exceptional image, Christ is represented in various ways but above all via the Eucharistic bread and wine that the priest prepares for consecration via a book which is itself, in a certain sense, a kind of incarnation. The bread and wine are placed on the altar, in the chalice and on the paten, themselves placed between an open book—the sacramentary—and



a closed book (which is not to be identified as a lectionary or alternative text, but rather the same book in different states). The visual ‘play’ presented between the closed and open books, framing the Eucharistic materials (Christ), cannot I think be explained by the presence of a second liturgical book on the altar next to the sacramentary. Rather, I think it relates to the desire of the conceivers of the image, and the rich theological discourse centred on the Invisibility of sacramentality, to ‘show’ the idea of *revelation*, of the theophany of Christ via the celebration of the Eucharist, with which all are brought face-to-face visually during the key ritual moment of consecration. To put it another way, the closed book on the altar must be understood in relation to the theme of the revelation which is made possible because of the Eucharist, and via the consecration of the bread and wine; we see this theme also in a complementary motif in the open book, as the sacramentary opens to the page of the *Te igitur*, which, in a certain sense, brings about the theophanic revelation by the words that it contains. The Frankfurt ivory presents the revelation made ‘visible’ by the Eucharist, via the invisible indices and made ‘real’ by the sensory activation of the celebrant; most of all by sight, by *his* sight. The activation of the celebrant’s sight at the moment of celebration stimulates the other senses—notably hearing, via the song of the choir—in order to perform the liturgy. In a certain sense, one could say that the celebrant is brought to a ‘celebration with the angels’, by the fact that he participates in the divine liturgy, a celestial ritual presided over by Christ himself, via the person of the priest. Following complex and sophisticated modes which correspond to the richness of theological discourse regarding the Visible and the Invisible in the sacramental, the Frankfurt ivory presents us with various modalities of the Incarnation of the *Verbum* in the course of the liturgy and the mass. The image thus becomes a perpetual moment in the liturgy of the mass, and all that it signifies in relation to the Incarnation; and above all, to the theophanic revelation. The image *becomes* the perpetual moment as it *becomes* that theophany, and does so in particular by the sensory activation of the celebrant during the performance of the ritual, in such a way that it functions as a sort of permanent anticipation of the moment of revelation brought about within the ritual of the mass. In temporal terms, the image *incarnates* the duality between permanence and repetition, in such a way that the Eucharistic ritual appears as the repeated activation of a theophanic manifestation, in which the permanent aspect is consubstantial with the divine *signum*, which is manifest in an invisible fashion within the liturgy. The image *is* the theophanic manifestation within the liturgy, shown at the same time as the Incarnation, the sacrifice, and the revelation following the Resurrection.

Thus, in order fully to understand the medieval liturgy, we have to appreciate not only its inheritances and theological developments from antiquity to the middle ages, but also to understand its performance—the complex flow of images, conjunctions, and actions, which work simultaneously to enact fundamental theological concepts, and also literally to ‘make present’, in a highly sensory fashion, the sacramental workings of the divine.

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# CHAPTER 15

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# PENITENTIAL VARIETIES

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ROB MEENS

## INTRODUCTION

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PENITENCE is a complex phenomenon. It can be an ecclesiastical procedure to strengthen discipline and an ecclesiastically sanctioned device to relieve feelings of guilt and shame in an individual. Penitence can thus be seen as a policing tool and as a therapeutic instrument in the hands of the clergy, and in the middle ages it could be used in both ways—sometimes to the distress of modern historians.<sup>1</sup> One can also regard penitence more from a social point of view, as a venue for reconciling conflicting parties. Penitential procedures often were part and parcel of more complex processes of reconciliation, to such an extent that it sometimes becomes difficult for modern observers to distinguish between the religious and the social dimensions of reconciliatory practices.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, I want to focus on yet another aspect of penitence: the personal experience. Because of the almost complete lack of ego-documents from this period informing us about personal experiences, this is of course a hazardous approach, yet I think that we still can get at least some feeling of what penitential procedures must have meant for individual people. By concentrating on particular cases it is possible to see penitence in action and a careful although necessarily brief analysis of individual cases will offer possibilities to evaluate the circumstances and pressures that induced people to do penance, to reconstruct as far as possible the penitential procedure that that individual underwent, and finally to understand what differences penitential procedures created for an individual's understanding of his or her position in the community.

Looking at particular cases will offer the opportunity to get away from a received 'grand narrative' imposed upon the evidence, a grand narrative which sketches an evolution of penitential ritual from early Christian times to the present, in order to legitimize or criticize current practices and opinions. In such a narrative, the origins of private penance were found in Irish monastic circles where penitential handbooks were composed for use in the context of private confession. Catholic authors stressed the 'sacramental continuities' between this form of penance and the early Christian form of canonical, public penance, which was too austere to be continued in later generations. Non-Catholic authors chose rather to stress the discontinuities. In the Carolingian period both forms were used in different circumstances. Private penance remained in use for sins which had remained secret, while canonical penance was meted out when sins had come public. This distinction between 'public' and 'private' forms of penance is known as the Carolingian dichotomy. From the twelfth century onwards public penance went out of fashion and private penance became the norm, but in a somewhat different form. Whereas in the earlier period the material side of penance was emphasized in its insistence on the works of penance such as fasting or almsgiving, from the twelfth century onwards 'true' feelings of guilt and remorse were regarded as crucial in order to receive absolution. The inner disposition of the sinner was more important than his outward deeds. This attention to inner dispositions has been regarded as a crucial element in 'the discovery of the individual'.<sup>3</sup> Most medievalists agree that at least in the twelfth century annual confession was general practice, but it is unclear



how far the abundant pastoral literature that was created in the thirteenth century, in combination with preaching and confession, succeeded in creating a culture of sin and salvation, or of 'fear' as some would have it.<sup>4</sup> Recent research has suggested that these grand narratives are in general much too schematic and do not give sufficient attention to the wide variety of forms in which medieval men and women atoned for their sins.<sup>5</sup>

The approach favoured here will hopefully introduce the reader to the rich variety of forms and formats in which medieval Christians tried to make up for their sins and to reconcile themselves with their fellow Christians, with the Church and with God. The cases are, of course, somewhat randomly selected, dependent on the availability of suitable source material, yet they are also chosen so as to represent personal experiences from different regions and different periods within the wider time frame that we usually define as the middle ages. As such they hope to catch the most important aspects of medieval penance. Let us begin in Rome.

## ROME, 589

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In November of the year 589, the city of Rome was flooded by the river Tiber, with terrible consequences. A Christian in Rome would see, among other things, the papal granaries collapse, leading to rioting and famine. He would see snakes swimming in the river and perhaps even a dragon of enormous size. If lucky he would escape the consequences of a terrible plague that snatched Pope Pelagius II away as one of its first victims. He would perhaps take part in the public acclamations by which the prefect of the city was chosen as the new bishop of Rome. He would hear the new bishop, who later became known as Gregory the Great, sermonize on the disasters that befell Rome and hear him frame the events as a punishment of God in order to convert the inhabitants of Rome through penitence. Among others, the bishop referred to the book of Jeremiah where the Old Testament prophet in an apocalyptic mood foresaw that the people of God would suffer terribly before being judged. It is evident that Gregory the Great saw in these events another sign that the end of the world was near. Gregory warned people to repent while there was still time. Nobody should despair because of the enormity of his or her sins, because a three-day period of penance had wiped away the sins of the city of Nineveh and the thief hanging next to Christ on the cross was saved in the hour of his death by his repentance and faith. Our nameless inhabitant of Rome would also hear Gregory giving orders for a procession in Rome that was organized according to the religious status of its participants: clergy, monks, nuns, children, lay men, widows, and finally married women would all assemble together with the priests of a specific Roman district. Our lay man would join those assembled at the church of St Stephen (the modern San Stefano Rotondo) and together with the priests of the seventh district in Rome he would then march in procession to the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore. There he would meet the other six groups that had all started out from different martyr churches from all over the city and they would come together to pray and to ask forgiveness for their sins. He would see choirs going through the streets of Rome singing psalms and the Kyrie Eleison. And while he would join in prayer with the Roman people to ward off God's wrath, he would see eighty people fall dead within an hour.

These events in Rome are related by Gregory of Tours in his *Histories*. Gregory, writing in Tours, was informed about these Roman events by a deacon of his diocese who had visited Rome in those days and had returned to Tours, bringing holy relics with him as well

as news about the new pope.<sup>6</sup> The story demonstrates how penitence could be used as a powerful theme in a sermon addressed in times of need in order to rally a group of believers around the person of the bishop. By organizing a penitential procession Gregory succeeded in reaching out to the faithful and to explain to them why they were so terribly struck by misfortune. Participants in such processions must have identified themselves as members of a sinful community and by their prayers demonstrated their willingness to do penance even when their fellow citizens were struck dead besides them as victims of the plague. This penitential procedure in Rome in 590 was clearly a communal affair, orchestrated by the local bishop in a very public and collective demonstration of humility and guilt. Penance, however, could also be more personal as the next case will demonstrate. For this however, we will have to travel to a place that had never been part of the Roman Empire, to far away Ireland.

## IRELAND, SIXTH CENTURY

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In Ireland we find from the sixth century onwards the first works of a new genre of texts. These were intended to help a priest, in some cases also a monk or an abbess, in the process of hearing confession. One of the earliest books of this new genre that we know by the name of penitentials, is the one composed by the sixth-century Irish abbot Finnian. In this work he deals with a multitude of sins: sinful thoughts and sinful behaviour, forms of violence and bloodshed, theft, perjury, and several forms of sexual licence. The author suggested appropriate modes of penance for each and every sin, often in the form of a period of fasting. In a number of remarkable canons, he also discusses ways in which married men and women should behave. Such discussions centre mainly on sex. Finnian formulated very strict rules for marriage, rules which must have been peculiar in Ireland where secular legislation provided a whole gamut of possible relations between man and wife and where marriages could easily be dissolved. Finnian rejected divorce altogether. In the case where a couple was unable to produce offspring—where the wife remained barren, as Finnian formulated it, but we should of course ask ourselves how Finnian could know which of the couple actually was infertile—a man should not do away with his wife but they should go on living together in continence. A woman should not leave her husband and if she did, she should remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. In the case that a wife left her husband, he should refrain from taking another wife in the hope that she would do penance and return. A woman who was being sent away by her husband should not have sex with another man but should wait until ‘God may perchance put penance in the heart of her husband’ so that he would take her back. Finnian furthermore includes a whole list of periods in which a wedded couple should abstain from sexual intercourse. ‘For marriage without continence is not lawful, but a sin’, as Finnian formulated it. A married couple should abstain from sexual intercourse during three periods of forty-days-and-nights each year, on Sunday and Saturday night and after a woman had conceived. Such abstinence apparently was motivated by two main reasons: sex was not granted for the sake of lust, but for the sake of producing offspring and it interfered with the proper preparation for praying.<sup>7</sup>

From a text such as this, it is clear that confession touched on people’s private life. A spiritual counsellor apparently intervened in the ways in which a couple gave form to their sexual needs. How this can be imagined is indicated in another sixth-century text from Ireland: Adomnan’s *Life of Columba*. In this text the saint is confronted by a man name

Lugne who complained that his wife had an aversion to him and refused to sleep with him any longer. The saint then invited the wife and started reproaching her indicating that she should not shy away from her own flesh, since her man was her own flesh. This was not the woman's viewpoint and she responded thus: 'I am prepared to do anything you order me to, however much a burden, except one thing: do not make me sleep in the same bed with Lugne.' She further indicated that she would take on all the burden of the house's work or travel overseas to join a female monastery, if only not to have sex with her husband. Columba denied her the right to enter into a monastery because her husband was still alive and proposed that the three of them should fast for a day and pray to the Lord. This they did and the saint even prayed an extra night for the couple. When they reconvened, the wife had completely come round: 'The man whom I loathed yesterday, she exclaimed, I love today. Last night... my heart turned from hate to love' and from that day onwards she remained closely attached to her husband and never declined him her sexual gratification.<sup>8</sup>

This story, of course, was meant to demonstrate the powers of the saint, but it also gives us a taste of conjugal problems in sixth-century Ireland and of the quite independent position of women vis-à-vis their husband. The way in which the saint here intervened in a marriage and mediated between man and wife sits well with the kind of evidence that we just discussed in Finnian's penitential. Although Adomnan's story nowhere indicates that Columba here heard confession, penitential books dealing with such problems suggest that marital affairs were often discussed in such a context and therefore confession might be a convenient context for this story. If this is the case, it would also illustrate how confession need not be a completely private affair in sixth-century Ireland. In many cases the confessor acted as a mediator between two parties, particularly in cases of violence and bloodshed, but also, as in this case, in a matrimonial setting. Finnian's penitential contains quite some sentences related to marital affairs, for which no specific amount of penance is being enjoined. This again indicates that the practice of confession and marital counselling were closely linked.

## NORTHERN ITALY, C.794

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We do not know whether a layman called Haistulf and his wife turned to clerical assistance for their marital problems, but if they did so, in this tragic case it was clearly of no avail. We know of this sad story from a letter from c.794 written by archbishop Paulinus of Aquilea (787–802).<sup>9</sup> This letter reveals that Haistulf had brutally murdered his wife in a cruel way (*crudelior omni bestia*) because he suspected her of adultery. The archbishop chastizes Haistulf for trying to excuse his brutal deed by bringing forth a witness of her adultery. Paulinus questioned not only the moral character of the witness, but most of all the fact that Haistulf acted upon a single testimony, which was not allowed in secular nor in divine law. Paulinus offered Haistulf two options to atone for his atrocious sin. The first option was to retreat from the world and to enter a monastery in order to humiliate himself at the hands of an abbot and thus to profit from the prayers of his fellow monks. This was the lighter option, according to Paulinus. The second more oppressive option was to remain in the world and to do penance in public for the remainder of his life. This meant in practice, so Paulinus continued, that he should refrain from eating meat and drinking wine or beer, except for the feasts of Easter and Christmas. He should live on bread, water and salt and should persevere in fasting, vigils, prayer, and almsgiving. Moreover Haistulf had to give up those aspects of social life that characterized a nobleman: carrying arms and

taking part in law suits. Sexual relations were taboo and he should refrain from bathing and any (other) forms of conviviality. In church he should remain separated from the rest of the community, staying near the doors and soliciting prayers from the people passing by. He was to be excluded from taking communion in Mass for the remainder of his life, but at the end of his life he was allowed to take the *viaticum*, if at least he lived up to the expectations of his priest.

Whether Haistulf chose one of these options and thus atoned for the murder of his wife, we do not know, since we are only informed of this case through Paulinus's letter. Perhaps Haistulf embraced one of these options because he seriously worried about the fate of his soul. Murdering his wife, however, must have brought him also into serious conflict with her family. In that case doing ecclesiastical penance might be regarded as (part of) an acceptable satisfaction for the family of the deceased. Haistulf would in both scenarios pay with his social life for the life of his wife, either by entering a monastery or by living as a public penitent, or, as a penitential book would phrase it, he would 'live dead unto the world'.<sup>10</sup> Our sources suggest that ecclesiastical penance sometimes played a crucial role in settling conflicts between two secular parties. The priest or bishop administering the penance then acted as a mediator between the two parties.

## SOISSONS, 833

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We moved from a rather intimate and private setting for confession, to one in which the private turned into a very public affair. Now we will turn to penitential ritual in a very public and political setting. In the year 833 the Frankish emperor Louis the Pious found himself with serious problems. His three sons, Lothar, Louis, and Pippin revolted against their father, whose troops had deserted him in the neighbourhood of Colmar. He was thus delivered powerless into the hands of his sons. This happened in a period of deep political crisis. Politics, however, was for the Carolingian kings and emperors inextricably intertwined with religious issues. The king was responsible for the moral conduct of himself, his family, and his people in order to retain the Lord's protection. In the late 820s, however, the Franks experienced serious setbacks, resulting in military defeats against pagan troops from Spain and Pannonia. As a result Frankish bishops and magnates frantically started to search their souls to find out why they seemed to have lost God's protection. The emperor Louis first found two scapegoats to blame, counts Hugh of Tours and Matfried of Orléans, but was later himself targeted by his sons, some important aristocratic families and some bishops, such as Agobard of Lyon and Ebo of Reims. Louis, who almost ten years earlier in 822 had succeeded in reconciling certain alienated members of his family by doing public penance, was now put under heavy pressure to do voluntary penance. In 833 in the church of St Médard in Soissons, packed with members of the Frankish political elites, the emperor prostrated himself on a hair shirt in front of the altar and confessed before all. He admitted that he had mistreated the sacred task (*ministerium*) that had been entrusted to him and to having offended God in many ways. He had brought scandal to the Church of Christ and turmoil among his people. After this confession, his sins were carefully written down. The emperor then begged for the imposition of public and ecclesiastical penance, which the bishops mercifully imposed.<sup>11</sup>

We cannot go into all necessary details here, not through lack of evidence but because this famous case engendered a 'veritable explosion of writing'.<sup>12</sup> All authors of the surviving texts tried to impose their reading of the events on their audience, resulting in an



‘open “battlefield” of meaning’; a struggle that proved to be even more important after Louis had returned to power, a year later.<sup>13</sup> It seems clear, however, that Louis was put under severe pressure to do penance in a very public fashion in the church of St Médard in Soissons. The impresarios staging the ritual took great pains to account for every action and stressed that they were following an established ecclesiastical tradition. This they did because they were in fact doing something entirely new. Louis had done penance before but this had not resulted in a fall from power. In 822 the emperor had done penance in order to appease feelings of discontent among his family and aristocratic factions. There and then he acted from a position of power. Now, eleven years later, he was in the hands of his rebellious sons and was put under severe pressure to do penance and thereby lose his throne. His opponents wanted to tonsure him and to put him away in a monastery, but the emperor successfully resisted going that far. The sources describing Louis’s penance all stress the voluntary character of his penance. This emphasis is a result of worries about the validity of any form of involuntary penance and of the fact that many sources were written after Louis had regained power in 834. The willingness of the emperor to do penance could now be presented as honourable.

If we try to capture something of Louis’s feeling at this particular moment, it seems that he felt that doing penance in Soissons was less definitive and less humiliating than to become a monk. Why this was so is difficult to grasp, but an important factor probably was that penitence was ambiguous. It was humiliating, but at the same time honourable. Because humility was one of the major virtues in Christian morals, a Christian could gain honour by debasing oneself. Moreover, one of the great Roman emperors, Theodosius, had done penance in public. Doing imperial penance, therefore, could be regarded as stepping in the footsteps of this famous predecessor. We may assume that such considerations helped Louis to agree to undergo the humiliating ritual of 833 and while doing so, perhaps anticipated that sincere penance might in due time help to regain God’s favour and imperial power.

## **TRIER, 900**

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Around the year 900 a bishop made his round in the diocese of Trier.<sup>14</sup> Before he arrived in a village an archdeacon or archpriest announced the bishop’s visit and called together the community. Together with the local priest he should settle petty cases before the bishop arrived. The visiting bishop was to be welcomed with joy, fear, and the greatest honour, while the church bells were ringing. He would say Mass and afterwards invite seven trustworthy men from the community who had to swear an oath on holy relics that they would inform the bishop of all the misdeeds going on in the community. The bishop would then question these witnesses about cases of murder and violence in the community, about adultery and other forms of illicit sexual behaviour, about theft, perjury and false testimony, and about magic and unchristian forms of ritual. But also less serious forms of wrongdoing were discussed, such as the consumption of impure food, the non-observance of fasts and festivals or the proper fulfilment of a penitential burden. People misbehaving were summoned before the bishop who would then judge them and impose a proper form of penance on them.

Here a sinner would be confronted with the bishop making a grand entry into a local community. He had been informed upon by fellow parishioners and had been summoned before the bishop to confess his sins in a kind of tribunal. The bishop would then enjoin a specific form of penance. If he had committed adultery, for example, he had to make up for



this trespass by living in penance for seven years.<sup>15</sup> If he had tried to foretell the future by reading specific signs he had to do penance for five years, if he had provoked thunderstorms, seven years.<sup>16</sup> Not all parishioners, however, seem to have been willing to submit to episcopal authority. In the *Life of Bishop Ulrich of Augsburg*, it is revealed that the bishop sometimes encountered stiff opposition. In the case that somebody did not want to accept the episcopal verdict, the bishop would continue the procedure for a long time even during night, when they would proceed by candlelight. In the end the bishop, at least according to Ulrich's *Life*, would silence the contestant by confronting him with ecclesiastical legislation.<sup>17</sup> The bishop could thus intrude heavily into a local community. His formal entry was surely meant to enhance his prestige and authority. Bishops, coming generally from aristocratic families, would use their relations with the local priest and the elite of the village to impose their authority. The local priests and elites would, however, also have entertained close links with local families. Whether bishops succeeded in imposing their will in a specific locality probably depended on the specific loyalties of the local priest and elite. Ecclesiastical penance in the context of an episcopal visitation surely was regarded more as a manifestation of episcopal authority than of a particular concern for the spiritual well-being of his subjects.

## THE PARACLETE, 1130S

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We have seen how Paulinus of Aquilea advised the husband who had killed his wife to enter a monastery as an appropriate penance for his act. In the 1130s an abbess in the newly founded convent of the Paraclete, halfway between Paris and Troyes, described her insufficient feelings of remorse after she had taken the monastic veil as satisfaction for her sins. As a young girl she had been taught by one of the most celebrated teachers of her time, Peter Abelard. The story about Abelard's love affair with his pupil is well known and does not need to be rehearsed here. After the birth of their child, her uncle Fulbert, ordered her lover to be castrated, whereupon Abelard and Heloise chose the monastic life. Heloise first was prioress of the monastic community at Argenteuil, but after problems with the monastery of St Denis, she left for the Paraclete where she became abbess. Heloise was a gifted writer as her correspondence with her former lover demonstrates. Already in her first letter to Abelard she expressed her worries about her insufficient feelings of remorse when she wrote: 'Wholly guilty though I am, I am also, as you know, wholly innocent. It is not the deed but the intention of the doer which makes the crime, and justice should weigh not what was done but the spirit in which it was done.'<sup>18</sup> In the remarkable letters Héloise addressed to her former lover, she clearly struggled with what she seems to have regarded as insufficient feelings of contrition. She wanted to do 'proper penance' for her sins by a lifelong contrition of the mind, but felt that she was unable to do so:

I can find no penitence whereby to appease God, whom I always accuse of the greatest cruelty in regard to this outrage. By rebelling against his ordinance, I offend him more by my indignation than I placate him by making amends through penitence. How can it be called repentance for sins, however great the mortification of the flesh, if the mind still retains the will to sin and is on fire with old desires?

<sup>19</sup>

Of course, Heloise was extremely well educated in rhetoric and particularly in the art of letter writing and we should therefore be wary of taking her words as a pure reflection of her emotions. Nevertheless, it is clear that Heloise was seriously troubled with what she saw as a lack of sincere repentance and as a discrepancy between her outward acts of penance

and her inner feelings. She even confesses that during Mass when her mind should be intent on prayer, she was distracted by her memories of love making with Abelard, her thoughts being concentrated on her wantonness instead of devotion.

Heloise's letters provide us a glance into the inner feelings of a very sensitive and eloquent medieval personality and her thoughts about her state of sin and (insufficient) feelings of remorse. Whether Heloise was unique in this respect, is hard to establish, but in the first half of the twelfth century some others started seriously to examine the nature of sin. Anselm of Laon and William of Champeaux had discussed the ontological status of sin and the question of when exactly it came into being. Was sin something created or only a negation of something created? Did it come into being at the moment when a sinful thought or temptation entered the mind, when the mind cherished the thought, when it decided to act, or only at the moment when the sinful thought was being put into action?<sup>20</sup> In the intellectual circles in which Heloise and her lover Abelard moved, the world of the flourishing cathedral schools in the first half of the twelfth century, such questions were apparently of interest. Yet, it was Abelard who moved such considerations centre stage in a remarkable work on ethics, his *Know Thyself* (*Scito teipsum*).<sup>21</sup> This work, probably composed shortly before 1140, was perhaps inspired by Heloise's self searching. Moreover, it has recently been stressed that Heloise was not Abelard's pupil in every sense, but that Abelard for some questions followed the lead of his pupil and mistress.<sup>22</sup> His thinking about sin and its nature seems to have been one of these.

## CANTERBURY, 1174

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On 29 December 1170 four knights, on the apparent instigation of the king, entered Canterbury cathedral and brutally murdered the Archbishop of Canterbury. This gory act was the final result of a long dispute between the archbishop, Thomas Becket, and the English king, Henry II, over the rights of the church of Canterbury and royal prerogatives. The details of this conflict need not detain us here, but the murder of the Lord's anointed in such a sacred place within the holy festival of Christmastide was immediately regarded as an unheard of case of sacrilege and engendered an enormous amount of debate and consequently a very rich corpus of written sources. Thomas Becket was almost instantly regarded as a martyr and a saint. The four knights who had perpetrated the killing were forced to do penance in exile in the Holy Land, where, so it seems, they all died shortly thereafter.<sup>23</sup> One of the main points of discussion was (and still is) how far the king himself was involved in the murder. Pope Alexander III and the French episcopacy were heavily implicated in the whole affair and in 1171 William, archbishop of Sens, put pressure on the king by laying an interdict on his continental possessions because the king had failed to make full satisfaction for the attack on Thomas. A legation was sent to the papal curia to explain the case and to exculpate Henry before pope Alexander II, but in vain. The pope did not excommunicate the king nor did he enjoin an interdict on his kingdom, but he did not lift the interdict on his continental lands either and moreover forbade the king to enter any church.<sup>24</sup> In May 1172 in Avranches, two papal legates negotiated terms for a reconciliation between Henry and the Church. Henry swore publicly that he had not ordered the killing of Becket, nor desired it. He admitted, however, that in the end he caused the event to happen and thus accepted responsibility and the consequences. He promised to fulfil any penance that the legates would enjoin. To make up for his deeds the king had to contribute to the Knights Templar for the defence of Jerusalem and had to take the cross himself for at least

three years. He should also take back the customs he had introduced at the expense of ecclesiastical privileges and had to remunerate the Church of Canterbury and those supporters of Becket whom he had dispossessed in the conflict.<sup>25</sup> Only after this promise was he led to the doors of the cathedral church of Avranches. The king knelt down and received absolution from the papal legates and then was admitted into the church. On the following Thursday 30 May, Ascension Day, there was to follow a public meeting in which the king's reconciliation was to be made public in the presence of the bishops of his continental lands that had lain under interdict.

Henry's reconciliation was thus carefully staged, but all this happened in Normandy. Two years later, Henry performed a spectacular form of penance in Canterbury itself, before the martyr's grave. In July 1174 the king approached Canterbury and dismounted outside the town in order to walk the last two miles. He went barefoot in plain clothing and arriving at the tomb he publicly confessed his guilt, prostrated and begged the monks for correction and absolution. He removed his outer clothing and received five blows from every attendant bishop and three blows from the more than eighty monks. Only then was he solemnly absolved. The sources depict his Canterbury penance much more as a true penitential process, complete with the shedding of tears, in contrast to the Avranches reconciliation that is presented more as a political and diplomatic compromise. Finding himself in serious trouble at the time because of an extremely dangerous and far-reaching political rebellion he was confronted with, it is possible that Henry was convinced of a connection between his involvement in the Becket case and this political turmoil, and acted out of true repentance. The fact that he paid his respects to Becket's tomb every time he visited the kingdom is telling, in this respect.<sup>26</sup> His penance at Canterbury should, furthermore, be seen as an essential part of political communication in which ritual gestures were more important than modern historians tend to admit.<sup>27</sup> It was also an expression of a changing perception of the royal office. Because of the outcome of the Becket conflict, Henry started to put more emphasis on the religious legitimacy of his kingship.<sup>28</sup> Historians can speculate about Henry's 'true motives'—political cunning or true repentance, although we need not necessarily regard these as opposites—but we are certainly dealing with a carefully staged expression of very specific political relations as well as of an ideal of kingship. The restoration of the king's relations with his murdered archbishop and with the offended monastic community at Canterbury, moreover, had to be ritually expressed to provide a proper ending to a story that had upset the whole kingdom and had Europe-wide repercussions.

## **A MONASTERY IN THE RHINELAND, BEGINNING OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY**

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Somewhere around 1220 the Cistercian monk Caesarius of Heisterbach collected a lot of stories that he regarded as useful preaching material into his *Dialogus Miraculorum*. Reading this work suggests that true and full confession and repentance were of great concern to the preacher Caesarius, for he collected a huge number of stories in which these themes appear. These stories circulated in Cistercian circles from which Caesarius drew much of his material. Caesarius named his informants and mentioned specific persons and places in order to augment the credibility of his edifying stories. It is not always clear how far Caesarius's tales are reliable: some of them seem wholly or partially fictitious and reflect the rich culture of storytelling as it existed in Cistercian monasteries in the early thirteenth

century; others are so realistic that they seem to have a support in medieval realities. The story I draw upon here is one of the stories that seem reliable, although in this case Caesarius refrains from giving any specific information about the persons involved, perhaps because of the scandalous nature of what happened. The story demonstrates how confession can help to create an intimate relation between confessor and the confessant.

Caesarius relates how a priest heard confession from the inmates of a Cistercian monastery. When a young man came to confess his sins, the priest, 'seduced by the devil', used the opportunity to have sex with him. Right after this act, however, he felt remorse and told the young man that what they had done was wrong. Because it was too shameful to confess these sins to a third person, he suggested that they would confess their sin to each other. So they did and they enjoined a heavy penance on each other, heavier than a normal confessor would have done, so Caesarius claims. When, shortly afterwards, the priest became seriously ill and felt his death approaching, he confessed his sexual trespass to the abbot without, however, revealing whom he had sinned with. The priest died but after his death he appeared before the young man and warned him to fully and truly confess their sin, because the confession they had made to one another had been totally ineffective. He indicated how he was punished in the afterlife by being hung on a glowing chain that had been bound around his genitals and was only saved from eternal damnation because he had confessed fully on his deathbed. Impressed, the young man wanted to confess his sin to the abbot. Unfortunately the abbot was away at that moment and therefore the young man postponed his confession. The delay, however, diminished his fears and strengthened his feelings of shame. The abbot meanwhile, knew from the priest's confession that someone from the community had sinned gravely, but had not confessed this and looked for ways to prompt the sinner to confess. At a solemn festival he ordered all inmates to receive the Eucharist and then carefully observed the faces of those invited. The young man did not want to attract attention by declining the Eucharist and walked to the altar, but when he was nearing the altar he was gripped by fear, backtracked, and indicated to the abbot that he wanted to confess. He confessed his sin, revealed his vision of the dead priest and accepted penance.<sup>29</sup>

Whether the story Caesarius narrates here was true or not, it reveals nicely how confession could create an intimate atmosphere in which sexual relations might develop. Worries about such intimacy is discussed in confession manuals from the thirteenth century, which also discuss that feelings of shame could impede true confession as Caesarius's story clearly illustrates. The story furthermore stresses that receiving the communion in an unshriven state was considered to be dangerous, as it indicates the ways in which through preaching true confession was presented as an essential feature of Christian life in the early thirteenth-century Rhineland.

## **MONTAILLOU, C.1320**

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When Jacques Fournier, the future Pope Benedict XII, became bishop of Pamiers in 1317 he was determined to wipe out the last pockets of heresy in his new diocese. Catharism, once a thriving movement in southern France, was already past its heyday in the early fourteenth century, but in some villages it was still very much alive. One of these villages was Montailou, set amidst the Pyrenees, in the Ariège. Fournier led an intensive inquisitorial campaign in which he interrogated almost every inhabitant of this village and carefully recorded their testimonies. There are quite a few problems in using this material, but the detailed documentation provides precious information on daily life in this late



medieval village.<sup>30</sup> From this documentation, it is evident that in general people confessed their sins to the local priest once a year, usually before Easter, except for the unabashed Cathars, who mocked the ceremony. Confession was heard by the local priest, Pierre Clergue, in the church behind the altar of the virgin. The villagers thus followed the prescription of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 that every Christian should confess his sins at least once a year to his or her parish priest. Apparently confession was highly regarded and it was generally accepted that contrition was an essential part of confession. Some who travelled to nearby towns also confessed their sins to mendicants, but otherwise mendicants played no role in this rural settlement.

The local priest, holding Cathar sympathies, did not believe in the efficacy of confession and stated that he only participated in the ceremony because of financial gain. Others with Cathar sympathies did go to confess their sins, but generally refrained from confessing their Cathar convictions, because, as Raymonde Marty reported, she did not regard them as sins. Another Raymonde, wife of Arnaud Belot, revealed that she did not confess her heretical views because she was afraid to lose her possessions, but nevertheless she took on some voluntary penance to give satisfaction for them. The local priest Pierre Clergue used the practice of confession not only for financial gain, but also to satisfy his libido. Again confession seems to have created an atmosphere of intimacy. When Beatrice de Planissoles, the local castellan's wife, came to confess her sins in Lent, Pierre Clergue embraced her and declared that he preferred her above any other woman in the world. Confused, she left without having confessed; but the priest must have made an impression because they would later become lovers and would even make love in the church building.

The rich documentation from a small mountain village demonstrates that yearly confession as a preparation for the feast of Easter was widely practised and that people were well aware of the basic principles of sacramental confession, even when their own priest did not believe in it. It furthermore shows how people manipulated confession by withholding information concerning their support of heretics and did self-made penance for it. It also demonstrates, once again, how a priest could abuse the intimacy that confession created.

## THE DIOCESE OF CONSTANCE, 1471

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Johann and Christoph Haid—two brothers?—had murdered a priest, for reasons which remain unknown. The family of the victim complained to bishop Hermann von Breitenlandenberg, bishop of Constance, who excommunicated the murderers. This was meant to put pressure on the killers, so that they would submit themselves to ecclesiastical justice. When this had no effect, he gave orders to read his disciplinary measures from all the pulpits in his diocese. All contact with the killers and those supporting them was to be avoided. In the churches the excommunication was ritually expressed by extinguishing candles that were trodden underfoot.<sup>31</sup> While the church bells were ringing, the parish community would then go in procession to the church doors where they were to throw stones in the direction of the house of the excommunicated.<sup>32</sup> We do not know whether these ritual expressions of anger and exclusion were effective, but if they were and the killers repented, a formulary from the diocese of Constance describes how the two sinners were going to be treated. They were to take off their clothes and shoes and with a rope tied around their neck and a knife, a symbol for their sin, and a rod in their hands they should visit all the churches in the town where they had committed their crime. Before the church



served by the murdered priest, they should then confess their sins aloud and a priest was to flog them while praying the penitential psalms.<sup>33</sup>

The use of such publicly staged forms of penance for the reparation of serious crimes in late medieval cities, has recently received quite some attention.<sup>34</sup> These studies demonstrate that in late medieval towns ecclesiastical ritual was regularly used to correct criminal behaviour and to reconcile the perpetrators. By their public humiliation, the honour of the offended party was restored, but at the same time such rituals strengthened the authority of the church as institution. In some cases secular rulers would impose such ecclesiastical censures—a well-known example would be penitential pilgrimages—in order to restore order. The rivalry apparent in the diocese of Constance between different ecclesiastical institutions claiming the privilege of enjoining public penance, suggests that this could be a profitable source of income but most of all it seems to have contributed to the authority of a particular institution.<sup>35</sup>

## SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

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This chapter has dealt with ten specific cases illustrating various aspects of the processes of confession and penitence. These cases came from different regions and very different historical circumstances. We have seen a monastic saint mediating in a marriage dispute in sixth-century, rural Ireland, we saw a bishop appear in the neighbourhood of Trier entering a village with great pomp and splendor around the year 900, and we saw ecclesiastical institutions staging very public forms of penance in late medieval towns. We encountered villagers in Montailou in the early fourteenth century abiding by ecclesiastical legislation but using it also to their own effect. We met an abbess seriously worried about her state of sin and lack of remorse and an emperor forced to do voluntary penance by his political opponents. We started with a publicly staged penitential procession as an expression of a communal confrontation with disaster and catastrophe and ended with the well-organized public humiliation of a specific individual. Archbishop Paulinus of Aquileia seriously tried to suggest the ways in which a nobleman could atone for murdering his wife, a confessor in a Rhineland monastery was too ashamed to confess his own sexual weakness to anyone else but the monk he had sinned with, and finally Pierre Clergue in Montailou is the cynical confessor who only heard confession because of financial gain and the opportunity of sexual intimacy that it offered. Penitential ritual helped to deal with serious social and political conflicts, ranging from particular marital problems, to cases of murder and violence with immense political impact, as in the case of Henry II making up for the murder of Becket.

By focussing on well-documented cases this chapter has probably over-emphasized instances with a particular social and/or political impact at the expense of less spectacular forms of confession and penance about which the sources are relatively silent. The attitude of the villagers in Montailou proves however that at least by the early fourteenth century yearly confession was well-established even in a remote mountain village where Catharism, with its inherent criticism of confession, was still strong. Hopefully this chapter has not only succeeded in providing a view on the great variety of medieval forms of penance, but also on the manifold sources that can inform us about them: historical works, saints' lives, letters, conciliar acts, exempla, registers from the inquisition, archival records, and formulary books. Liturgical books and handbooks for confessors provide a general background for the particular cases presented here. The sources employed here were mainly

written in very specific circumstances and often defend specific positions and views. They differ in this respect from the normative sources which used to form the backbone of earlier histories of penance. This is the result of the current interest in penitential practice, which might differ substantially from penitential theory.<sup>36</sup> Penitential practice is much more diverse than theory would allow and this makes the study of medieval forms of penance more complicated but at the same time more rewarding in bringing us closer to medieval men and women and their feelings of guilt, shame, and relief.

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# CHAPTER 16

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# SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

## *The Making of Interior Faith*

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ROBERT L. A. CLARK

THE execution of a more or less regular series of gestures in reverence of God is doubtless as old as Christianity itself. Jesus himself in the Garden of Gethsemane separated himself from his disciples in order to pray and draw physically closer to God the Father. Even narrowly defined, spiritual exercises include a remarkably diverse assortment of devotional acts, recorded in an equally diverse body of texts ranging from confessional literature to prayer books to devotional treatises. Yet, despite the heterogeneous nature of this corpus from over a thousand years of religious history, in this essay we will see that there are a number of features which may be said to define spiritual exercises, both in terms of their programme and of their aim. As the preceding remarks suggest, written texts provide the richest documentation of these practices, and textual influence may help to explain some of the continuities that can be observed over such a broad span of time. However, these written documents can give at best only a partial glimpse of the subject for three important reasons. First, those who had direct access to devotional guides comprised of necessity a very small and elite group, although indirect access through preaching, confession, and even dramatic performance allowed the dissemination of these practices to a broader public. Second, they were produced within predominately male ecclesiastical and clerical milieus, although we will see that there were a significant number of texts produced by and for women in the later medieval period. Finally, spiritual exercises are by definition *performative* and thus, as with performance of any type, only partially and imperfectly captured by the primarily prescriptive texts that convey them. Spiritual exercises as a phenomenon are thus situated at the juncture of the authoritative, written word and the fluidity of personal performance, a dynamic that is recognized explicitly or implicitly in a number of devotional guides.

## AUGUSTINE AND THE HERITAGE OF LATE ANTIQUITY

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Perhaps the most influential guide to spiritual exercises was provided by Augustine of Hippo in his *Confessions* (397/398 ce). In writing the story of his life before and after his conversion, filtering the memory of his past self through the twin lenses of faith in God and hope for salvation, Augustine drew on the rich tradition of Late Antiquity, perhaps best exemplified by the *Confessions* of Marcus Aurelius (121–180 ce). In Marcus Aurelius and other texts by such writers as Cicero and Quintilian, the goal was the discovery of the self through philosophical reflection and self-discipline, aided by the tools of Roman rhetoric.<sup>1</sup> Augustine brought these lessons to his text, but his narrative of self-discovery was not an end in itself but rather a way to knowledge of the self within God's plan for the writer and for humankind more generally. In the words of Roger Hazelton, 'Augustine seems not to have been so preoccupied as were the later mystics with the techniques and regimens of the life devoted to God. He was no Loyola, setting forth spiritual exercises by the day and hour for the example of his followers'.<sup>2</sup> Augustine did offer, however, if not a praxis, then at least some guideposts to devotional practice. Thus, it was necessary to separate oneself

from the clamour and distractions of this world so as to create the silence in which God's voice could be heard and in which the soul could enter into dialogue with God through meditation and prayer. He writes: 'My confession therefore, O my God, is made unto thee silently in thy sight—and yet not silently. As far as sound is concerned, it is silent. But in strong affection it cries aloud'.<sup>3</sup> The transversal reexamination of one's life is what makes possible the ascent to God through his salvific grace.<sup>4</sup> In Augustine, grace is thus inseparable from the narrative of the self, and meditation indissociable from writing. Ideally, the reexamined life also made possible the mimesis or *imitatio* of the perfect life, that of Jesus. This reexamination should not be likened to the modern notion of 'self discovery'. Rather, the goal was the discovery of God's plan for and within oneself as a Christian, a life-long project through which proximity and communion with God might be attained. According to Augustine, it was also possible for the illiterate to achieve the same spiritual end, as in the case of Saint Anthony who, though unlettered, imitated the gospels correctly.<sup>5</sup> Thus, a number of threads that run through medieval spiritual exercises can be found in Augustine: the need for silent meditation and prayer, the examination of one's life, and the meditation on and imitation of the life of Christ.

## MANUALS AND MIRRORS FOR PRINCES

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During the Carolingian period and the high middle ages, information about lay piety comes primarily from texts produced by and for the nobility. The *Liber manualis*, written between 841 and 843 by the Frankish noblewoman Dhuoda for her young son William, is representative of such texts. Dhuoda conceived her book as 'a mirror in which you [i.e. William] can without hesitation contemplate the health of your soul' and, as such, it contains a mix of instructions for how her son should comport himself in the world, devoting several chapters of the *Liber* to religious instruction.<sup>6</sup> William should observe the seven hours of the divine office and in his prayers, favouring the beatitudes (Book 6) and the psalms (Book 11). She indicates which psalm it is preferable to use on which occasion: when undertaking penance and confession, giving praise of God, seeking relief from affliction, and so forth. Similarly, she details for whom he should pray (the different ranks of the clergy, his own lord, his father, etc.), noting that if he reads the prayers for Holy Friday, he will find that he should pray for all people (Book 8.8). But there is little in the manual about what disposition, either physical or mental, William should adopt when he prays—a central preoccupation of later devotional treatises. She simply states that she has ordered the beatitudes as an ascent, a stairway on which he can progress from lesser to greater things (Book 6.1) and that, in combining the eight beatitudes with the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit as he climbs, he may reach the perfect number of one hundred (6.4). Dhuoda quotes the Apostle Paul's enjoinder that one should pray without ceasing (I Thess. 5:17), asking whether he means that one must pray constantly. No, she answers, explaining that 'whatever good you do in this world will be a constant prayer to the Lord on your behalf' (8.1), thus neatly negotiating a problem that arises in later treatises regarding the demands of a rigorous devotional programme.

The mix of social and religious concerns is also typical of the religious instruction that, in the mid thirteenth century, Louis IX of France gave to his son Philip shortly before he died. Among instructions about the choice of good counsellors and the rendering of justice, Louis tells his son that if God should send him adversity, he should suffer it in patience and give thanks with the thought that God will turn it to his profit. Conversely, if God should send

him prosperity, he should accept it humbly, taking care to avoid pride. He should confess often, listen devoutly to the mass with devotion, without laughing or joking, and pray with heart and mouth, especially at the moment of the consecration of the host.<sup>7</sup> Like Dhuoda's son, he should pray for the clergy and for his father's soul. Perhaps it is not surprising that in such 'Mirrors for Princes' (as the genre is known) so little attention should be paid to the inner disposition of the subject. Reverent participation in the rituals of the Church combined with prayer and confession are seen as the hallmarks of religious sincerity and, presumably, the guarantors of God's grace. As with another well known example of the genre, John Gower's mirror for princes in Book VII of the *Confession Amantis*, such texts present essentially a moralizing lesson in kingship.<sup>8</sup>

## DEVOTIONAL TREATISES FOR THE LAITY

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Devotional treatises and manuals of the later middle ages offer an exceptionally rich corpus for the study of spiritual exercises and their construction of devotional subjects, female subjects in particular. As noted above, devotional manuals typically show a concern for establishing a balance between spiritual practices and other, worldly demands. In the case of women, the sphere in which these tensions are played out is typically the family and the home. A short text written by Jean Gerson (1363–1429) for his sisters is an instructive exception to this feature.<sup>9</sup> Gerson, chancellor of the University of Paris and one of the most important religious and political figures of his time, speaks from a position of indisputable authority, in religious as well as familial terms, although in advising his sisters he takes care to defer to the authority of their father. As for his sisters, they were ideal recipients for their illustrious brother's solicitous advice in that, as unmarried women of means, they could strive to live according to his suggestions without the social and material constraints faced by most women who wished to follow a devotional programme. Among Gerson's wishes is that they should join a community of chaste women where it would be easier for them to observe the seven-point programme he has devised for them. It is especially interesting that this is a programme for lay women, for he specifically states that he does not want them to enter a monastic order nor even a beguinage, communities where the realization of their programme might presumably have been more easily achieved. Gerson says that they should dress and act without ostentation; say their hours regularly and attend as many masses as possible; live soberly, drinking only diluted wine and avoiding spicy foods; live in peace with each other; never speak to men they do not know unless it be in public and in the presence of others, and even then as seldom as possible; never go dancing; and, lastly, learn to read French (*romant*) so that they can read the letters and devotional books that he will send them. Even a text as straightforward as this one, however, participates in several different discourses: spiritual, moral, familial, and medical. The last of the seven points is especially significant: in learning to read his text, his sisters will at the same time be constructed by it. There will be a perfect fit between their spiritual practices and their presence in the world; they will not be able to think themselves other than as constructed by the text.

Devotional manuals written for women are usually characterized by a more marked tension between their spiritual programme and their active life. An unpublished prayer book made in the fourteenth century for a lady of the high nobility who was a widow at the time of its composition is fairly typical of the devotional guides produced by clerical spiritual advisors for women whose social and material existence allowed them the time and means

to devote themselves to a rigorous programme of spiritual exercises, remaining in the world to do so as opposed to joining a community of women.<sup>10</sup> This manuscript combines certain features of the Book of Hours and of the devotional manual. Books of Hours were prayer books destined for use by the laity, either at home or in church, which allowed the owner to recite the Hours of Our Lady and other prayers in a programme of personal devotion modeled more or less freely on the chanting of the Hours of the canon as practiced by religious communities.<sup>11</sup> Books of Hours thus reflect both the demand among the laity for a more personalized kind of devotion and the continuing prestige of the traditional, collective forms of devotion practised within cloistered or non-cloistered communities. In the devotional guides there is a tension, albeit a latent one, between the programme of prayers and other devotions and the spiritual ideal represented by monastic practice. This tension is much more in evidence, and indeed symptomatic, in more ambitious devotional programmes designed specifically for individual lay people, for the spiritual director had the difficult task of negotiating between the temporal and spiritual obligations of his charge. This manuscript (Bibliothèque National, Paris, n.a.l. 592) presents such a spiritual programme, containing over one hundred and fifty folios of prayers, the texts of which are often given in both Latin and French translation. Accompanying many of the prayers are *enseignements*, or directions, which instruct the lady as to the proper occasion for a particular prayer and, occasionally, the mental or physical attitude to be adopted. The tone of these devotional exercises established by the first *enseignement*, where the lady is told that, since God has placed her in high estate in this world, she should prostrate herself humbly before God as do the angels whom Saint John saw in the Apocalypse.<sup>12</sup> These should be the first actions she does in the morning. There follows a series of six prayers in Latin with translation and commentary in French: a prayer of benediction and thanks to God; two prayers to the cross (the second consisting of four verses of the cross attributed to Anselm); a prayer consisting of the *Jhesus nazareus rex judeorum*; a prayer to Saint Cecilia; and a prayer of benediction attributed to Moses. She can say these prayers either in her room or in church, which is the next step on her daily spiritual itinerary. There, she should recite three further prayers during mass. Two prayers are to be said during the Elevation of the Host, followed by a prayer to the Mother of God (attributed to Saint Innocent). This first sequence of prayers closes with prayers to be read upon going to bed. The cycle of prayers to be said at certain moments of the day is, however, only the beginning of the lady's devotional programme. There are eighteen prayers, each of which thanks Christ for one of his gifts to men, from his Conception to the Last Judgment, which she is to read to herself daily. There follow two long prayers for before and after communion, and then yet another series of prayers in the form of suffrages to the angels, apostles, and various saints which the lady is to recite at her leisure, according to the *enseignement*. Most of the numerous prayers—in the more than one hundred folios comprising the rest of the manuscript—have simple rubrics with no instructions. Such a programme of spiritual exercises was, if anything, at least as rigorous as that of a female religious, albeit somewhat more flexible in the choice of prayers. Withdrawing to such a community is apparently not possible for the owner of this manuscript since mention is made of the people whom she must govern and of her children. But her independent status, in both material and marital terms, makes it possible for her spiritual director to propose a devotional programme marked by long daily periods of prayer and meditation. Her spiritual standing in the eyes of the Church could, in fact, only be enhanced if she had never married and had remained a virgin. That not being the case, she will remain a chaste widow, praying to Saint Cecilia to help her in protecting her chastity.



## AFFECTIVE PIETY AND DEVOTIONAL PRESENCE

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There are two other, related features of BNP MS n.a.l. 592 which are hallmarks of late medieval devotional literature: affective piety and devotional presence. Among the many prayers in this manuscript are French translations of the long meditative prayers of Saint Anselm of Canterbury (c.1033–1109), whose prayer to Mary Magdalene is characterized by mimetic actions and role playing. This prayer reads in part:

O most merciful, my good Lord Jesus Christ, God of my heart, out of reverence for your dear friend Mary, I will address my words to you and, presuming upon your great understanding, I will dare to ask you why you asked her why she was crying. Hadn't she seen you, her heart and the sweet life of her soul, so cruelly killed and put to so odious a death? And yet you asked her, 'Why are you crying'?<sup>13</sup>

The lady's identification with Mary Magdalene and her complex dialogic relationship to Christ achieves a level of reflexivity that the *enseignements* in the manuscript have pointed toward without perhaps fully achieving. That is, when the lady steps into the role of Mary Magdalene, as in this prayer where she designates herself as a sinner (*une pecheresse*) throughout, she is invited to reflect on her own life as a sinner. She has also stepped into a liminal space where, as praying subject, she communes directly with the holy, as in the contemporary visual images known as *sacra conversazione*.

The sensation of presence at a scene from sacred history where one was encouraged to enter into dialogue with the holy figures is not unique to the fifteenth century or to devotional guides. As early as the twelfth century, Bernard of Clairvaux, Aelred of Rievaulx, and others began to work in an interpretive mode that contributed to the pious practice called affective devotion. It was based on the idea of meditating on the life of Jesus *sicut praesens* ('as if present').<sup>14</sup> In Aelred's dialogue, *De Iesu puero duodenni* [On Jesus at the age of twelve], for example, he speaks to Jesus and Mary as if he sees the biblical story unfolding before him, and he asks them direct questions, often exploring their motivations for actions and probing their emotions.<sup>15</sup> This evocation of the sense of sight, of seeing 'as if present', correlates with optical theory of the same period. Suzannah Biernoff writes that 'in an Aristotelian or Baconian context...seeing *is* feeling in every sense: a physical "touch", a sensation of pleasure and pain, an emotion "expressed in matter"'.<sup>16</sup> Sarah McNamer emphasizes the role of women as agents in the creation of texts that stimulated this practice, but this agency can be extended to devotional guides written for women by male clerics.<sup>17</sup> The subjects in these texts, as in Anselm's prayer to Mary Magdalene, could achieve the sensation of spiritual and bodily presence at the events of sacred history. They could better share the emotions of its principal characters—the joys and sorrows of Mary, the suffering of Jesus during the passion—through the sensation of 'performative presence', what McNamer has termed 'scripts for the performance of feeling'.<sup>18</sup>

Late medieval devotional guides flesh out the sketchy details provided by the texts discussed above, paying special attention to attitudes, speech, and gesture. In addition, they bring out the tensions between the spiritual programme and the demands of the world. Perhaps the single most important determining factor in the manuals discussed below is whether or not the woman is married. A young, unmarried girl or widow could follow a more rigorous devotional programme. A married woman could do so but faced considerable obstacles. Not only were there the practical concerns of running a household and caring for children, but there was also the even more important fact that she was not free to dispose of her person, this being the prerogative of her husband. This meant that anything approaching the devotional ideal of the contemplative life was, if not unattainable, extremely difficult to

realize. Even young girls and widows, though, might have fairly important social and familial responsibilities which could interfere with the pursuit of their devotional programme. There were essentially two solutions to this problem, which was seen basically as the opposition between the active and the contemplative life. The first involved a constant mental effort to override non-devotional activities by projecting spiritual significance onto them in a systematic way. Thus, in the early sixteenth-century *Petite instruction et manière de vivre pour une femme séculière*, the lady is told that, if she feels that her young children keep her from devotion, she should turn *them* to devotion, from which she will derive spiritual profit.<sup>19</sup> In a similar vein that underscores the potentially ludic aspect of such devotions, an Italian manual, the *Regola del governo di cura familiar*, suggests that the lady's children can play-pretend to perform the divine service at her private altar.<sup>20</sup> As for the lady in the *Petite instruction*, when she sews and spins and comes and goes in doing her chores, she should raise her heart often to our Lord and pray to him that he grant her the grace of loving him with all her heart and that he be willing ever to direct her to do his holy will.

This redirection of one's mundane occupations is considerably more pronounced in the *Decor puellarum*, written expressly as a spiritual guide for young girls by the Venetian John the Carthusian, who died in 1483.<sup>21</sup> Typically, the beginning of the day is a precious moment to be used for prayer and contemplation before turning one's attention to one's domestic responsibilities. John instructs the young girl to begin her day as follows:

Rise early and, upon waking, bless God and meditate on the mystery of the Trinity. When you get up, cross yourself three times in saying *Benedicamus Patrem et Filium...*; while dressing, raise your eyes and mind to Heaven in saying *Agimus tibi gratias...*; say your usual prayers and meditate on the attributes of the three divine persons; having dressed, coarsely but decently, and put on your shoes, wash your hands and face and comb your hair while praying, with your heart remaining in Heaven, meditating on the creation of the angels, the fall of the bad and the confirmation of the good angels. Immediately thereafter, turn your attention to the housework: wake up the servants, light the fire, sweep, start breakfast, dress the children, make the beds, do the laundry, take care of the chickens, etc., while meditating on the celestial hierarchies, the reasons for the damnation of Lucifer, the creation of the world in six days, etc.

The strain of maintaining this programme must surely have reached its limits at the dinner table:

When you sit down at table, meditate on the Nativity; say the *Benedicite* and make the sign of the cross on the table; while eating the first course, think of the Circumcision; while eating the second, of the Adoration of the Magi; and when you have had enough to eat, meditate on the Massacre of the Innocents and the Flight into Egypt..<sup>22</sup>

Such a programme, even if it had become routine must have put tremendous demands on the mental reserves of the young girl or mother even as it sanctified her daily activities.

The other model for spiritual exercises was rather more reasonable in its demands, proposing that practical and spiritual preoccupations be addressed separately and that certain times of the day be set aside for devotion. The two models were not in fact mutually exclusive, for virtually all the manuals designate certain moments of the day as being especially propitious for prayer, the early morning being one of these, as we have already seen. What is especially interesting is that the manuals very often designate a domestic space for these devotions: the girl's or woman's room. The room is a retreat from the world where she can retire, usually after supper, to read, meditate, and pray, away from distractions and prying eyes. And it is a space which, through these activities, becomes sanctified. Several manuals instruct the woman to maintain an altar in her room which she should decorate herself with holy images and with an altar cloth embroidered by her own

hand. A relatively early French manual from the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century instructs the woman to remain ‘in as much a state of reclusion as possible in your room, for it was in her room that the glorious Virgin was greeted and there conceived the Son of God’.<sup>23</sup> Yet another, late fourteenth-century French manual, *Comment on doit régler sa vie*, specifically identifies the conscience with the room in a passage reminiscent of Saint Augustine’s words about silence:

Tu te retireras en ta chambre assez tost et clorras ton huys aprez toy; et aussy dois tu faire espirituellement, c’est a dire que tu dois tez sens qui ont estez ocupez et espartis le jour en plusieurs lieux ez chosez mondainez retraire et rassembler avecquez toy, et clorre l’uys de ta conscience et toy mettre avec ton createur seulement; et ne dois parler jusquez a l’endemain, se ce n’est en grant nécessité ou de grant prouffit.<sup>24</sup>

(You shall retire into your room as soon as possible and you shall close the door behind you; and you must do so spiritually as well, that is, you must withdraw and gather your senses to you which have been occupied and scattered during the day among worldly matters in various places, and you must close the door of your conscience and place yourself in the presence of your creator along. And you must not speak until the next day, unless it be for great necessity or great good.)

Devotional guides might thus go well beyond prescribing a programme of devotions to be carried out or prayers to be recited. In the construction of their devotional subject, appropriate attitudes and gestures might be indicated and, in some cases, propitious times, spaces, and object designated in a veritable staging of devotional conduct. Indeed, the subject’s body and mind might be invaded by the spiritual directors probing discourse. Thus, in an anonymous text composed after 1408 the author assures his charge that neither *mariage* nor *mesnage* (household) are obstacles to the attainment of spiritual perfection:

[E]n vostre vocation de mariage vostre mary crie et fait noise, l’enfant se blesse et fait noise, la chamberiere ne fait pas bien sa besogne et ainsi des autres empeschemens qui sont innombrables. Et pour ce, ma fille, vous qui serés gente columbe sans amer laquelle le grant Noë(l), c’est-à-dire Dieu la Trinité, a fait a son ymage et mise en terre pour apporter le bel rainsel l’olme qui signifie douceur en la bouche de l’esperit, ne trouvez riens en terre ou le pié de vostre affection se puisse ficher ou arrester mais retournez a Noe(l), a l’arche de contemplative oroison. Car tant plus croissent les eaues de tribulacion, tant plus se doit eslever en hault ‘arche’ d’oroison sur les montaignes d’orgueil et de tout autre peché.<sup>25</sup>

(In your vocation of marriage, your husband shouts and makes noise; your child hurts himself and makes noise; the chambermaid doesn’t do her job well; and so on with the other obstacles which are without number. And therefore, my daughter, you who will be the gentle dove which the great Noah, that is, God the Trinity, made in his image and placed on earth to bring the beautiful elm twig which signifies sweetness in the mouth of the spirit, do not seek anything of this world where the root of your affection can take hold; but turn again to Noah, to the ark of contemplative prayer. For the more the waters of tribulation rise, the more the ark of prayer must be raised up above the mountains of pride and of all other sin.)

As in many such devotional guides, the harried wife is told to take refuge in her room where, late at night, she can freely deliver herself to her spiritual exercises:

Je croy, ma tres chere fille, que l’eure la plus prouffitable a vous et a nous seroit de mynuyt apres dormir, apres la digestion de la viande, quant les labours du monde sont separez et delaissez, et quant aussi les voisins ne nous verront point et que nulz ne nous regardera fors Dieu et qu’i[l] n’y aura personne qui puisse veoir noz gemissemens ne les lermes et souspirs venans du perfond du cuer, ne aussi les ameres clameurs, plainctes et complainctes entrerpompuez par fors souspirs, les prostracions et agenoillemens d’umilité, les yeux mouilliez, la face muante ou suante, maintenant rouge, maintenant pale, quant on ne voit aussi battre la coulpe souvant et par grant contricion, baisier la terre par grant et humble devocion, lever les yeulx au ciel et les mains par grant desir, souvent plaier et entrelasser les bras comme se l’en acoloit son amy par grant amour, estandre le corps sur terre ou tout sur piez comme en une croix par grant compassion: telle chose est bonne a faire ou temps et en lieu que nul fors Dieu ne voie ces choses et autres semblablez signes de doulce devotion, lesquelles choses sont moult requises a ceste gracieuse oroison et euvre. Non obstant que en toute heure et en tout temps on doit,

comme dit est devant, estre prest et diligent de drecier tousjours et lever continuellement sa pensee a Dieu, toutesvoies l'especiale heure si est l'eure de mynuyt.<sup>26</sup>

(I think, my very dear daughter, that the most profitable hour for you and me [to give ourselves to contemplation] would be midnight, after sleeping, after the digestion of meat, when the labours of the world have been separated and left behind and when also the neighbours will not see us, nor will anyone see us but God, nor will there be anyone who can see our moaning nor the tears and sighs coming from the depths of our heart, nor either our bitter cries, complaints and laments interrupted by many humble sighs, prostrations and kneeling, eyes moist, face changing and damp, now red, now pale; nor then can one see us often beat our breast in great contrition, kiss the ground in great and humble devotion, raise our eyes and hands to heaven in great desire, often bend and intertwine our arms as if embracing a lover with great love, stretch our body out on the ground or standing, as on a cross, in great compassion; such things are good to do at a time and place when no one but God may see these things and other similar signs of sweet devotion, which things are greatly required by this prayer and work of grace. Although at any hour and at any time one must be ready and diligent to raise one's thoughts to God, the special hour is indeed the hour of midnight.)

The advisor concludes this curious passage by saying that since his charge has a husband, household, children, and family, she should set aside some time for meditation after supper, between seven and nine in the evening. This passage makes explicit the acute tension between the wife's spiritual programme and the demands of her societal role—indeed, between her spiritual director and her husband. In the wife's devotions there is in any case a substitute for the occluded husband: Jesus himself. In this regard, the manual is not unlike other works of mystical spirituality, as in the passage where the lady is told that contemplation is always completed in an *amour vivant* with the Lord. This *supplément* (that which allows the subject to reach plenitude in place of an apparent lack of wholeness) occurs when at the moment of union between the soul and her divine lover:

L'ame se gette toute entre les braz de son doulz amy et laisse raison et entendement dehors muser a la porte et amour la met dedans la chambre de retrait; la baise elle et acole son seigneur, non pas comme seigneur a craindre mais comme loial et amoureux espoux.<sup>27</sup>

(The soul throws its entire self into the arms of its gentle lover and leaves reason and understanding outside to muse at the door. The love puts the soul in a secret chamber, where it kisses and embraces its Lord, not like a lord to be feared but like a loyal and amorous spouse.)

The complete displacement of the husband by the divine lover and his *entremetteur*, the spiritual director, does not mean that the lady has been freed from all worldly cares and concerns. On the contrary, the text works on several levels to integrate devotional and the more mundane matters of household, diet, and social responsibility. Diet is a major concern, and here the director takes a firm stand against the excessive fasting of certain people (referred to at one point as *les filles de ce pays*), a practice which he says results in melancholic and fantastic visions of the Antichrist and of crows as devils, debilitating physical problems, illness, and death (fol. 113v). He reminds his charge that there are cures for overeating but not for malnutrition, and he admonishes her to eat well, taking even more meat than one normally would, because of the physical and mental rigors of a contemplative programme (112v). She is to sleep at least seven or eight hours a day, more if necessary (111v). In this way, she will avoid speaking impatiently or harshly to her servants (114). The lady's highborn position, far from being a hindrance, is in fact a great advantage because it allows her the leisure of following a demanding devotional programme. The social specificity of his arguments is indeed quite remarkable. If she thinks that she need not trouble herself with the rigours of a strict devotional programme because those of small merit will be saved along with those of great worth, then she should go work in the fields and vineyards with nobles, and bourgeois, not so that they can be called *monsieur* or *mademoiselle* and wear fine clothes but so that they will have the instruction, intelligence, and strength to purge body and soul and turn themselves entirely to God (120).



One can see these late medieval treatises, written a millennium after Augustine's *Confessions*, as distant descendants of his emphasis on the separation of the self from the concerns of the world in order for the soul to hear the voice of God. On the other hand, with their intense dramatization and eroticization of the devotional scene, where the text of prayers to be recited has been completely displaced by the detailing of gestures to be accomplished, they are at a great remove indeed from Augustine's insistence on the quietism necessary for hearing that voice. In this theatre of devotion, the construction of interior faith may seem to be at antipodes to the clamorous agitation expected of the devotional subject. Yet one must remember that such signs as tears and sighs were held to be the outer manifestations of inner contrition.<sup>28</sup> In this regard, one need think only of the wailing of one such as Margery Kempe. In such texts as the *Petite instruction et manière de vivre pour une femme séculière*, raising the subject's soul to such dizzying heights was accompanied by an equally dizzying plunging into the depths of her soul, assuming that she had the time and energy to follow its directives.

## NEW DIRECTIONS

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Toward the end of the middle ages and in the early modern period, two extremely influential works sum up the tradition of spiritual exercises, relaying it to new generations of readers: the *Imitation of Christ*, of which Thomas à Kempis (c.1418–27) is widely held to be the author, and the *Spiritual Exercises* by Ignatius Loyola (1522–4). Unlike most of the works discussed above, which were created for a select readership or indeed a single reader, these works were conceived for a broad audience and widely disseminated, especially after the advent of print. The *Imitation of Christ*, generally considered to be the most widely read religious text after the Bible, was circulated extensively within monastic communities in manuscript (750 are extant) before receiving its first printing c.1471–2.<sup>29</sup> By the end of the fifteenth century there were over one hundred printed editions in French, German, Italian, and Spanish.<sup>30</sup> Loyola acknowledged the influence of the *Imitation of Christ* on his work, along with that of Ludolf of Saxony's *Life of Christ*, and the *Golden Legend*.<sup>31</sup> First printed in 1548, there are thousands of editions and translations into many languages, making the *Spiritual Exercises*, like the *Imitation of Christ*, one of the most influential devotional guides up to the present.

Although intended for different audiences and different in their approach and form of presentation, the *Imitation of the Life of Christ* and the *Spiritual Exercises* possess features which we have seen to be the hallmarks of devotional guides and manuals: separation from the world, withdrawal into the self, and examination of one's life. [Chapter 20](#) of Book 1 of the *Imitation*, on 'The Love of Solitude and Silence', advises: 'Anyone, then, who aims to live the inner and spiritual life must go apart, with Jesus, from the crowd'.<sup>32</sup> In the chapter, 'Sorrow of the Heart', the subject is told to 'fight like a man', to overcome habit by habit, and to expect few consolations in life, for '[w]hen a man is perfectly contrite, the whole world is bitter and wearisome to him' (30). Book 2, on the interior life, instructs the subject on how to prepare the soul to receive Christ, its bridegroom, through meditation and humility. 'Take up your cross, therefore, and follow Jesus', the reader is exhorted, 'and you shall enter eternal life' (57). The *Imitation*, unlike the devotional guides discussed above—indeed, unlike [Loyola's \*Spiritual Exercises\*](#)—does not prescribe specific gestures to be accomplished but rather seeks to inflect the inner state of the devotional subject. It is through reading his book and meditating on its message that the reader will be prepared for



the 'Inward Conversation of Christ with the Faithful Soul' that is given in Book 3. As in the manual *Comment on doit régler sa vie*, the soul is instructed to 'close the door of your senses, so that you can hear what the Lord your God speaks within you' (62). In a series of enjoinders of a general nature, Christ then tells the soul to be humble, avoid pride and concupiscence, renounce the self and its desires, practice self-denial, 'fight like a good soldier' (71), and 'be so dead to... human affections as to wish as far as lies within you to be without the fellowship of men' (121). The soul responds by what is essentially a series of prayers in which it asks for Christ's help in overcoming the many obstacles that lie in its path, chief among which is its inner weakness. In the final book, after the thorough examination of the conscience and confession the soul is invited to Holy Communion.

In a number of respects, [Ignatius Loyola's \*Spiritual Exercises\*](#) would appear at first to be the very antithesis of the *Imitation of Christ*. Where the latter does not indicate how its programme is to be followed in terms of its duration, suitable times for the execution of its practices, and indeed what those practices should be other than reading, meditation, and prayer, Loyola's book reads like an instruction manual. However, alongside these differences, one finds in it the sort of martial vocabulary noted in the *Imitation*. In order for the subject to 'conquer himself and to regulate his life so that he will not be influenced in his decision by any inordinate attachment' (47), its programme was ideally to be carried out during a radical separation from the world in a thirty-day retreat with specific exercises and contemplations for each day. For example, during the third week the daily contemplations are structured around the events of the Passion, beginning on the first day with Christ's journey from Bethany to Jerusalem. The hours of contemplation are midnight and morning, and each includes what Loyola terms the 'application of the senses', as he does on this day where he enjoins the reader to visualize (the persons at the Last Supper), listen (to what they are saying), observe (what they are doing), and to consider the more general message (what Christ suffers in his humanity). The reader is then to engage in a colloquy with Christ or, if prompted by the subject matter or devotion, three colloquies, with Christ, his mother, and God the Father (91–92). The examination of the conscience that opens the work and which is to be carried out every day is equally precise, to the point of including a chart where the reader is to record the sin or defect into which he or she has fallen. For each instance, the subject must also 'place his hand on his breast, repeating that he has fallen' (49). On successive days, note must also be made on the chart as to whether the sin was greater or lesser than on the preceding days. The work concludes with three sets of Rules (for the discernment of spirits, the distribution of alms, and 'thinking with the Church') and, to accompany the first set, notes on discerning and understanding scruples and the 'snares of the enemy'.

Loyola had no illusions about the difficulties involved in carrying out such a rigorous programme and envisioned that the retreat would be carried under a spiritual master. Besieged by requests from noblewomen to be given the *Spiritual Exercises* and, in some cases, to join the Jesuit order, he weighed in each case the advisability of doing so.<sup>33</sup> In the case of some ladies who were doing the exercises too zealously, he advised his spiritual daughters to temper their devotions lest they become melancholic or exhausted and become easy prey for the evil spirit. Thus, Donna Barbara Pezzani of Modena tried to lead her 'not very edifying family' to devotion and 'grew melancholic because of her ill-success and began to doubt the value of her own ascetic ideals'.<sup>34</sup> To Sister Teresa Rejadella in Barcelona, he wrote of the dangers of depriving the body of food or sleep, stating that a 'healthy body can be a powerful factor either in the doing of much evil or of much good' and that she should 'chiefly dwell on God's love for you which is certain and think only of repaying him with love'.<sup>35</sup> In such letters of advice, tailored to the needs of individual

subjects, are expressed the concerns regarding excesses in personal devotion as in such earlier guides as the *Petite instruction et manière de vivre pour une femme séculière*, where excessive zeal could prove to be counterproductive.

## CONCLUSION

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In this survey of spiritual exercises from Augustine to Loyola, certain themes can be seen as constants. Chief among these is the necessity of separation from the world and of silence in order to carry out the devotional programme, a programme which varied widely across time and place. In the Mirrors for Princes tradition, it might simply entail a certain number of prayers to be said and regular attendance at mass. The later middle ages saw a vast expansion and proliferation of devotional actions, sometimes accompanied by a dramatic staging. In such programmes the examination of the conscience tended to be supplanted by the externals of the programme, although the intensity of the experience, replete with weeping, was taken to be the mark of sincere devotion. In the later guides there is also an increased emphasis on the written word, a tendency which finds its fullest expression in the *Imitation of Christ* where, as with Augustine a millennium before, reading and meditation formed the heart of spirituality. At the end of these developments stands Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, where detailed observances, prayer, and meditation are accompanied by the scrupulous examination of the conscience. Ultimately, however, the spiritual guide, whether a manual or a human director, could only hope that virtue could be attained through custom and, as Hamlet says to Gertrude, use could 'change the stamp of nature'.<sup>36</sup>

# NOTES

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1. B. Stock, *After Augustine: The Meditative Reader and the Text* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2001), 24–25.
2. R. Hazelton, ‘God and the Soul: Augustine on the Devotional Life’, *Journal of Religion* 27 (1947), 91–101, at 92.
3. Augustine, *Confessions*, X.2.2, trans. Albert C. Outler, Library of Christian Classics 7 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955), 202.
4. On the ascent of the soul to God, see Hazelton, ‘God and the Soul’, 93–94; R. McMahon, *Understanding the Medieval Meditative Ascent: Augustine, Anselm, Boethius, and Dante* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006).
5. Stock, *After Augustine*, 18; on ‘Reading and Self Knowledge’ more generally, 8–23.
6. Dhuoda, *Handbook for William: A Carolingian Woman’s Counsel for her Son* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), Prologue, 5. Subsequent references to the manual are given in the text with book and section number.
7. Jean de Joinville, *Vie de Saint Louis*, Lettres Gothiques (Paris: Garnier, 1995), paragraphs 741–742.
8. M. A. Manzalaoui, ‘“Noght in the Registre of Venus”: Gower’s English Mirror for Princes’, in P. L. Heyworth, ed., *Medieval Studies for J. A. W. Bennett* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), 159–183.
9. Jean Gerson, ‘Sur l’excellence de la virginité’, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Palémon Glorieux, 10 vols. (Paris: Desclée, 1960–73), 7: 416–421.
10. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS nouvelle acquisitions latine 592. All translations from this manuscript and the other devotional treatises quoted below are mine. For a description of the manuscript, see abbé Victor Leroquais, *Les livres d’Heures manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, 2 vols. (Paris: Protat Frères, 1927), 2: 260–266; and R. L. A. Clark, ‘Producing the Devotional Body in Late Medieval Spiritual Guides for Women’, in K. Ashley and R. L. A. Clark, eds, *Medieval Conduct: Texts, Theories, Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 160–182.
11. On Books of Hours, see Leroquais, *Livres d’Heures*, Introduction, vol. 1; and R. S. Wieck, *Time Sanctified: The Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life* (New York: Braziller, 1988), 27–32.
12. BNP MS n.a.l. 592, fol. 30, r-v.
13. For a complete translation of the prayer, see *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm*, ed. B. Ward (New York: Penguin, 1973).
14. See further ‘Jesus at the Age of Twelve’, trans. T. Berkeley, *Aelred of Rievaulx: Treatises and Prayers* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1971; repr. 1995), 4, note 6.
15. ‘De Iesu puero duodenni’, *Aelredi Rievallensis opera omnia, vol. 1: Opera ascetica*, ed. A. Hoste and C. H. Talbot (Turnhout: Brepols, 1971).
16. S. Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 64, 97; and S. Biernhoff, ‘Carnal Relations: Embodied Sight in Merleau-Ponty, Roger Bacon and St Francis’, *Journal of Visual Culture* 4 (2005), 39–52.
17. S. McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).
18. S. McNamer, ‘Emotions’, in P. Strohm, ed., *Middle English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 241–257, at 246, 245.
19. Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, MS 2176. For a description of the manuscript, see G. Hasenohr, ‘La vie quotidienne de la femme vue par l’Eglise. L’enseignement des “journées chrétiennes” de la fin du moyen-âge’, *Frau und spätmittelalterlicher Alltag*, Internationaler Kongress, Krems an der Donau, 2. bis 5. Oktober 1984), Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Sitzungsberichte 473, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für mittelalterliche Realienkunde Österreichs 9 (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1986), 87–89.
20. Hasenohr, ‘Vie quotidienne’, 67.
21. Hasenohr, ‘Vie quotidienne’, 95–98.
22. Hasenohr, ‘Vie quotidienne’, 96.
23. Hasenohr, ‘Vie quotidienne’, 80.
24. This treatise was inserted into the *Livret* attributed to Peter of Luxembourg. Hasenohr, ‘Vie quotidienne’, 83.
25. Hasenohr, ‘Vie quotidienne’, 35.
26. Hasenohr, ‘Vie quotidienne’, 44–45.
27. Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, MS 2176, fol. 89v. Subsequent folio citations are given in the text.
28. See J. C. Payen’s *Le motif du repentir dans la littérature médiévale des origines 1230* (Geneva: Droz, 1967).
29. J. N. Tylanda, *The Imitation of Christ* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 1998), xxvii.

30. W. C. Creasy, *The Imitation of Christ by Thomas a Kempis: A New Reading of the 1441 Latin Autograph Manuscript* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007), xiii.
31. Ignatius Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. A. Mottola (Garden City, NY: Image, 1964), Introduction, R. W. Gleason, 17. Further citations are given in the text.
32. Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1949; reprint Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1998) 28; <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/kempis/imitation.pdf>>. Further citations are given in the text.
33. H. Rahner, ed., *Saint Ignatius Loyola: Letters to Women*, trans. K. Pond and S. A. H. Weeman (Freiburg: Herder; Edinburgh and London: Nelson, 1960).
34. Rahner, *Saint Ignatius Loyola*, 327.
35. Rahner, *Saint Ignatius Loyola*, 337.
36. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III.iv.169.

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# PART IV

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# IDEAS

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# CHAPTER 17

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# FEAR, HOPE, DEATH, AND SALVATION

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ARNOLD ANGENENDT  
*TRANSLATED BY THEO RICHES*

‘IN the midst of life we are in death’. So begins a medieval hymn still sung by Christians today. The faithful call out to Jesus Christ so as not to fall into mortal danger. Jesus had himself endured the gravest mortal danger: before his arrest, ‘he taketh Peter and James and John with him; and he began to fear and to be heavy. And he saith to them: My soul is sorrowful even unto death’ (Mark 14:33–4); ‘his sweat became as drops of blood’ (Luke 22:44). Upon his death on the cross, he ‘cried out with a loud voice’ and ‘gave up the ghost’ (Mark 15:37). He had previously prayed for his persecutors: ‘Father, forgive them’ (Luke 23:34) and had commended himself to God: ‘Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit’ (Luke 23:46). The death of Jesus was always at the forefront of Christians’ minds. It meant three things to them: the inevitable bitterness of life until the moment of death, the call to forgive one’s worst enemies, and the need to commend oneself into the hands of God. This attention to the death of Jesus was however only the first part. Jesus’s resurrection followed on as a second element, and it led to a completely new interpretation: death as a transition to eternal life. Already during the Last Supper, Jesus had indicated that there was a future after death: he would not dine again, ‘till the kingdom of God come’ (Luke 22:18). The young Christian community celebrated Jesus Christ as the first of ‘them that sleep’, and who opened up the possibility of resurrection for everybody so that, ‘in Christ all shall be made alive’ (1 Cor. 15:20–2). From that there emerged a completely new hope, namely that one might, ‘attain to the resurrection which is from the dead’ (Philippians 3:11). Christians saw in this the proof of God’s charity: ‘God is charity’, and, ‘Fear is not in charity’, indeed, ‘perfect charity casteth out fear’ (1 John 4:16–18). In this way, Christianity moves between two poles, between fear and hope, on the one hand the fear of death and on the other the hope for eternal life.

Like all major religions, Christianity made ethical demands. Above all others stood the commandment to charity, in other words to love God and one’s neighbour with one’s whole soul and mind (see Mark 12:30–3). Moreover, after the Resurrection, when God and Jesus appear to pass judgment, one must ‘render an account’ (Matt. 12:36). Death ends the day during which good works are to be done, and then, ‘the night cometh, when no man can work’ (John 9:4). Everyone’s work will be tried in fire and revealed (1 Cor. 3:12–13). The just, whom God will gather to His right, receive ‘life everlasting’, the merciless, however, who stand to His left, ‘shall go into everlasting punishment’ (Matt. 25:46). Everything is decided with death and that gives both life and death the weight of finality.

As an ethical religion, Christianity therefore required, corresponding to this judgment, two opposing places: heaven as a place for the blessed and hell as a place for the cast down. Heaven is the ‘place of God’; it is from there that His voice rings out, and it is to Him that people go and find ‘many mansions’ (John 14:2), as long as they have done ‘the will of my Father’ (Matt. 7:21). Living in heaven is described as ‘being with God’. Jesus used the image of a feast, prepared by God Himself: ‘he will gird himself...and passing will minister unto them’ (Luke 12:37). This feast is like that at a marriage (see Matt. 22:2). All those who remained ‘ready’ for the Lord, ‘went in with him to the marriage’; for the others, ‘the door was shut’ (Matthew 25:10). The underlying assumption here is acceptance at

God's table, as sought by all religions, and moreover the equally frequent idea of the sacred wedding. Each is an expression of the deepest bond. Revelations eulogizes: 'Blessed are they that are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb' (Rev. 19:9). And being with God is depicted there as a heavenly liturgy: 'there was a throne set in heaven' and in this place rings out an eternal 'holy, holy, holy' (Rev. 4:2–8). Those washed in the blood of the Lamb, 'shall no more hunger nor thirst, ... and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes' (Rev. 7:16–17). In contrast to this, Hell is the place of 'everlasting punishment', with 'exterior darkness', 'weeping and gnashing of teeth', and even 'fire' (Matt. 25:46, 8:12, 5:22). Even so, confidence predominates: 'the gates of hell shall not prevail against [the Church]' (Matt. 16:18). It has been possible to argue that hell is 'at worst, a detail in Jesus's teaching'.<sup>1</sup>

The first Christian community lived in expectation of the end of the world: the living, because of the imminent return of Jesus Christ, 'shall not taste death' (Matt. 16:28); not everyone would 'sleep, but we will all be changed' (1 Cor. 15:51). This expectation bred the firm hope that they would, with the risen dead, 'meet the Lord' (see 1 Thess. 4:13–5:1). Of course, the hour remained uncertain, so constant watchfulness was necessary (Matt. 25:13), but signs were discernible that pointed towards the end: 'When therefore you shall see the abomination of desolation... standing in the holy place' (Matt. 24:15), then the end 'is nigh, even at the doors' (Matt. 24:33). The book of Revelations uses mythical images: Satan is chained and the righteous are freed, in order to rule with Christ for a thousand years; afterwards Satan is given free hand again briefly before he is finally thrown into the pool of fire and brimstone. After this there comes the general resurrection and the judgment, and last of all the new creation of the world. Jesus's promise, 'I come quickly' (Rev. 3:11, 22:20) was answered by early Christians, full of expectation, with the prayer: 'Yes, come quickly' (*maran atha*). Thanks to this hope for life and bliss, Jesus has 'destroyed death' (see 2 Tim. 1:10). Thus Christians should not grieve, 'as others do who have no hope' (1 Thess. 4:13).

But the expectation of the end of the world was not fulfilled, with the result that the Resurrection and the Last Judgment were pushed into an unforeseeable future. Thus the lot of the dead until the Resurrection had to be re-imagined. Reference points in the Bible were found in two places. First, there was Jesus's words to the penitent criminal with whom he was crucified: 'This day thou shalt be with me in paradise' (Luke 23:43). So for the righteous dead, there was a Paradise which, however, could only be a kind of pre- or ante-Heaven, since Heaven itself could only be entered after the Last Judgment. The other reference point was the parable of the rich glutton and the poor Lazarus, in which Lazarus was carried to Abraham's bosom and comforted, while the glutton was buried in a fiery hell and suffered torment (see Luke 16:19–23). So for the evil there was a place of torment which, because the final decision only fell at the Last Judgment, could only be a kind of pre- or ante-Hell. The concept of the 'pre-Heaven' and 'pre-Hell' required in addition a sort of provisional body because, in biblical-Christian anthropology, mankind was always made of body and soul. In order to ensure one's continuing existence until the bodily Resurrection, initial use could be made of the common antique concept of the 'soul'. Indeed, the Bible promised, 'you shall find rest to your souls' (see Matt. 11:29). While in the Greek philosophical tradition the soul should be as free from the body as possible, the biblical viewpoint did not consider the soul capable of action without the body, so that for the intervening time it required a 'provisional body', which then allowed the experiences of initial bliss and torment.

Again Revelations explains this eschatology in dramatic images and metaphors. Land and sea release the dead and 'they are standing in the presence of the throne' (Rev. 20:12, 7:15).



There they are ‘judged by those things which were written in the books, according to their works’ (Rev. 20:12). Those who were worthy, ‘lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years’ (Rev. 20:4). Those who were condemned by the judgment, and were not ‘found written in the book of life’ were ‘cast into the pool of fire’ (Rev. 20:15). That ‘white robes were given to every one of them’ (Rev. 6:11) was understood as the initial body. Taken together, that means there was an intermediate state or interim: the good experience a blissful pre-Heaven and the evil a tortuous pre-Hell.

Last of all there are those who ‘cometh not into judgment, but [are] passed from death to life’ (John 5:24). These are the apostles and martyrs; they are granted their full existence immediately. The apostles are prophesied to sit on 12 seats at the Last Judgment with the Son of Man (see Matt. 19:28), which assumes they have already been judged. It is prophesied that their souls would rest under the heavenly altar (Rev. 6:9), which indicates that they are already in Heaven.<sup>2</sup>

## DEATH AS TESTIMONY TO LIFE

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Death is not just one’s lot. Seen in a Christian manner, it has to become a testimony, because to follow Jesus means, ‘you are witnesses of these things’ (Luke 24:48). That is true even to death. Whoever wants to be Jesus’s disciple must ‘take up his cross’ (Mark 8:34), in other words aligning himself to Jesus even into crucifixion. Insofar as the witness sacrifices his life and becomes a blood witness, he approximates Jesus Christ especially closely, who also went to his death for his testimony. The first martyr Stephen died entirely according to Jesus’s precedent: ‘Invoking, and saying: Lord Jesus, receive my spirit... he cried with a loud voice, saying: Lord, lay not this sin to their charge’ (Acts 7:59). But the testimony to life does not have to include being killed. When Luke demands of a man that he ‘deny himself, and take up his cross daily’ (Luke 9:23), the whole lifestyle and its everyday self-denial is meant. No one is allowed to provoke martyrdom, since Christians are advised to flee persecution: ‘when they shall persecute you in this city, flee into another’ (Matt. 10:23). Early Christians only accepted martyrdom by necessity; in the Acts of the Martyrs, you can find the formula: ‘I want to live’.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, the defining characteristic of martyrdom as a death that was not only willingly suffered but also courageously accepted came so much to the forefront that there appears to be something of a parallel with the chosen suicide recommended by the Stoics. An early example is provided by Ignatius of Antioch (d. 107/117) who, on the way to his martyrdom in Rome, said, ‘By death I shall attain true life... do not hinder me from living... Permit me to be an imitator of the passion of my God’.<sup>4</sup> The desire for martyrdom can be heard: ‘he who is near the sword is near to God’.<sup>5</sup> With the end of the persecutions there then appeared the kind of martyrdom as Paul formulated it: ‘if by the Spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh (*sarx*), you shall live’ (Rom. 8:13). That was ‘bloodless martyrdom’, which granted a kind of holiness recognized as equivalent to that of the martyrs.<sup>6</sup>

## THE BODY AND THE GRAVE

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After death the corpse remains; thus it is important to ask not only about the soul. Throughout the pre-modern period, the corpse was thought not to be completely dead, but to contain some remaining life-force. The actual soul, understood as a person’s essence, had

passed over into the other world, but a second soul remains in the buried corpse. Consequently the dead person is present in his grave, can exert influence from there and remains open to communication. Insofar as the biblical-Christian anthropology insisted on humanity being whole, it was especially important to give thought to how the corporeal body and spiritual soul belonged together. To begin with, Christians saw the corporeal body as corruptible and temporary and looked forward to a new, God-created 'spiritual body' (see 1 Cor. 15:42–50). Because of this newly created body, Christians initially did not practise any particular veneration of the corpse, any more than they had a cult of the grave. Specifically Christian graves are recognizable as such from the end of the second century at the earliest; for the first three centuries, we know of no church burial ritual nor is a burial described. Only as a reaction against Gnostic contempt for the body did a particular veneration appear: the earthly body would be transformed into the resurrected one, when everything mortal put on immortality (see 1 Cor. 15:35–44). Only in this way did a veneration of the corpse and the grave develop. On the anniversary of each death Christians gathered at the grave and celebrated a feast with the dead, which would over time be replaced by the celebration of the Eucharist.

Keeping company with the dying consisted to begin with in 'commending the soul to God' (*commendatio animae*), derived from Jesus's dying words, 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit' (Luke 23:46). Only later did a fixed liturgy of dying develop: prayer for one another and confession before one another, then anointing with holy oil, as described in the Letter of James (see James 5:14), and finally giving the Eucharist in the form of bread and wine, thought of as 'provisions' (*viaticum*) for the journey beyond.<sup>7</sup>

Those Christians at whose graves miracles occurred had a special position. They counted as saints those who were particularly effective at petitioning God. The bishop had to appraise their lifestyle and record the miracles. Thus descriptions of their lives (*vita*) and miracle collections (*miracula*) were written. Innumerable petitioners and devotees went to the graves of the martyrs and saints in the hope of a miracle.<sup>8</sup> In Rome, because the grave was seen as sacrosanct, underground crypts were built to enable touching the coffin which contained the body. The first and most famous crypt, which still exists today, is that of Gregory the Great (d. 604) in St Peter's. It was different in North Italy and Gaul; Bishop Ambrose of Milan (d. 397) was the first who had the bones of martyrs exhumed, transferred into a church and reburied there at the foot of the altar. A parallel between earth and heaven was to be constructed: as the souls of the martyrs and saints were at the foot of the heavenly altar (Rev. 6:9), so their bodies were at the foot of the earthly ones. In addition to that, because the first martyr Stephen had seen Heaven open during his stoning (see Acts 7:15), the grave of a martyr or saint was therefore thought to be a place where Heaven was open. Soon every grave of a martyr or saint was built over by a church, often called a martyrion, which promoted them to a place of pilgrimage. A particular version also developed in Gaul: the martyrs and saints were exhumed from their graves, placed in new coffins and placed in raised positions behind the altars. The light which came from the saints was thus supposed to shine upon everyone (see Matt. 5:14–16).<sup>9</sup>

## INTERCESSION ON BEHALF OF THE DEAD

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To begin with Christians prayed for the deceased by expressing gratitude for his good life. The future resurrection and eternal life were hoped for, but insofar as damnation was to be feared, grief and worry followed.<sup>10</sup> The early Christian apologist Aristides of Athens (d.

181) is a witness of both aspects. 'When a just one of us leaves the world, they are happy and thank God and accompany his body as if he only went from one place to another... But if they see that one of them dies in godlessness and sin, then they weep over him bitterly and sigh that he should go to his punishment'.<sup>11</sup> Any celebration of the Eucharist is initially not evidenced either at death or burial.<sup>12</sup> The developing ideas about life after death can be seen in Tertullian's (d. c.230) familiarity with intercessory prayers and sacrifices for the dead: prayers are said and a sacrifice is brought on each anniversary of the death in the desire that the dead be refreshed (*refrigerium interim*) and participate in the first resurrection.<sup>13</sup> We see the next step in development in Bishop Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258). He already assumes that upon death, an 'offering [would] be made... for his repose [and a] prayer [would] be made in the church in his name'.<sup>14</sup> That Cyprian speaks so emphatically about this is linked with his hope for a possible reconciliation in the hereafter. Moreover he urges his audience to record the days on which the martyrs died, so that a sacrifice can be made for them on the respective anniversaries.<sup>15</sup>

Here we see the beginning of both the liturgical service of the dead and of necrologies. The dates of the memorial days were taken from antique custom, according to which relatives gathered at the grave on the third, and sometimes also the seventh or ninth, day after the death, as well as its anniversary, and held a funeral banquet at which the deceased was considered to be present.<sup>16</sup>

Gratitude for a good life had been foremost at the beginning, but this was increasingly pushed into the background by concern for those who did not die well. Instead of gratitude, intercession for souls became more prominent. It was Augustine (d. 430) who created the foundation that would become authoritative for the whole of western Christianity. It was a fourfold scheme: the completely good in Heaven and the completely evil in Hell; in between the not-entirely-good in Paradise with complete confidence in future access to Heaven, and the not-entirely-evil subject to temporary torment in a place of purification. That was the origin of Purgatory. Now the concern was directed toward helping those souls in the place of purification who were no longer capable themselves of doing anything meritorious, and were therefore called 'poor souls'. They could be supplied with good works from this world in order that they could leave the punitive torments behind them as quickly as possible.<sup>17</sup> Any meritorious, good work could be performed as an intercession for poor souls, such as prayer, alms and not least also the mass. The Gallican liturgy (widespread in Gaul, northern Italy, Spain, and Ireland) contained at the end of the Presentation of Gifts an extraordinary prayer for donors both living and dead, for the wellbeing of the former and the purification of the latter. A further step was focussed entirely on the dead, namely to dedicate not just an intercession for the benefit of the dead but the entire mass. This was the origin of the mass for the dead. In addition, there were influences from the Iro-Frankish system of penitential tariffs, according to which penance was to be performed in strictly defined measures of alms, prayer, and celebrations of the Mass. Such measures were now also used for those still doing penance in the afterlife in order to shorten their time of purification.

This intercession for the dead was justified theologically by none other than Pope Gregory the Great (d. 604). Against the objection that the balance of one's life was decided at death, he emphasized that the Church also had the power of the keys for those doing penance in the hereafter and so could perform effective intercession for the deceased. Additionally the pope knew what kinds of intercession were especially helpful for the souls doing penance in the afterlife: after works of charity, the celebration of mass was

particularly powerful—six and then also 30 of which were claimed to liberate a soul from torment. The entire middle ages practised these series of masses as ‘Gregorian masses’.

## VISIONS OF THE HEREAFTER

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The increasingly clear image of heaven and hell is owed to visions of the hereafter. Such visions in which individual people receive insights into the afterlife and return to the living, are often encountered in the religious world. In ethically conceived religions they display the separation of the good from the evil, in heaven and hell. Thus Plato (d. 348 bc) has someone who returns to life report:

He said that when his soul went forth from his body he journeyed with a great company and that they came to a mysterious region where there were two openings side by side in the earth, and above and over against them in the heaven two others, and that judges were sitting between these, and that after every judgement they bade the righteous journey to the right and upwards through the heaven with tokens attached to them in front of the judgement passed upon them, and the unjust to take the road to the left and downward, they too wearing behind signs of all that had befallen them, and that when he himself drew near they told him that he must be the messenger to mankind to tell them of that other world and they charged him to give ear and to observe everything in the place.<sup>18</sup>

Such reports also occur in Christianity.<sup>19</sup> One example among many is the *Visio Pauli*, written at the turn of the fourth and fifth centuries and widely distributed, which claims to be a detailed report of the taking up into the third heaven referred to in passing by Paul in his Second Letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 12:2–4). It depicts the heavenly Jerusalem and a paradise-like garden with the everlasting rejoicing of the blessed, as well as the fire of hell with the eternal torments of the damned. After death the good souls are received by rejoicing angels, while the damned are bitterly tortured by demons.<sup>20</sup> Despite Augustine’s (d. 430) warning that this vision contradicted correct teaching, it continued to spread. Gregory the Great made these kinds of visions of the afterlife into a theological argument: souls had re-appeared, and not just reported about the places in the afterlife, but also about the means of freeing souls from the place of purification, which was said to demonstrate that the Church had real power of intercession in favour of the souls after death.

The visions of the afterlife had a long-term effect. Here are only two examples passed on by the Anglo-Saxon author Bede (d. 735). First, there is the vision of the Anglo-Saxon peasant Drythelm. In this, the souls appear separated into four places, as classified by Augustine. For the ‘very good’ there is heaven, which is only immediately accessible to a very few, and for the ‘very evil’ there is the fiery hell. In-between there are two places for those souls who will enter heaven at the Last Judgment; on the one hand, there’s a blissful pre-heaven for the not wholly good, and on the other a tortuous place of purification for the not wholly evil. The tormented are in a long, deep valley with one unbearably hot side and another unbearably cold one, which drives the souls restlessly to and fro. Here are purified those who in life had delayed their confession until finally saying it at their hour of death, but who would also certainly enter heaven on the Day of Judgment. The message to the living is clear: ‘The prayers and alms and fasts and above all the Masses of the living help many to be freed even before the Last Judgment’.<sup>21</sup> Drythelm’s vision is considered a milestone and turning point in the vision literature of the middle ages. In a second story, Bede also refers to Pope Gregory, namely in a story about a prisoner who was freed through the celebration of the mass. The wife of a man who had been captured in war brought, ‘because she thought him dead, sacrifices every week; and every time his wife brought



sacrifices to free his soul, his chains in his prison were loosened'.<sup>22</sup> According to Bede many took this as inspiration to pray, give alms, and bring God the sacrifice of the holy oblation.<sup>23</sup> Even in early scholasticism we see these stories of the liberating power of masses cited, always with the urging to help poor souls.

Intercessions intensified in particular for the moment of death. At the moment the soul left the body support was especially needed, since it was caught up in a battle between angels and demons. Having led a good life meant the angels took it to heaven, but a bad one meant the demons dragged it to hell. Visionaries sometimes saw a bright light, heard heavenly music, saw angels and saints, or even Jesus himself. Or they shuddered from the darkness and the stink of the Devil. Those left behind tried with their prayers to strengthen the good spirits and drive off the evil ones. In monasteries a death was accompanied by the ringing of a bell, as urgently as when a fire had broken out, and everyone had to rush to prayer.

Even more urgent was help for cleansing in the place of purification: purgatory. This help had to be given over the long term and led to 'eternal commemoration'. In this the monasteries were the leaders. Although monks were originally intended to be laymen and did not celebrate mass daily, monasteries changed into communities of priests with daily community mass and the additional individual masses of the monk-priests. At the same time the monasteries expanded the Divine Office from the Benedictine extent of 37 Psalms a day to 118 and lastly 200. In this way a spiritual capacity was available which could also be used on behalf of the dead. In the Carolingian period there appeared prayer fraternities which spanned the whole of western Christendom. The names of the living and the dead were entered into memorial books; that of Reichenau Abbey had 40,000 entries. When a report of a death arrived every monk-priest immediately celebrated three masses and the non-priests sang the psalter. For the Abbey of Fulda, which had 200 priests out of 600 monks in the ninth century, that meant 600 masses and 400 recitations of the psalter in one go.

While the monastic-priestly fraternities consisted of mutual exchange of names, for laymen it worked differently. These had to perform special works for the forgiveness of their sins, namely giving alms to the poor and freeing slaves, which they could also do on behalf of poor souls. But the laity also wanted to benefit from monastic prayer, which could be allowed them as a confraternity (*confraternitas*). But they had to pay for it, so that the rich and propertied even had land transfers demanded of them. This exchange system achieved its zenith in Cluny. The monastery sang 200 psalms every day, celebrated two community masses and the monk-priests celebrated their individual masses. The abbey wanted to rebalance the sins of the world. But whoever wanted to participate as a layman had to pay for it with donations. Cluny was, as contemporaries said, rich in spiritual earnings and rich in worldly possessions.<sup>24</sup>

If we pause here and look back, then the stories authorized by Gregory the Great clearly turn out to be not just illustrations for the ordinary people. Rather a raw material of religious narratives came to be propagated, such that they came to be found worldwide. They are stories about the heavenly city and the maw of hell, with paradise and the cleansing place for the imperfect in between, about the journey into the hereafter surrounded by good and evil spirits, and about the occasional return of individuals to the living. This raw material now influenced Christianity. Only in this way did the idea of purgatory take shape, as it predominated throughout the middle ages and led to endless sacrifices for the poor souls.<sup>25</sup> What was decisive, as Jacques Le Goff has correctly explained, was ongoing contacts between the living and the dead, as can be observed in the



history of many religions.<sup>26</sup> Above all it can also be seen how, in the ‘theology-free’ period between Gregory the Great (d. 604), the last antique church father, on the one hand, and Anselm of Canterbury (d. 1109), the father of medieval Scholasticism, on the other, a ‘narrative theology’ was practised which was decisive above all for ideas about the hereafter. How much ‘ordinary people’ were involved can be seen in the fact that many of the visions of the afterlife originate from them, from men and women of the peasant classes. They were taken up, however, by the powerful and educated, priests and monks, which demonstrates that this was not a case of priestly deceit or scare tactics, as Enlightenment critics of the Church would have it, but rather that members of all social groups were subject to the same fear. Louis the German (d. 876) one night had a vision of his dead father Louis the Pious who asked him to free him from the torments he was exposed to, ‘so that I can finally have eternal life’; the terrified son sent letters to every monastery of his kingdom, ‘so that they might take up the tormented soul into their prayers to the Lord’.<sup>27</sup>

In the twelfth century the visions of the afterlife reached a new zenith. The *Visio Tnugdali* escalated into fantasies of torture which were still inspirational to Hieronymus Bosch (d. 1615) for his depictions of hell. But at the same time a new theology began, Scholasticism, which no longer acknowledged such visions.

## THE TURNING POINT OF THE MIDDLE AGES

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The great turning point that occurred after 1100 in the West can be called the re-invention of Christianity. The ascent came from intellectualism as much as emotionalism. Spirit and heart were to find their fulfilment in unity with God, whether, as the theologians said, more through understanding, or, as the mystics said, more through love. In this way the whole understanding of grace, merit, and reward changed, as did that of sin, punishment, and damnation. Only what occurred out of spirit and heart counted as meritorious now, and only what was done through conscious evil and stubbornness counted as sin. This subjectivization changed the conceptualization of God’s judgment over sin and humanity and as a result that of heaven, hell, and purgatory.

The theologians discarded the visions, which had until then been dominant, and dispensed with any imagining of the hereafter. They understood heaven as the blissful gazing upon God, and hell as tortuous separation from God. The blessed gaze upon God with their intellect and find in that their bliss. The damned are aware of their separation from God and suffer torment through that. It remained unclear whether the tormenting fire that brought about this anguish was to be understood as physical or more spiritual. But in one, central point, the new theology brought about a significant shift. Although the incorporeal soul still did not count as a complete person, the souls of the just were believed to gaze upon God immediately after death. In this way the first judgment immediately after death was turned into the main judgment and the bodily resurrection paled into insignificance. Out of the Augustinian classification into four groups only three remained, namely heaven, hell, and purgatory, after the disappearance of paradise.

Aid for the poor souls had to be re-thought. Those condemned to purgatory are, despite all their torments, on their way to bliss. Bernard of Clairvaux was able to preach: ‘For if it is also sad that they suffer in Purgatory, so is there much more reason for joy, since the moment is near that, ‘God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more, for the former things are passed away’ (Rev. 21:4)’.<sup>28</sup> Albert the Great (d. 1280) removed the Devil from purgatory

and considered it unlikely that demons inflicted the torments. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) also did not believe that souls in purgatory were tortured by evil spirits.

As a result of this, Cluny's exchange system also had to be rethought. Now there were accusations that the donations of money and land amounted to the purchase of spiritual goods, which had to count as a sacrilege. The new Cistercian Order also still took donations, but did not repay them with prayers and masses; instead of living from gifts, the order was supposed to work with its own hands. Francis (d. 1226) ordered that even with numerous priests present only one mass was to be held in a monastery every day, which made matching donations of masses impossible. But all the orders which were newly founded after 1100 and, to begin with, all attacked the Cluniac exchange system acceded to the pressure from donors; they all became communities that celebrated masses.

The theologians emphasized that God forgave the truly remorseful, even in the moment. But what was penance then still for? It could only survive as an educational means to better moral living. And what about purgatory? If someone died remorseful, surely God had to forgive! What were punitive torments now for? It can be seen here that the meanwhile established idea of purgatory and the practice of aiding poor souls was too firmly rooted to really change. Theology offered a compromise: God forgave eternal damnation in the case of true remorse. But punishment remained, since as well as eternal punishment, God also now imposed temporary ones, to be completed either in life or in purgatory.

Mysticism thought differently, but in just as novel a way.<sup>29</sup> It took the path of the heart. Meister Eckhart (d. 1328) urged that man, 'should not allow himself to be satisfied with a "conceptualized" [*gedachten*] God'.<sup>30</sup> Rather man should find repose in God:

First of all we should perceive and recognise how the divine countenance drives the desire of all souls for the divine nature to insane distraction in order to draw them to it. Since God savours his divine nature, in other words repose, and because it is so pleasing to him, he reveals that part of himself to attract the natural desire of all creatures and to draw them to him. The Creator does not just seek his own repose that way, by revealing that part of himself and giving it to all creatures, but he also at the same time seeks to draw creatures along with himself back to their first origin, that is repose.<sup>31</sup>

Eckhart does not mention the torments of hell; instead he sees that even in the damned the 'spark' is still not extinguished, 'which was made by God and is a light, imprinted from above, and it is an image of divine nature, which opposes in every way everything that is not divine and it...is in every way disposed to the good; even in hell it is disposed to the good'.<sup>32</sup> Whoever had to accuse himself of not being able to atone all his many sins himself should go to Jesus Christ, who had atoned properly for all guilt: 'In him you can sacrifice the most worthy sacrifice to the heavenly father for all your guilt'.<sup>33</sup>

This was especially appealing to female mystics. They understood themselves as brides of Jesus (see Matt 25:1) and interpreted heaven as a union with their bridegroom Christ. For this the early Christian idea of the heavenly wedding feast was newly reanimated. Thus Mechthild of Hackeborn (d. 1299):

As the wedding banquet was prepared, the Lord said, 'Who will entertain us at this feast?' And he had barely said this and he took Mechthild's soul in his hands and had her perform a dance. All the participants at the feast were animated by this in a particularly great happiness and abundance of joy. They thanked God that he had entertained them with Mechthild's soul. But the soul embraced its lover Christ in heartfelt love with an embrace and led him to the guests' table. There she saw an indescribable light and a wondrous brilliance emanate from the face of the Lord. He filled the whole heavenly chamber with light and he filled all the cups on the royal table.<sup>34</sup>

Mechthild of Magdeburg (d. 1282/94) describes the wedding in erotic terms: 'Lord, your eternal kingdom / Stands open to my eyes, like / The noblest wedding / And the greatest

celebration / And a feast [of eternal sweetness] /.../ And so God, who grants everything, answered: / 'Your mountain will melt in wooing / Your enemies will gain no part in you / The sun has shone on your field / And your fruit has remained unspoilt / In my kingdom your will live newly as a bride / And there I will kiss you sweetly on the mouth / So that all my divinity / Will flow through your soul / And the eyes of my trinity / Might be always there and forever / Play in your twofold heart'.<sup>35</sup>

The mystics understood purgatory as a way-station on the way to bliss. For Henry Suso it only lasted a short time: 'And even if the soul burns in Purgatory for a thousand years, it has set it aside in a short time with its guilt and penance, so that it goes on without any purgatory into eternal bliss'.<sup>36</sup> The late medieval Wessel Gansfort (d. 1489) no longer thought of torment at all and instead interpreted purgatory as 'burning, but unfulfilled love'.<sup>37</sup> As a result, the mystics had to go their own way when it came to aiding souls. They developed axioms such as: 'An act in piety is more pleasing to God and more useful to man than many acts without piety'. Meister Eckhart claimed provocatively that one Ave Maria prayed with devotion was better than a thousand without. This devotional requirement also affected the service of the dead: one act in devotion was a much greater service to the deceased than a multitude. For this reason they advised against individual donations for helping one's own soul: a good donation during one's life was more pleasing to God and more useful to man than when one had a church built from gold given after one's death.<sup>38</sup>

Because death itself did not announce either the hour or manner of its coming, it was important to prepare oneself for it. Dying was to be learnt and became a discipline (*ars*).<sup>39</sup> One should not flee death, but face it, even 'keep [it] daily before one's eyes', as even Benedict had already demanded.<sup>40</sup> For the hour of death Suso emphasized gazing upon the cross even more strongly than prayer or the sacrament: 'Just as you have properly received your Christian rights [i.e. the last rites], wherever possible, then do one thing: place the crucifix before your eyes, gaze at it and then press it to your heart'.<sup>41</sup>

In general, death inspired on the one hand hope and joy, on the other terror and fears. Late medieval 'transi' tombs had two levels: on the top lay the radiant body of the resurrection, below lay the rotting, worm-eaten earthly body. Francis (d. 1226) praised God for death: 'Praised be to you, my Lord, for our brother, earthly death;... Blessed are those, who find themselves in his sacred will'.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, the text 'Dies irae, dies illa', which was also read in the Franciscan milieu, complained, 'What horror and fear there will be when the judge comes with questions... What will I, wretched, say?... Gentle Jesus, please consider that you come for me, do not curse me... Grant me a blessed end'.<sup>43</sup> On the walls of many churches one could see the horrific depictions of the Dance of the Dead: appearing as a merry musician, death gathered everyone, emperor and servant, mother and maid, elder and infant.

In practice, intercession for poor souls continued. Whoever was rich enough donated hundreds or even thousands of masses for souls, arranged annual memorial celebrations, sometimes even several times a year. In this way, donations for the dead increased again towards the end of the middle ages. In particular, late medieval wills are full of donations for the salvation of one's own soul: donations for the poor and churches, especially money to pay for Masses. The English King Henry V (d. 1422) provides an example. In his will of 1421 he established a double series of mass celebrations, one 'forever' and one for a year after his death. For this, an altar to the Annunciation was to be built on his tomb in Westminster and three masses were to be celebrated there every day forever, for the Assumption, Annunciation, and Christ's Resurrection respectively, thus around 1,000 masses every year for which £100 was allotted. In addition to this there should be obsequies

celebrated every year on the anniversary of his death, with a requiem in the morning and alms for 24 paupers. This was the perpetual donation, but was followed by a donation for the time immediately after his death. According to this, 30 paupers are to be supported for a year and they are to pray the Marian Psalter, with the final prayer in English: ‘Think on King Henry, who put all his hope in you’. Above all, there should be celebrated 3,000 masses in honour of the Trinity, 15 daily masses in honour of Christ’s five wounds, 5,000 masses in honour of the five joys of Mary, 900 in honour of the choirs of angels, 300 in honour of the Patriarchs, 1,200 in honour of the 12 Apostles, 4,125 in honour of All Saints —which comes in total to 20,000 masses, which were all to be celebrated as quickly after his death as possible.<sup>44</sup> Emperor Maximilian (d. 1519) put the utmost level of thought and effort into his memoria: the Order of St George which he founded was to receive a mountain church, where four priests would read masses and 24 choirboys take turns singing psalms day and night. In addition, he wanted his grave to be surrounded by statues of his descendants and all the kings and emperors, 172 in total. It was to be a grave of unprecedented extent. But only the small number of statues which are now in the royal chapel in Innsbruck were constructed and the tomb there remained empty. The plan was ambitious, but liturgical memoria remained traditional: his head and breast were placed under the altar so that the priests celebrating mass were standing above his corpse’s feet and the sacred proceedings took place over his heart.

## AT THE END

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The Reformation led to a revolution. Theologically it reduced the interim between death and the Last Judgment to a kind of sleep, again made the resurrection and Judgment Day decisive and rejected any possibility of helping the poor souls. Martin Luther (d. 1546) used the mystics’ arguments: ‘I would prefer, and indeed it would be more pleasing to God and much better, if a church or monastery put all their year’s masses and vigils together and held on one day just one true vigil and mass with heartfelt seriousness, devotion and faith on behalf of all their donors, than if they held thousands and thousands of them for each donor individually without such devotion and faith’. As Luther himself lay dying, he was asked, ‘Honoured father, do you want to die in the name of your Lord Jesus Christ, and testify to the teaching you have done in his name?’ There followed an audible ‘yes’. But Luther demanded no more confession and no Last Rite, and even dispensed with the Last Communion and even the viaticum. ‘We are all called to death and no one can die for another, but each person must battle death for himself’. That meant a farewell to a significant part of medieval practice regarding death. But was it a complete break with tradition? When Augustine lay in 430 on his deathbed in the besieged city of Hippo, he wished to be, ‘alone in his sickness; he, who was otherwise so sociable and surrounded by friends’, and it seems that he voluntarily died as an excommunicated sinner and penitent without the viaticum, and thus without the last communion.<sup>45</sup>



# NOTES

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# CHAPTER 18

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# REFORM, CLERICAL CULTURE, AND POLITICS

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MAUREEN C. MILLER

GUIBERT of Nogent (c.1060–c.1125) has, for many reasons, been considered precocious or unusual.<sup>1</sup> I hesitate to add to this reputation, but he does appear to have been the first author to record the adverb *clericaliter* ('clerically'). Describing the strictness of his tutor, Guibert lamented: 'The other boys of my age could wander everywhere at will, entirely unrestrained at times, whereas I was scrupulously guarded from such behaviour. I would sit, clerically adorned [*clericaliter infulatus sedebam*], and watch the groups of players as if I was a trained animal'.<sup>2</sup> The phrase, *clericaliter infulatus sedebam* combined the adverbial coinage 'clerically' with the medieval adaptation of *infulatus*. The latter term was classically used to denote the wearing of a sort of woollen headband, either by Roman priests or their sacrificial victims, but in Christian parlance was deployed to describe raising a prelate to his 'dignity' or, more literally, assuming the special vestments and insignia (particularly the mitre) worn by bishops. What we need to note about Guibert's recollection of himself sitting 'clerically decked out' is that in the early twelfth century there was a sufficiently well-formed notion of clerical-ness, of clerical behaviour and appearance, that one could be said to do something 'clerically'.

This was new. How clerics lived, acted, and dressed had been quite variable in early medieval Europe. Aspects of this variability—whether clerics were married, for example, or whether they performed the Roman liturgy—had agitated reformers in previous centuries and fuelled efforts to enforce higher standards of education, moral comportment, and uniformity. The fruits of their efforts become clearly visible in the twelfth century. Guibert, and authors after him, could use a word like *clericaliter* and trust that their readers had some shared notion of how clerics looked and behaved.

In brief, while the emergence of a powerful, monarchical papacy is the most prominent heritage of the ecclesiastical reform movements of the eleventh century, an equally important result was the development of a distinctive, European-wide, clerical culture. By 'clerical culture' I mean the particular way of life of the clergy, their institutions, their values, beliefs, and customs, their use of objects, and their material life.<sup>3</sup> Like papal monarchy, the development of this distinctive, European-wide, clerical culture was gradual, with roots extending into the Carolingian era, and it was just as significant in medieval Christianity and European history. Indeed, in order to understand what really changed as a result of eleventh-century ecclesiastical reform, it is useful to get beyond a focus on what divided Christendom in the age of the investiture conflict to consider the unifying forces that allowed the church to emerge as a much more powerful 'trans-national' institution in the twelfth century. Clerical culture was central to the unity and authority of the high medieval church, particularly its political power.<sup>4</sup>

## REFORM AND THE NARRATION OF CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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The history of medieval Christianity has often been narrated as a series of reform movements. After the conversion of the Germanic peoples, the Carolingian reforms established a measure of institutional and liturgical unity in the practice of western Christianity. The eleventh-century reforms, usually called ‘Gregorian’ after Pope Gregory VII (1073–85), restored ecclesiastical order after the invasions of the late ninth and tenth centuries, and more thoroughly established papal authority and clerical celibacy. Innocent III’s convocation of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 initiated yet another wave of reforms that further developed some Gregorian ideas, such as distinguishing the clergy and laity, but set new standards for pastoral care and regulated religious orders. In the late fifteenth century, after the disarray provoked by the Avignon papacy (1305–78) and Great Schism (1378–1415), a number of reform movements commenced, but they did not forestall the protestant reformation that permanently divided European Christianity.<sup>5</sup>

Critics of such narratives rightly point out that different ideas of reform have long been present in the Christian tradition and it is relatively easy to show that exegetes and theologians, even in periods not recognized as ones of reform, were vitally interested in moral and institutional betterment. Another justified critique of this narrative approach is that historians have been insufficiently attentive to the actual Latin words used to denote such strivings, grouping many significantly different notions together under a modern concept of reform.<sup>6</sup> Also problematic in the recourse to reform movements as an organizing principle in the history of Christianity is that it often doesn’t yield a very inspiring view of the Christian past since periods of backsliding or errant corruption are as prominent as heroic attempts to overcome them. Even if you don’t view history as progressive, unrelenting cycles of virtuous effort and all too human failure become analytically deadening as well as dispiriting.

Insistence on ‘real’ corruption and ‘real’ reform has been especially prominent in the historiography of the eleventh-century movements. But the issue of clerical celibacy, considered central to the Gregorian reform, well illustrates the empirical difficulties of reform as a category of analysis. Our documentation does reveal widespread clerical marriage and concubinage before the late eleventh century and much greater documentary discretion after the Gregorian campaigns against nicolaitism (the sin of clerical unchastity). Clerical wives, concubines, and children, ubiquitous in early medieval charters, appear only rarely in this kind of evidence after the early twelfth century.<sup>7</sup> This suggests an acceptance of the principle advocated by reformers, but did practices really change? The repetition of canons against clerical incontinence and the records of ecclesiastical courts suggest a great deal of non-compliance, and our sources are not adequate to gauge levels of adherence or disobedience before and after demands for ‘reform’.<sup>8</sup> Even if one wishes to distinguish the eleventh-century movements by the epic struggle between emperors and popes that they sparked, the result of the investiture conflict was more a draw than a clear ecclesiastical victory. Rulers retained powerful, even determinant, roles in the elevation of bishops to sees, and the *ius patronatus* provided lesser lords and property owners with significant influence in the disposition of local benefices.<sup>9</sup>

Despite all the research and critical debate on these issues and others, many historians retain a strong sense that the Gregorian reform and investiture conflict marked a highly significant watershed in medieval Christianity. I admit that I am one of them. Some point to the unequivocal establishment of important principles and a general hastening and empowerment of both lay and religious initiatives to revitalize Christian spirituality, and just about all agree that the emergence of papal monarchy was an immensely important development. The latter consensus is inadequate: to emphasize the power of the papacy



continues to valorize traditional ‘top-down’ approaches to history and ‘great men’. The challenge for historians committed to broader, *annaliste*, perspectives on the past has been, and continues to be, to discern and articulate much more clearly *what changed* between the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Historians of temporal affairs—whilst still to some degree debating the ‘feudal revolution’—have more radically recast inherited political narratives for this period than have ecclesiastical historians. The latter have been more content to work within the framework of Augustine Fliche’s *réforme grégorienne* and Gerd Tellenbach’s struggle for ‘right order’ in the world. Excellent local studies have demonstrated that there was change below the level of leadership in the church, but the evidence for it is more diffuse and gradual than that for the robust involvement of popes in matters great and small throughout Christendom.<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, historians have better articulated and documented changes among the laity than the clergy.<sup>11</sup> While these historians have ranged widely in reconstructing the religion of the people, studies of clerical ideas and practices have remained more circumscribed—especially those elucidating the liturgy, which was the particular concern of clerics. Enough local research on clerical life has been accomplished, however, to propose broader patterns.

From the ninth century, two constantly intersecting processes worked to produce a distinctive, European-wide clerical culture. The first were institutional and societal changes that facilitated geographical mobility, exchanges of ideas and practices, and the dissemination of norms. The second were more intensive efforts at educating, forming, and disciplining the clergy: these produced mentalities and ways of life distinct from those of the laity.

## MOVEMENT, CONNECTIVITY, EXCHANGE

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The idea that medieval society was static has long been vanquished. But recently the chronology of mobility in the middle ages has expanded considerably. Instead of seeing a ‘take off’ of trade and other forms of travel from the eleventh century, historians now acknowledge significant movement of people and goods beginning in the late eighth and early ninth centuries. [Michael McCormick’s \*Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce, a.d. 300–900\*](#) is a key contribution to this interpretive transformation. Drawing upon physical evidence—such as coins, other archeological finds, relic authentications—and prosopography, McCormick argues for significant movement of individuals and goods within the Mediterranean basin but also for the development of new overland routes linking northern Europe to Italian ports and to the Byzantine heartland. Although McCormick’s reconstruction of the origins of the European economy has not gained universal assent, evidence of greater mobility and communication in early medieval Europe is accruing.<sup>12</sup> While many of the people on the move in McCormick’s account were clerics, his interpretation posits more lay than ecclesiastical travellers: merchants, servants, slaves. Still, the evidence for clerical movement, and for exchanges of ideas and practices among clerics, increases from the ninth century.

Two vitally important means of clerical interaction were education and councils. Charlemagne’s court, of course, attracted erudite clerics such as Peter of Pisa, Alcuin of York, and Paul the Deacon (from Friuli). More importantly, the emperor’s decrees fostering clerical reform and the foundation of cathedral schools laid the groundwork for the educational institutions and practices that facilitated the formation of a European-wide clerical culture. The *Admonitio Generalis* of 789 required bishops and priests to teach the

Christian faith and ordered that schools be established at monasteries and cathedrals.<sup>13</sup> Subsequent councils, particularly the reform councils of 813, reiterated these requirements and from the 830s we have considerable evidence of active schools. The approximately seventy schools attested in the ninth century, however, were scattered across the empire and hardly amounted to the network touching every diocese and parish envisioned in the *Admonitio*.<sup>14</sup> This incomplete success necessitated and encouraged movement in order to study. Indeed, an 825 capitulary of Lothar I for northern Italy, acknowledging that reality, designated nine centres of study to serve surrounding towns and regions.<sup>15</sup> Some of the cathedral schools established, such as Laon and Auxerre, could boast an unbroken series of masters from the mid-ninth through the early tenth century,<sup>16</sup> but in others continuity of instruction is less certain and even a centre like Reims under Archbishop Hincmar (845–882) had only the resources for beginning studies. Advanced students were sent to Laon to continue their education. Reims came into its own at the end of the ninth century when Archbishop Fulk brought Hucbald of Saint-Armand and Remigius of Auxerre to restore his school after devastating Viking raids. Both scholars later moved on to Paris.<sup>17</sup> In sum, the practice of clerics travelling to schools, and living in other clerical communities while they furthered their studies, took root in the ninth century.

From the mid-tenth century, indeed, our sources suggest significant numbers of clerics circulating among cathedral schools. Then a certain Ohtricus was drawing crowds of students to Magdeburg, among them the young Adelbert of Prague whose hagiographer Bruno of Querfurt (another Magdeburg *alumnus*) called Ohtricus ‘another Cicero’.<sup>18</sup> The teaching of Stefan of Novara at Würzburg attracted the future masters Wolfgang of Regensburg and Heinrich of Trier. A famous late tenth-century example is Gerbert of Aurillac (c.934–1002), who began his studies at the local monastery Saint-Geraud in Aquitaine. When he exhausted the resources there, he went to the cathedral school at Vich in Catalonia to study mathematics. Later he sojourned to Rome and also taught at the cathedral school in Reims.<sup>19</sup> Peregrinations of students and masters intensified over the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The controversial dialectician Roscelin of Compiègne taught at Tours, Loche, and Besançon, while his more famous pupil, Abelard, studied and taught at Loche, Paris, Laon, Melun, and Corbeil.<sup>20</sup> Abelard famously boasted that he ‘began to travel about in several provinces disputing, like a true peripatetic philosopher, wherever I had heard there was a keen interest in the art of dialectic’, but even earlier, in the 1030s, the students at Würzburg said of their teacher that ‘for his sake people gather here from diverse regions, not only from the vicinity. Many who have wandered from afar seek him out’.<sup>21</sup>

The cultural implications of this movement are evident in the difficulty scholars have in identifying the authors of anonymous texts and the provenance of renowned masters: local usages are not pronounced enough to determine whether the didactic poem *Quid suum virtutis* was written in Belgium or in the Loire Valley or whether Hugh of St Victor was born in Francia or Saxony. As C. Stephen Jaeger has observed of Hugh, and Honorius Augustodunensis, and Master Manegold, teacher of William of Champeaux and Anselm of Laon, ‘the fact that their large body of writing does not supply distinct clues to their backgrounds underscores ... [that] local background and national origins played no significant role in their writings’. A ‘unity of learning’ in eleventh-century Europe was produced through a relatively uniform cathedral school curriculum and the circulation of masters and students among various schools.<sup>22</sup>

Another practice that fostered clerical mobility was the periodic holding of synods and councils. This was a venerable and ancient custom in Christianity, and one particularly valorized in the Carolingian era and innovatively reinterpreted to serve reforming agendas

in the eleventh century. Especially in the early ninth century, the concern of Carolingian monarchs to correct ecclesiastical abuses resulted in more frequent large reform gatherings attended by dozens of prelates. At least 220 councils can be documented between 740 and 840.<sup>23</sup> Although most conciliar sources for the Carolingian era do not provide lists of signatories to decrees or attendees, we do know that forty-four bishops and abbots attended a council at Attigny c.760–762, twenty-two to twenty-six at Reisbach in 800, and thirty-nine at Mainz in 829, one of four co-ordinated reforming councils held throughout the realm that year.<sup>24</sup> Each of these prelates was certainly accompanied by a clerical entourage.<sup>25</sup> The significant corpus of synodal statutes, or *capitula episcoporum*, from the ninth century also suggests renewed episcopal dedication to calling diocesan synods both during Charlemagne's reign and well after the break up of his empire. While some of the *capitula* take the form of letters, many explicitly record that they were promulgated in synods.<sup>26</sup> In the tenth century, local and regional gatherings of priests and other clerics under the leadership of bishops became an important vehicle not only for reform but also for combating violence and promoting peace.<sup>27</sup> These ecclesiastical gatherings facilitated exchanges of ideas and issued canons demanding both the correction of perceived abuses and greater uniformity in clerical practices.

The frequency, participation, and legislative intensity of these assemblies increased significantly from the mid-eleventh century when popes began calling and presiding over councils that were attended by bishops from all over Europe and that passed decrees considered binding on all Christians. As I. S. Robinson observed of the period from Gregory VII (1074–85) to Alexander III (1159–81), '[a]t no other period in the history of the Church did popes preside so frequently over councils of bishops from all the provinces of the Latin Church, as in the later eleventh and the twelfth century'.<sup>28</sup> While many of these gatherings drew ecclesiastics to Rome, the peripatetic character of pontificates such as that of Urban II led to great convocations of clerics in southern Italy (Melfi 1089, Benevento 1091, Troia 1093, Bari 1097) and in France too (Clermont 1095, Tours 1096, Nîmes 1096). Accounts of the council of Clermont emphasized the great crowds in attendance, including at least ninety bishops and ninety abbots, and earlier that year a council in Piacenza drew roughly 200 'bishops and abbots both from Germany and from Lombardy and Tuscany'.<sup>29</sup> Descriptions of the three Lateran councils held across the twelfth century also estimate the episcopal attendees alone to have been in the hundreds, with prelates at the Third Lateran in 1179 from the Italian and Iberian peninsulas, the kingdoms of France, England, Scotland, and Hungary, the German empire, and even the Latin sees in Palestine. Each of these assemblies met for weeks, facilitating exchanges of all sorts. Eadmer, who accompanied Archbishop Anselm of Canterbury to the Council of Bari in 1098, earnestly recorded how he 'discreetly observed the conduct of the council, the seating arrangements, the procedures and ways of weighing issues', professing his habit 'to consider with careful attention and commit to memory new things, especially those occurring in ecclesiastical affairs'. He was particularly attentive to liturgical garb and made inquiries about how a certain magnificent cope had been acquired.<sup>30</sup>

The increase in conciliar activity, however, was as much a local and provincial phenomenon as a papal one. In France, for example, the number of councils we know about from the documentary record more than doubled (from fifteen to thirty-seven) between the first and second quartiles of the eleventh century and continued to increase until it peaked at eighty-four in the first quarter of the twelfth century.<sup>31</sup> Roughly 40 per cent of those held in the second half of the eleventh century was convened by or in the presence of papal legates, but the majority were local initiatives.<sup>32</sup> Clerics who shared Eadmer's curiosity about

ecclesiastical matters had an increasing number of opportunities to observe one another and how things were done.

## MAKING CLERICS

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Over this same period, ecclesiastical leaders had devoted considerable effort to changing how clerics behaved, appeared, and performed their duties. By the twelfth century, education, formation, and discipline had produced mentalities and ways of life distinct enough from those of the laity for a notion of clerical-ness to emerge. One reason that scholars have been slow to acknowledge this is that in looking at clerical education, they have focussed on the better documented luminaries produced by cathedral schools and the early universities. The gulf between the learning of an Anselm or Abelard and that of a parish priest has been reasonably assumed to have been immense, and the sources for investigating the former are more abundant than for understanding the latter. But studies are illuminating this more rudimentary level of clerical education, and greater appreciation of the roles of memorization and textual communities have contributed to a more positive assessment of reform efforts from the Carolingian era on.<sup>33</sup> This less elite level of clerical education also fostered greater uniformity in clerical ideas and practices, chiefly through shared experiences and texts.

For the great majority of clerics, training for holy orders was a matter of apprenticing yourself to experienced clerics under the watchful discipline of a bishop. Indeed, saints' lives often record that a child was entrusted either to a particular bishop or to a see where the family had connections: the young Brun, later to become bishop of Cologne (953–965), was sent to Bishop Balderich of Utrecht while Ubaldus, later to become bishop of Gubbio (1129–60), was given over as a child to the cathedral church where his paternal uncle was a canon. The training received was frequently described, as in the case of Ubaldus, as studying *divinas litteras* and being 'brought up under ecclesiastical discipline'.<sup>34</sup> What this usually meant was a long liturgical internship: participatory learning was the norm.<sup>35</sup> First the psalms were learned through recitation and rote memorization. This knowledge, reinforced through hearing the divine office, was the basis for learning Latin grammar. One learned to read through the psalter. Further knowledge of scripture was surely gained first through the liturgy, and those destined for rural parishes may not have progressed much beyond the texts read, most intensively in the minor order of lector, within the context of the mass.

The liturgical character of clerical education was codified during the Carolingian reforms with the production of commentaries on the liturgy. What both secular and ecclesiastical leaders wanted in the eighth and ninth centuries was for clerics 'to know and understand liturgical texts and rituals, especially those of the Roman rite'.<sup>36</sup> This provoked a veritable flood of liturgical treatises, with the most influential being the *De institutione clericorum libri tres* of Rabanus Maurus (d. 856) and the *Liber officialis* of Amalarius of Metz (d. c.850). Both were writing their commentaries in the wake of the 816 reform council held in Aachen, and Amalarius overtly dedicated his to its convener, Louis the Pious. Rabanus' *De institutione* grew out of his experience of teaching at the abbey of Fulda but his dedication of the work to Archbishop Aistulf of Mainz reflects its general utility in the education and supervision of clerics.<sup>37</sup> These works are written in a simple, straightforward Latin style. They include brief chapters on the ranks and orders of the clergy, sacred vestments, the mass, the sacraments, the divine offices, and the chief feasts of the liturgical year. Simple



meanings—for example, the mass as an embassy between men and God with the priest offering the prayers and supplications of the people to the Lord—and practical instructions were emphasized.

Indeed, the relationship between these manuals and reform is clear in the chronology of their production. After these texts from the first half of the ninth century, there is a lull in the composition of liturgical commentaries until the genre was strongly revived in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In this period, bishops themselves were the primary authors. John of Ivry, for example, wrote his *De officiis ecclesiasticis* while bishop of Avranches (1060–7), announcing in its prologue his hope that it would contribute to the reform of his diocese.<sup>38</sup> At the end of the twelfth century, Bishop Sicard of Cremona (1185–1215) wrote his *Mitræ* for the education of his clergy, and this tradition reached its apogee in William Durandus's *Rationale*, written for the clergy of Mende when he was their bishop. Surviving in two recensions, the first c.1285 when Durandus was promoted to the see and the second more widely diffused edition in 1291 when he actually came to Mende, the *Rationale* was used as a standard textbook for the rest of the middle ages.<sup>39</sup>

Moreover, if we take these texts as indicators of what clerics should know, standards were clearly rising from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries: the Carolingian era commentaries are shorter and simpler than those of the second wave, which incorporate more scriptural passages and use *distinctiones* to enumerate meanings. Amalarius of Metz and Hrabanus Maurus in the early ninth century, for example, posit single meanings for the vestment called the amice or humeral. Since it goes around the neck, Amalarius explains that it is a reminder to control speech, while Rabanus sees it as a symbol of the purity of good works since it is made of white linen.<sup>40</sup> Honorius Augustodunensis, however, in his liturgical commentary the *Gemma animæ* (c.1097–1110), assigns meanings to every part of the amice. He tells us that it stands for hope of heaven but goes on to specify that:

through the edges of the humeral we understand that faith and works are connected in two ways to hope: both cross the breast, one showing and the other hidden, because faith and works are joined in one, but faith is hidden in the heart whereas works are manifest for the instruction of those around us. For one end is concealed and the other is visible because our works shine forth for others whereas our intention before God is hidden within. The breast is girded by the humeral because it is through hope for our celestial home that perverse thoughts are restrained in the heart of the priest. The two ties that fasten the amice across the breast are fear of punishment and the desire for life, which the Holy Spirit engraves on our heart. This vestment is white because all things are brilliant in the presence of the Lord.<sup>41</sup>

While the legislation of both periods of reform might give the impression that the same abuses and problems were rampant—and therefore, that any ‘progress’ in the ninth century had been obliterated in the tenth—these educational aids indicate a definite ratcheting up of expectations.

Other kinds of texts suggest reasons why this was possible and illuminate the spiritual formation of clerics that paralleled their educations. Clerical manuals or ‘priest books’ are usually composite manuscripts that bring together various texts useful in parish ministry. Known exemplars date from the late eighth to eleventh centuries, but much work remains to be done on this genre. These manuals are usually quite modest volumes, both in size and in materials, using inferior quality parchment and defective leaves, in addition to showing ample evidence of hard use. Commonly they will include some canon law, an exposition of the mass, sermon *exempla*, and sundry liturgical materials (masses, prayers, *ordines* for visiting the sick or burying the dead).<sup>42</sup> There is sometimes overlap between the liturgical commentaries and these more miscellaneous volumes, with copies of sections on the orders of the clergy included or the parts on vestments. But one of the things distinctive and



valuable about the ‘priest books’ is that they include prayers and brief texts of a more devotional character.

Vesting prayers are a good example. These brief prayers that clerics said as they put on liturgical garments in preparation for the mass are sometimes found in ‘priest books,’ but were also copied on the flyleaves or margins of sacramentaries and missals.<sup>43</sup> Usually the prayers are attached to the opening of the *ordo missae*, a text giving condensed instructions for the saying of daily mass. They are often strongly penitential in character: ‘Omnipresent and eternal God’, one prayer for donning the alb intoned, ‘I humbly beseech you in order that having cast off the deception of all evasions and put on this white garment, I might be worthy to follow you into the realm of true joy’ (*Circumdame domine fidei armis ut ab iniquitatum sagittis erutus, valeam aequitatem et iustitiam custodire*).<sup>44</sup> But most summon the virtues clerics were supposed to cultivate in order to be worthy to offer sacrifice for the community. When putting on the maniple, a short band of cloth draped over the left arm, the cleric prayed, ‘Give me, O Lord, right understanding and a pure voice so that I might be able to accomplish your praise’ (*Ad fanonem. Da mihi, Domine, sensum rectum et uocem puram, ut implere possim laudem tuam*).<sup>45</sup> Ritually these prayers constructed the virtuous celebrant.

What is pertinent here to the emergence of a distinctive clerical culture in medieval Europe is the chronology of their emergence and their relationship to Carolingian initiatives to improve the clergy. As in the last prayer cited, many drew on words and imagery in the liturgical commentaries composed to prepare men for the priesthood. In his discussion of the maniple, which was derived from the Roman handkerchief or *sudarium*, Amalarius of Metz had explained its use to clean away impurities. This vestment, he instructed, ‘means zeal for purifying [our] thoughts...’.<sup>46</sup> The composer of the vesting prayer took this lesson that the cleric was supposed to learn from the textbook of the liturgical commentary and turned it into an active, individual practice that was repeated every time the vestment was put on. Something learned intellectually became a routinized devotion, a cultural practice. The manuscripts thus far studied suggest that this transformation of more formal educational materials into spiritual practices occurred from the late ninth century, with examples becoming common and widely diffused during the eleventh century. Such shared practices were equally, and perhaps even more, important to the emergence of a pan-European clerical culture as the shared knowledge that even a rudimentary clerical education imparted.

The role of objects was also considerable. It’s not surprising that Guibert of Nogent referred to his attire when he first used the word *clericaliter*. A spirituality of sacred vestments emerged in the Carolingian era and was intensified and used by reformers of the eleventh century to make new claims for clerical status and authority. In addition to the devotion of vesting prayers, vestments were used in ordination and consecration rites as potent symbols of the powers of the various orders and offices of the clergy. The vestments associated with holy clerics were venerated, and in some cases even worn as reliquary garments. New insignia—such as the episcopal mitre—were developed in the eleventh century and quickly became controversial symbols of clerical pretensions to rule.<sup>47</sup> One of the most popular satires of the twelfth century, Nigel of Longchamp’s *Mirror of Fools* (*Speculum stultorum*), has its asinine protagonist bray that after one term’s study at Paris he wants to be a bishop in order to wear the mitre!<sup>48</sup>

But Guibert was not likely to have been referring to liturgical garb, despite his use of *infulatus*, since his story was about his tutor and it was not set in a church. He surely meant the long, dark, closed gown (*cappa clausa*)—the forerunner of the modern soutane or

cassock—that visually distinguished clerics outside of the sanctuary by the twelfth century. Although the desire to distinguish clerics by their clothing is evident as early as the sixth century, over the early middle ages there was little unanimity on what they should wear. Prohibitions of clerics bearing arms and wearing military garb were often repeated in early medieval councils, but what constituted ‘indecent clothing’ is not further specified. By the eighth century, the concept of a clerical ‘habit’ seems to have formed with canons enjoining the wearing of the *tunica sacerdotale* or ‘clerical clothes’.<sup>49</sup> What ‘clerical clothes’ looked like, however, ranged from an alb not used for the liturgy to a chasuble-like garment called the *caracalla*. Given the varied evidence of what was recognized as clerical attire, it is perhaps unsurprising that in the ninth century people still had difficulty in identifying priests beyond the confines of their churches. A canon of the council of Trebra in Thuringia (895) that was incorporated into later manuscript copies of the *Admonitio synodalis* admonished, ‘Let priests not go about without wearing a stole or *orarium*. And if priests when traveling without a stole are robbed, wounded, or killed, let simple compensation be paid; if with a stole, triple’.<sup>50</sup> This directly contradicts, of course, other canons restricting the stole to liturgical use, but it does suggest that reasonable doubt arose in legal cases about whether a criminal knew the ecclesiastical status of his victim.

A major impediment to establishing a clerical ‘habit’ was surely the cost of clothing. Only the very wealthy were buried in garments: only 2–3 per cent of excavated burials yield evidence of the corpse having been clothed. For the mass of the population in early medieval Europe, garments were too valuable to be thrown away.<sup>51</sup> Since bishops even in the later middle ages did not provide clothing to their priests, they were hesitant about demanding that their clergy wear a particular garment. The constitutions of the clergy of Fiesole only required the ‘prelates of the diocese’ (*prelati dyocesis*, probably meaning the beneficed clergy), to wear the *cappa clausa*, and lesser clergy (*inferiori clerici*) were required simply to wear ‘seemly garments closed in front’ (*honesta et clausa desuper ... indumenta*).<sup>52</sup> With cost surely in mind, more emphasis was placed on the tonsure as the distinguishing visual sign of clerical status.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, reform councils of the late eleventh and twelfth centuries evinced new concerns about clerics wearing inappropriate clothing. From the 1130s, canons requiring the *cappa clausa* multiply, culminating in the Fourth Lateran’s canon 16 ‘on clerical clothing’.<sup>54</sup> Illuminated manuscripts of Gratian’s *Decretum* from the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries depict model clerics dressed in simple, alb-like tunics with fitted sleeves and a cloak closed at the neck or clasped at the shoulder and draping most of the body.<sup>55</sup>

The twelfth-century legislation and Lateran IV’s canon 16, interestingly, associated improper clerical clothing with other behaviours deemed un-clerical. Canon 16 begins:

Clerics should not practice callings or business of a secular nature, especially those that are dishonourable. They should not watch mimes, entertainers and actors. Let them avoid taverns altogether, unless by chance they are obliged by necessity on a journey. They should not play at games of chance or of dice, nor be present at such games. They should have a suitable crown and tonsure, and let them diligently apply themselves to the divine services and other good pursuits.<sup>56</sup>

The decree goes on to discuss clothing. While these other prohibitions of improper clerical behaviours were ancient and often repeated, it is significant that this legislation brings them all together, with the newer strictures on dress, to articulate broad norms of clerical deportment. A notion of clerical-ness had coalesced.

What difference did this make? Ever since Jacques Le Goff used the phrase *culture cléricale* as the opposite of *traditions folkloriques*, the idea of a clerical culture has served mainly to portray Christianity as an oppressive force in western European history.<sup>57</sup> This it

certainly could be and frequently was, but it is also obviously a very partial assessment. A more balanced understanding of clerical culture seems even more pressing since R. I. Moore, in his widely read synthesis on the central middle ages, posits the *clerici* as the greatest beneficiaries of his *First European Revolution* (2000). They formed a new intelligentsia and administrative class that came to power in the twelfth century as a result of rapid changes in European society. Moore brilliantly depicts the cultural cohesion and power of the clergy. Although he emphasizes the elite strata of university graduates, he rightly perceives that even the simple parish priest, with no Parisian or Bolognese education, was part of this brotherhood. The vertical distribution of the power and control of the clergy, from papal and royal courts all the way down to rural parishes, was essential to this 'first European revolution'.<sup>58</sup> Although Moore's depiction of the emergence and empowerment of a European-wide clerical culture has decidedly dark overtones, his nuanced account of the clergy's complex relations with lay elites positions us to reconsider the political heritage of eleventh-century reform.

Traditional accounts have tended to narrate this heritage as an ongoing conflict of Church and State over who's on top: after Henry IV versus Gregory VII, we have confrontations between Henry II and Becket, Philip Augustus and Innocent III, and myriad minor local skirmishes until Philip the Fair bests Boniface VIII. This prize-fight approach to evaluating the long-term effects of the eleventh-century reform movements may communicate the fortunes of a particular Gregorian model of papal authority and the extreme claims for ecclesiastical status that sustained it. But it fails to capture the political repercussions of other aspects of reform. If the *clerici* were the administrative backbone of emergent states, moreover, how did their culture shape the political institutions and ideals of Europe? This seems a more productive line of inquiry. Moore's account and those of others emphasize the clergy's literacy and bureaucratic technologies of power such as *inquisitio*, law, and accountancy. But such skills were only a part of clerical culture and to clerics, not necessarily the most important part. They were means, not ends.

For the clerical culture visible in 'priest books' and liturgical commentaries, whilst largely about the correct performance of ritual, is also about virtue. Exhortations to virtuous conduct suffuse the commentaries, and devotions like vesting prayers transformed these into repeated invocations of a highly personal nature. These clerical notions about virtue were as much part of the 'essential stock of materials' out of which western political institutions and ideals were built as were literacy and law. While earlier accounts too simplistically accorded Christianity a beneficent role in these historical processes, more recent revisions have swung the interpretive pendulum rather hard the other direction: for example, Christendom in Robert Bartlett's *Making of Europe* is largely a geography marked by recognition of papal authority and performance of the Latin liturgy. The Church was a 'machinery of authority and communication' and an identity, rather than anything recognizably religious.<sup>59</sup> The makers of Europe were aristocratic families who turned new military technologies into political power. Thomas N. Bisson's focus on lordship, while most interested in these same families and their zeal for domination, offers nonetheless a fruitful category of analysis for reconsidering the political consequences of the emergence of this distinctive, European-wide clerical culture. Most of Bisson's examples of good lordship, in fact, involve clerics and at points in his narrative of the 'crisis of lordship' he intimates that clerical domains 'were comparatively, perhaps conspicuously, free of the harsh customs that accompanied the spread of lay lordship'.<sup>60</sup> This generalization may be too optimistic an assessment, but many ecclesiastics decried the brutality of their lay counterparts and some tried to articulate other ways of wielding power.

Indeed, the writings of many educated and articulate clerics reveal an active engagement with questions of how power should be virtuously exercised: they were not unreflective about the tensions between the prayers they said and the duties that came with their offices. Peter the Venerable wrote about how serfs should be treated, and Bishop Fulcher of Chartres reflected on the duties of vassals to do good (not just refrain from evil).<sup>61</sup> I've argued elsewhere that clerics articulated a model of lordship that was markedly less violent than that of lay lords and that was suffused with their own notions of virtue and justice.<sup>62</sup> But just as it is useful to descend from the heady accomplishments of the cathedral schools to the more basic lessons of liturgical commentaries, and from theological treatises to the mentalities implicit in everyday prayers, it is worth studying the more mundane aspects of ecclesiastical lordship to assess whether or how clerical ideas about virtue affected the exercise of power. The *clerici*, after all, were as interested in reforming society as they were in reforming themselves: the souls of all were at stake. The urgency of this broader mission escalated from the apocalyptic admonitions of Gregory VII to Jean Gerson's calls for *reformatio in capite et in membris* to the godly communities of sixteenth-century reformers. Were mechanisms of personal formation and discipline forged by the medieval clergy the tools used to create the 'disciplinary societies' of the modern world?



# NOTES

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# CHAPTER 19

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# INTELLECTUALS AND THE MASSES

## *Oxen and She-asses in the Medieval Church*

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PETER BILLER

### THE INQUISITOR

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ON 16 March 1394 the inquisitor Peter Zwicker was in the Baltic sea-port city of Szczecin, questioning followers of the heretics called Waldensians. With the first person to appear in front of him that day Zwicker began as he always did, with the form-filling questions. What is your name? Answer: Herman Wegener. Where were you born? Answer: Groß Wubiser (now Nowe Objezierze), a village forty miles to the south of Szczecin. Herman told Zwicker he was a servant, and Zwicker ploughed on with the questions. Eventually he turned to Herman's belief in the articles of faith taught by the heretics. What did you hear and believe? But the questioning soon stopped. Zwicker was without a notary that day, writing everything down himself, and this is what he wrote about Herman. 'Because he was thick and ignorant, the inquisitor passed over the other articles' (*quia stolidus fuit et ignarus, ideo inquisitor alios articulos petransiit*).<sup>1</sup>

Sizing people up in terms of their intelligence will have been encouraged by Zwicker's earlier experience and career. He had been rector of the town school of Zwickau, before becoming a Bachelor of Arts at the University of Prague (1379) and at an unknown later date—as we infer from his high theological learning and use of the title *magister*—Master in Theology. The depositions of his interrogations in Szczecin show this penchant. Occasionally he recorded his view of the low mental capacity of a believer in heretics and the slightness of their rootedness in the articles of the heretics. He then curtailed the questioning.

In the education of a student in theology at a university, there was a particular moment when he was taught about believers who were simple and was given a simple division of the Church into two *blocs*; *bloc* is not a medieval term, but nonetheless helps capture this mode of thinking about people as divided according to their ability to understand. This was during the lectures expounding and commenting on the key textbook that was on the syllabus alongside the bible, the *Four Books of the Sentences* of Peter Lombard. Since it coloured the thought of all theology students, not just Zwicker, it is translated here, and we shall return to it later in this chapter.

The Lombard's *Sentences* begins with the faith of believers in the past, before Christ's revelation, and moves on from the past to the present: to the faith of simple or stupid people in the Church today. Headed 'On the faith of simple people', the chapter starts with a question:

What therefore should be said about those simple people, to whom the mystery of the incarnation had not been revealed, who piously believed what was handed down to them? It could be said that no-one was just or saved, to whom the revelation has not been made, whether clear or veiled, in the open, or under a mystery. Clear, as to Abraham and Moses and other elders, who had clear grasp of the articles of faith. Veiled, as to the simple people to whom it had been revealed that they should believe those things that these elders believed and taught—things, however, of which they did not have a manifest grasp.



At this point the discussion adopts the present tense:

Similarly, there *are* some people in the church who are less able, who cannot clearly grasp and explain articles of the Creed but still believe all the things that are contained in the Creed. For they believe things that they do not know, having a faith veiled in mystery. Similarly *then*, on the basis of the revelation that had been made to them, those who were less able believed, clinging on to the elders, to whom they as it were entrusted their faith. Whence Job [1.14]: ‘The oxen were ploughing and the she-asses feeding beside them’. The simple and lesser people *are* the she-asses feeding beside the oxen, because by humbly clinging to the elders they believed under a mystery those things which the elders were teaching under a mystery.<sup>2</sup>

The ‘less able’ in the Church today are the less capable, the *minus capaces*. Our inquisitor continued to think in the same language when transposing the polarity ‘elders/ less able’ to the heretics and believers of the sect he was trying to repress. A year after Peter Zwicker stopped interrogating in Szczecin he was down in upper Austria, writing an open letter warning authorities about the danger of the Waldensian heretics. After listing the heretics’ erroneous articles he said that their followers believed these more or less, according to their ‘capacities’.<sup>3</sup>

## INTELLECTUALS

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There is a large area of modern thought, with its own vocabulary and concerns, dealing with intellectuals and intelligentsias and their role in society. In one of its sub-sectors in the second half of the twentieth century, it exported the word ‘intellectuals’ into the writing of medieval history. While modern intellectuals were smoking Gauloises, reading *Le Monde* in the cafés of the left-bank in Paris, and ‘engaging’ in criticism of French colonial action in Algeria, one of the intellectuals, the *Annaliste* historian Jacques le Goff, was writing a book. The book’s title—*Les intellectuels au moyen âge* (1957)—projected intellectuals back into the middle ages. These intellectuals in their earliest phase were rootless, alienated, and critical—in the middle ages, then, but still in some ways modern. Medieval intellectuals, if not this particular take on them, became an established field, and the modern vocabulary became naturalized in books on the middle ages. In 1973, men in the schools discussing the conflict between Becket and Henry II were the ‘Intellectuals in Politics’ of a monograph’s sub-title, while a chapter entitled ‘The Intellectual Elite’, in a book published in 1978, depicted intellectuals as snobs, looking down on ‘the lower class’.<sup>4</sup>

Continuing this conversation between modern and medieval, and now more than half a century after Le Goff, we are spoilt for choice. Which historian’s or sociologist’s line on modern intellectuals shall we carry back with us into the past? Here the selection is John Carey, whose *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880–1939* (1992) supplies a title to this chapter and its question. How might this modern literary critic’s terms and approach illuminate medieval Christianity’s intellectuals? Carey examined a group of modern *litterati*, who looked out on what they saw as relatively undifferentiated masses of people, and regarded the masses’ lack of culture with disdain. So, let us cart Carey back with us into the middle ages, and envisage masters and students of theology as our ‘intellectuals’, and ‘simple’ adherents to faith as our ‘masses’. We shall look at a mode of thought—theologians thinking about people in general *blocs*—and we shall delve more deeply into the university lectures that dealt with ‘On the faith of simple people’. This is a game, and the choice is arbitrary. Consequently, in a postlude we shall point to a few other ways of conducting a conversation between medievals and moderns on the theme of clerical intellectuals and the masses.

Let us first define the oxen. They were the theologians among those masters and students who began to be seen in larger numbers in the decades after 1100 in urban centres such as Laon, Orleans, Chartres, and Paris, and from around 1200 in the theology schools of the institutions which came to be called *studia generalia*, and later on universities. These theology schools went hand in hand with the proliferation of universities, in France, England, Italy, and Spain in the thirteenth and first half of the fourteenth centuries, and then in northern, central, and eastern Europe in the 150 years after the foundation of Prague in 1348. Mingling with and also adjoining the secular masters and students of these schools of theology are the masters and students of the new mendicant Orders of the thirteenth century, especially the Dominicans, Franciscans, and Augustinians. Some of their theologians taught in the university schools, their own highest centres of learning were also called *studia generalia*, and their programmes of instruction in arts and theology were essentially similar.

The twelfth and thirteenth centuries had seen a revolution, as theology was steadily turned into a science.<sup>5</sup> Theological texts of the early twelfth century had often been no more than anthologies of authoritative statements and opinions from the past, ‘sentences’. The following decades saw the organization of these by topics, then the occasional intrusion of formal questions such as ‘What is a sacrament?’, and later the earliest simple examples of the formal question, with the statements of thesis and counter-thesis and their resolution in the response. In the middle of the century Peter Lombard produced a brilliant work in which theological topics and sentences were brought together in a logically organized instant data-retrieval textbook, the *Four Books of the Sentences*, and thereafter the plan of this work influenced the shape of most general theological treatises. The internal structure of the formal question became ever more complex. By the early fourteenth century, a question raised on the *Sentences* had such an elaborate structure that one needs to take notes on its architecture before trying to read it, while the comprehension of most sentences requires not only mental agility but also easy familiarity with many technical terms in logic. By this time, of course, a progression had long been established, in which theologians took an Arts course beforehand, where the set texts included Aristotle’s logical and natural-philosophical works, and also eventually the *Ethics* and sometimes the *Politics*. Many of the scholastic questions would also import into theological discussion the newly translated texts of Greek and Arabic ‘natural philosophy’ (science) and Arabic medicine. Theology was now a science, and a science of extraordinary intellectual span, complexity, and difficulty.

One academic exercise that flourished in Paris from the middle of the thirteenth to the early fourteenth century was the raising and determination of *quodlibet* [‘what you will’] questions. Scanning the range of topics dealt with in these ‘whatever you want’ miscellanies provides one with a quick keyhole glimpse of the theologians’ interests. Most of the topics raised are very abstract. Thus nearly all of Hervé Nédellec’s *quodlibets* of 1308 were questions such as ‘Whether action is in the agent’, ‘Whether the supernatural exists’ and ‘Whether God can make matter without form’. But one of his questions—‘Whether there must be restitution of everything that has been stolen’—moves the responder and his audience straight into the gritty everyday problems handled by a priest in confession. Throughout our period—and however high and technical the level and language of their discussion—the sacraments formed one large topic directly and closely related to the daily work of the Church in all the parishes of Latin Christendom. In fact, concrete moral theological issues enjoyed a brief period of dominance in the theology of the Paris schools, around 1200, before subsiding to being a minority interest as the great metaphysical issues raised by Greek and Arabic philosophy came to dominate. But they always remained there, providing direct instruction for those seculars whose later careers were mainly pastoral. And with the advent of the mendicant Orders the instrumental purpose of high theological

instruction was a matter both of self-consciousness and exceptionally efficient educational organization. One Dominican likened their learning and action to archery: ‘first the bow is bent in study, then the arrow is released in preaching’.<sup>6</sup> Some Dominicans were the ‘common brothers’, preaching and hearing confessions, but the echelons above them contained the brighter ones, selected and fast-tracked into their higher centres of learning, where many of them not only lectured but wrote. A very high proportion of the most significant work in the thirteenth century came from these men—such as lists of corrections to the text of the Latin bible and encyclopaedic compilations incorporating new knowledge of the natural world and medicine. But the friars saw all of this—however learned—as instrumental in and subordinate to their pastoral work.

## THE OXEN LOOK AT *BLOCS* IN THE WORLD

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When discussing the sacraments, the masters had in mind the ‘simple faithful’ (*fideles simplices*), grouped into the parishes of the around 500 dioceses of Latin Christendom. Their views of these had a wider geographical setting. When the masters turned their gaze towards what lay beyond the borders of Latin Christendom, they looked out on a world of peoples who were the *fideles* of different ‘faiths’ or ‘laws’. During the high middle ages this map acquired more definition and colouring. Increasing knowledge of the peopling of the three known continents through trade and travel (in particular the mendicant missions to the Mongols and the first contacts with China) accompanied closer grappling with other faiths and laws, especially those of Mahomet, the Mongols, and heresies. The resulting world view of other faiths had a reflexive effect on the view of one’s own *fideles*. They were cut down in size vis-à-vis the others. In the early fourteenth century a Dominican could write of Christians forming no more than one tenth, perhaps only a twentieth, of the world.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, within Latin Christendom and in the mid-thirteenth century, a Franciscan, who had provided an account of countries and regions drawing primarily upon classical geography, pasted onto it generalizations about the quality of different peoples’ piety and morals; we shall return to these later.

Within Latin Christendom there was the fundamental division of the *fideles* into two *blocs* in the church defined according to status and function. In the fundamental definition of Gratian’s *Decretum*, in one *bloc* were the clergy (carrying out divine office) and the religious (dedicated to prayer and contemplation), and in the other *bloc* lay people (possessing temporal things, permitted to marry, tilling the earth, judging between man and man, litigating, placing offerings on altars, and paying tithes). Running parallel to this was the division into two *blocs*, according to education and intelligence, of those who could understand faith and those who could not.<sup>8</sup> Here we return to look more closely at ‘On the faith of simple people’, and how it developed over time.

## ‘ON THE FAITH OF THE SIMPLE PEOPLE’: DEVELOPMENT OF THOUGHT

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In the early twelfth century the ordinary gloss on the bible had collected a figurative interpretation of the oxen and she-asses drawn from Gregory the Great’s late sixth-century *Moralia in Job*,<sup>9</sup> and in the 1130s Hugh of St Victor spelled out the mode of belief of

simple people. They believe by believing in other people—believing in those who know and believe more perfectly.<sup>10</sup> Peter Lombard put together his text around 1157–8. The next significant step came in a work written between 1215 and 1229, probably after 1218. This was William of Auxerre's *Summa aurea*. By this time concentrated thought on the two different faiths of those who did and those who did not understand had given birth to two succinct phrases, and these supplied the title of William's discussion: 'On implicit and explicit faith'. William now spelled out the division into two *blocs* with crystal clarity:

The oxen are the preachers or prelates... the she-asses are said to be simple people, who ought to rely on what is said by their elders. The sense therefore is that the prelates should instruct the simple, and the simple ought to rely on their faith, for it is sufficient for the simple to believe some articles explicitly and others implicitly... To believe implicitly is to believe that what the Church teaches is true.<sup>11</sup>

The next stage is diffusion. Though written in the mid-twelfth century, Peter Lombard's *Sentences* had to wait in Paris until the 1220s to enter the syllabus. Thereafter it was *the* text, alongside the bible. Right up until Luther's student days, in the lecture halls of universities and mendicants' *studia*, the theology masters hammered the contents of the *Sentences* into students' minds, in lectures which often showed their reading of one of the most popular of all medieval theological books, though not formally a syllabus text—William's *Summa aurea*. The archaeological survivals are the many thousands of still extant manuscripts containing the *Sentences* and their commentaries. This is the first fundamental point about 'On the faith of simple people', 'implicit and explicit faith' and oxen and she-asses: the hard-wiring of the outlook articulated by these phrases into the minds of many thousands of high and late medieval theology masters and students. The fact insisted upon here is of course a fact about the lens through which these theologians looked, not about the very mixed reality of the culture and education of later medieval lay people. In this respect it has some resemblance to the general disdain for the lack of culture of the masses evinced by John Carey's literary intellectuals.

Secondly, the commentaries published by theology masters provide us with glimpses of the vocabulary they used and the topics they raised in their lectures. Some referred to Peter Lombard's *simplices* as 'the common people' (*populus communis*), and they spelled out their types of mental simplicity. There was, for example the simplicity of a person 'who through his stupidity and grossness of understanding cannot comprehend subtle things', or of someone who is 'so stupid that he cannot grasp what "nature" is'.<sup>12</sup> There was recognition that there are 'many people of little understanding but great devotion'.<sup>13</sup> Some lecturers used a stock figure to represent the simple lay person when raising a problem about their faith for debate. This was the *vetula*, the little old woman. Suppose that this little old woman is pious and very respectful of her parish priest. As a consequence, her 'implicit faith' consists in her believing what her parish priest says. There follows the brain-teaser. What is one to say about her belief and her responsibility for what she believes if, in fact, her priest says erroneous things?<sup>14</sup>

Some of the commentaries conjure up the contemporary pastoral scene. The Oxford theology lecturer Richard Fishacre stated that more is now required of simple people, because there is more now that is preached explicitly and clearly.<sup>15</sup> A Dominican himself, and talking in the mid-1240s, Fishacre was clearly alluding here to the great change brought about in the previous twenty years by the preaching of the new Orders of friars, which is discussed further below. Commentaries in these years rested upon the fairly straightforward equation between animals and groups, the oxen as prelates and preachers, the she-asses the simple common people. But eventually the simple common people were joined by another



*bloc*, that of *curati simplices*, ‘simple or ignorant priests’.<sup>16</sup> The language and category is that of the ‘ignorant’ priests whose instruction was being addressed by contemporary conciliar and synodal legislation in England and France, most famously by the 1281 constitution of John Pecham, archbishop of Canterbury, ‘On the instruction of simple priests’ (*De informatione simplicium sacerdotum*).

In another development, doctrines or articles of faith soon came to be weighed on two different scales. One was how difficult the article was to understand. The other was how widely and commonly it was preached. When importing the theme into his inquisitors’ treatise (written by 1376), Nicholas Eymeric reverted to the quality and condition of the believers themselves. Literate lay people were under an obligation to believe more than illiterate ones, just as those who heard the word of God every day were bound more than countrymen, who heard it more rarely.<sup>17</sup> The primary measure—how widely something was known—dominated commentators’ thought about those articles in which even the stupid needed to have explicit belief, even if they were difficult to understand. There would be a quartet or quintet of doctrines from the Creed: the Trinity, and Christ’s birth, death, resurrection, and coming to judgement. These formed a minimum of doctrines in which explicit belief was required even from the stupid. Here the *Sentences*’ commentators were bearing in mind contemporary legislation on the minimum requirements of the laity.<sup>18</sup>

Some of the commentators raised the question of the possibility of heresy being imputed to a simple person who was questioned about difficult matters. In his discussion of the simple, Albert the Great raised and discussed a case where lay people were ‘relinquished’ as heretics—meaning that they were sent off to be burnt to death—because they could not distinguish between certain articles of faith. With surprising force he wrote that it was the inquisitors themselves who ought to be burnt for showing such lack of understanding.<sup>19</sup> We are taken aback—until we remember how the German nobility had been scandalized by Conrad of Marburg’s attempted persecution of perfectly orthodox German nobles, and that the Dominican Albert came from a southern German knightly family. In general the mendicant commentators were very aware of contemporary heresies and the activities of those of their fellow friars who wrote about heresy and acted as inquisitors, interrogating and sentencing heretics. Let us turn to theologians thinking in *blocs* in this field.

The general picture is well known—churchmen had fitfully discerned heresies in parts of Latin Christendom in the first half of the eleventh century, and they became more worried in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Notions of illiteracy and stupidity played a large part in their view of themselves and of heretics. In their earlier writings they held up two *blocs*, literate and learned churchmen opposed to illiterate and stupid heretics.<sup>20</sup> This duality persisted in some texts, especially in polemical theological treatises that branded heretical opponents as stubborn idiots. But a larger role came to be allocated to a two-fold division of heretics themselves. The fully-fledged heretics who preached were cunning and clever, and their believers were simple people whom they led astray. In letters and treatises, the fully-fledged heretics are the ravening wolves of Matthew 7.15, donning sheep’s clothing in order to deceive simple sheep.

Churchmen trying to categorize heretics and their believers in the legislation of mid-thirteenth-century Languedoc took great pains to itemize those *acts* which denoted a believer in heresy. In part this was rooted in contemporary legal opinion. Lawyers saw a problem in dealing legally with an inner mental disposition (such as treachery or heresy) rather than an action (such as theft or murder), and their view was that proofs (*indicia*) should be sought in those actions that correlated to what was in hearts and minds. But this concentration on actions was also rooted in the parallelism between the division in the



Church between the preachers and the simple faithful, and the division in a heretical sect between full heretics and simple believers. The legislation laid little emphasis on the beliefs articulated by an individual believer in a heretical sect. The question put to someone appearing before an inquisitor was, did the person believe that the heretics were good men and that one could be saved with them? Here in mid-thirteenth-century Languedoc the legislators and inquisitors did what Peter Zwicker was to do in the 1390s. transposing the structure of how they thought about the ‘implicit faith’ of simple Catholic lay people, who believed what their priests believed, to the structure of their thought about a sect, in which ordinary people believed what the heretics believed.

One of the most discussed registers of inquisition in modern scholarship is that of two Dominican inquisitors, Bernard of Caux and John of St Pierre, who interrogated over 5,000 possible believers in heresy in 1245–6.<sup>21</sup> At one stage in their education in a Dominican *studium*, these two friars will have been taken through the *Sentences*. As we have seen, the *Sentences* commentators did not entirely remove the obligation of ‘explicit faith’ from the ordinary lay person, however simple he or she was. They reserved, in fact, a quarter or quintet of doctrines that had to be believed explicitly, however difficult they were. Interrogating possible believers, most of the time Bernard and John concentrated on the acts that denoted a heretical ‘lay’ person, leaving belief to the cover-all of ‘implicit faith’ in listening to heretics and believing what they said or that they were good men. But they did spend a little time on belief. To be specific, they put questions about a quintet of doctrines that the heretics preached: about visible things (that God had not made them); about the sacred host (that it is not the body of Christ); about baptism and marriage (that they do not have power for salvation); about resurrection of the flesh (that it will not be).<sup>22</sup> Through questions about these doctrines the friars explored believers’ ‘explicit faith’. The fact that it was of so much less interest to them is striking testimony to the pervasiveness of medieval churchmen’s dismissive view of all ordinary people, whether adherents of parish priests or of heretics: a *bloc* of *simplices*.

## TYPOLOGIES OF MORAL BEHAVIOUR ACCORDING TO ESTATE

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The effectiveness of mendicants’ explanations of doctrine, and the direction of Pecham’s instructional constitution that were alluded to in lectures on the *Sentences*, provide keyhole glimpses of later stages in the general pastoral revolution experienced by the Church in the century following the Third and Fourth Lateran Councils of 1179 and 1215. At the beginning there was awareness of a general crisis, the symptoms of which were the poverty of instruction of parish priests, the lack of preaching in the church, and what these two failings produced—heresy. Attempts to remedy the first included the attempts to improve education through the provision of a master providing free instruction in each cathedral church (Lateran III, c.18), instructional tracts for priests (such as Pecham’s constitution) disseminated through synodal and conciliar legislation, and the constitution *Cum ex eo* (1298) dispensing parish priests to be absent while studying at university. Looking back with the licence of hindsight, historians have tended to set these within a long duration, seeing the institution of seminaries after the Council of Trent as the first really effective major step forward in the education of secular priests, and pointing to the rise of the mendicant Orders in the early thirteenth century as the medieval Church’s principal answer to the crisis.

The notion of a Church crisis around 1200 and its solution through the rise of the mendicant Orders became a commonplace of hagiography and art from the mid-thirteenth century, found first of all in the lives of their founders, St Dominic and St Francis. The pressing need of the universal Church was seen by the pope, Innocent III, in a dream. He was asleep, the church of St John Lateran was falling down, but St Dominic had come along and his shoulders were supporting the building. The story is the same in lives of St Francis, apart from the substitution of St Francis for St Dominic.<sup>23</sup> The meaning was transparent, a pontiff sleeping (= secular clergy unaware of the danger and not on the job); in the church of St John Lateran (= the whole Church); this church is falling down (= the pastoral crisis). The commonplace was further disseminated in depictions of St Dominic's and St Francis's lives on the walls of churches. With the telescoping of successive actions common to both modern cartoons and individual scenes in medieval narrative painting, the hero (St Francis or St Dominic) has run along (= the foundation of the Franciscan or the Dominican Order). The walls of the church that had been falling down are now being propped up by the saint in question and the Church is no longer collapsing (= the effective pastoral work of the Order).<sup>24</sup> If this was a counter-reformation, in the thirteenth century, then the Jesuits of this earlier period of crisis were the mendicant friars.

As we have noted, the common brothers (*fratres communes*) who formed the majority of the friars were occupied in preaching and hearing confessions, and from the 1220s on there was a great outpouring of specialist literature written to help them be effective in these two tasks. If they had envisaged the lay people who listened and confessed to them as nothing but a mass of she-asses, differentiated only by degrees of education and intelligence from the oxen, the benefit of their ministry would have been circumscribed from the start. Accordingly, these pastoral experts adopted and developed further a way of differentiating the whole mass into sub-groups, of differing estates (*status*), so that the topics of sermons, and the interrogations and penances of confession, could be tailored to them—and to their ability to 'believe'.

A few caveats are needed before looking at this differentiation. Differentiation into estates has a history which begins before the mendicant Orders, and there continued to be many writers using the estates theme who were not friars: the latter were simply very prominent among these writers. Secondly, among the friars themselves, all of their vast literary production can be and has been seen as pastoral aids (*pastoralia*), not just the preachers' and confessors' manuals. The 'encyclopaedias', for example, containing scientific material on the natural world that was God's creation, were from this point of view vast repositories of material for sermons. Thirdly, before turning to estates, let us sample briefly a few of the other ways of differentiating. One was by geography. As already mentioned, in a mid-thirteenth-century encyclopaedia that was to acquire immense readership in later centuries, one Franciscan—Bartholomew the Englishman—devoted a book to an alphabetical list of countries and regions, into which he inserted earlier material on their physical features and their peoples. His vast book-learning was displayed in his recycling of earlier, mainly classical, material. But at the same time another outlook was on display, his own and that of his pastoral readers, in the comments he added on devotion and morals. The people of Brabant are charitable, devout and benign; those of Denmark, naturally pious; of Flanders, pious and good to their servants; of Frisia, good at keeping their children chaste until the end of adolescence; of Normandy, pious; of Holland, moral, devout towards God and faithful to other men; in greater *Slavonia*, little concerned with the worship of God; in Scotland, superstitious; in Venice, allowing no sect to live there; and in Finland, practitioners of magical arts.<sup>25</sup> Another way of differentiating accompanied the rise in the presence and prestige of learned medicine. One author of an early thirteenth-

century confessors' manual suggested the priest needed to know medicine (*physica*) or at least consult physicians when imposing penance. Since the dominance of one particular humour in the body and a person's consequent constitution as sanguine, choleric, melancholic, or phlegmatic affected a person's lesser or greater proneness to sin, and therefore the degree of guilt, the priest needed medical expertise here in order to moderate the penance to be imposed.<sup>26</sup>

The most significant differentiation, however, was by estate. From around 1200 confessors' manuals had been showing a growing concern with classical rhetorical circumstances (*circumstantiae*) of both sin and individual sinner. The circumstances of a person included knowledge, age, and condition, and the manuals included verses that were mnemonics of such lists of circumstances. What was happening was a development in thought, reaching towards what we would term the 'social condition' of the particular Christian in question. Michaud-Quantin traced a change in the meaning of the key word, *status*, that was at the heart of this. In earlier Latin, as a 'social' category, *status* denoted 'the state in which one is'. It was never used in the plural: there were not 'estates'. In the thirteenth century it acquired a new meaning and it came to be used in the plural. It was 'functional'—and since it was used by moralists, 'ethico-functional'. In these plural *status*, different kinds of people were grouped by what they *did* or what their functions were. There was 'in large measure innovation both at the lexical and conceptual level: a new word to denote a new notion'.<sup>27</sup> The pastoral specialists, preachers, and confessors recognized that the Christians with whom they were dealing belonged to a certain number of well-defined groups whose members exercised different activities, and they were also living in a period that was seeing both the appearance of new professionally specialized groups and a conceptual development in categorizing them. Seeing the pastoral advantages, they adopted and developed the estates category in their pastoral literature.

While the 'to estates' (*ad status*) principle underpinned no more than three of the major thirteenth-century collections of model sermons (those of the secular Jacques de Vitry, the Franciscan Guibert de Tournai, and the Dominican Humbert de Romans), it had a stronger presence in confessors' manuals, structuring, for example, the immensely popular pocket-book *Confessionale* written by the Dominican John of Freiburg (after 1298), and providing the interrogatories in the section on confession in the *Priests' Aide-memoire* (*Memoriale presbiterorum* (1344)). The latter, for instance, included a detailed interrogatory for sailors, which included comment on their being prone to having a wife in every port. There were offshoots in other types of pastoral literature. Among these, the one that produced the most detailed and lengthy accounts of sins by estate was probably *On the plaint of the Church* (*De planctu ecclesiae*), written by the Iberian papal penitentiary Alvaro Pelayo (first recension 1330–2). This listed, for example, twenty-two typical vices of the peasants and agricultural labourers, and its sexual sins have been described as providing 'parts of an estates-map' of avoiding conception.<sup>28</sup>

A treatise written by Humbert of Romans (perhaps between 1270 and 1274) *On the Instruction of Preachers* is our final example, one which exemplifies the diagram we have been describing of the Church's intellectuals envisaging people in *blocs*.<sup>29</sup> The second part contains 100 model sermons for different groups of people, of which numbers 2–70 address the clergy and religious. Number 71 addresses all lay people and numbers 72–100 address individual lay estates. This is how Humbert introduces these latter sermons:

There are two kinds of men among the faithful of Christ, that is to say the clergy, who are superior in dignity and have to be more intelligent through their knowledge and holier than lay people, who abound less in these things. Further, in order to denote this distinction there are two parts in the churches of Christians, the choir which pertains to the clergy and the nave which pertains to lay

people. Further, as regards lay people, it should be noted that they ought not to reach up towards the scrutiny of the secrets of the faith which the clergy hold. Rather they should adhere implicitly, in accordance with this passage from Job—‘The oxen were ploughing and the she-asses feeding beside them’, which Gregory [the Great] expounds thus, saying that the she-asses, that is to say the simple, ought to be content with the doctrine of their elders.<sup>30</sup>

The example provided here of the lay estates are the concluding numbers 94–100. These are addressed to women, grouped thus: all women; noblewomen; rich townswomen; secular young girls and adolescents; maidservants of the rich; poor women living in villages; women evil in their bodies and prostitutes. All women are characterized by worldliness of outlook and lack of interest in faith, and there then follows a moral typology of each group of women. For example, rich townswomen love their children in a human way, they are only concerned with their living together in prosperity and household care (though some are slovenly about this), and they are not concerned with their own or their children’s or their husbands’ salvation. As for adolescent girls, ideally they should be reading the psalter. But in reality these young girls are obsessed with make-up, dress and personal appearance, spending their time on pop songs, dances, and gadding about.

The sequence in Humbert’s treatise, the general statement of duality followed by twenty-nine model sermons encapsulates what we have been examining in this chapter. The starting point was the Church’s intellectuals dividing Christians into two *blocs* or masses of people, seeing one *bloc* in a broadly undifferentiated way as ‘simple’, with the consequent low requirement of the faith it professed, part of which could be ‘implicit’. Secondly, a remarkable upsurge in pastoral professionalism and the desire to be pastorally effective led to the development of a literature which did differentiate this second *bloc* into sub-groups. Its contents, estates sermons and estates interrogatories, constituted a remote adumbration of the modern discipline of ‘pastoral sociology’. At the same time the statements made in this literature were typifications of the behaviour of groups: and, in this way, they were also essays in envisaging sub-*blocs* of people who were individually undifferentiated. And, in John Carey’s sense, regarded with disdain?

## POSTLUDE: OTHER MODERN-MEDIEVAL CONVERSATIONS ABOUT INTELLECTUALS

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*The Intellectuals and the Masses* is only one among various modern lines we could cart back into the middle ages. Prominent and also commonplace among modern approaches is one in which the political or sociological analyst places intellectuals and intelligentsias on a spectrum, at one point or another according to their views of and attitudes towards the existing political and social order. At one end of the register intellectuals maintain and uphold the existing order, in the middle they are engaged in criticizing and proposing reforms, and at the other end they are revolutionary. In the mid-nineteenth century Friedrich Engels saw medieval theologians as the providers of the ideology of the feudal social and political order. Something subtler could be twisted out of John Baldwin’s brilliant study of masters in theology at Paris in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century, *Masters, Princes and Merchants: The Social Views of Peter the Chanter and His Circle* (1970). Through moral theology and a remarkable interest in concrete cases, these masters looked out on the world in which they lived, sharply describing and analysing practices that ranged from selling rotten food in markets to the rights and wrongs of royal taxation. Their moral-critical views supplied the terminology and topics of pastoral work, especially in the confessors’ manual written by one member of the circle, Thomas of Chobham. The masters also



propounded ideas for general society. Two of their proposals—the reduction of the requirement of clerical celibacy and the use of imprisonment rather than capital punishment to contain heresy—came to nothing. But their criticisms of ordeals and the canon law of marriage were taken up in reforming general legislation, enacted at the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, which accelerated the decline of the ordeal in judicial process and expanded the prohibited degrees of relationship when contracting marriage from four to seven, thereby reducing the abuse (in their eyes) of over-easy divorce. Through their social criticisms, the impulse they gave to legislation reform, and their consequent effect on the lives of many ordinary people in Latin Christendom, these Paris masters can be placed on the middle part of the spectrum and labelled ‘reformist intellectuals’. One can also take the case of the late twelfth-century canon lawyers of Bologna, as presented in [Brian Tierney’s \*Medieval Poor Law\* \(1959\)](#). Distinguishing between giving money to the poor as an act of charity, which is voluntary, and as an act of justice, which has to be done, they argued for justice. Lecturing, debating, and writing during the prolonged famines of the 1190s, in a period when thieves were hanged, they analysed property. The consequence of arguing that in times of need property reverted to being in common was that a starving man who took a loaf of bread was not stealing it.<sup>31</sup> Continuing to play this game, should we label the Bologna canon-lawyers ‘left-wing intellectuals’?

While demonstrating the sheer longevity of what we might call left- and right-wing thought about poor relief may be helpful to modern debate about dealing with poverty, it is not clear that using modern labels for the Bologna lawyers or the Paris theologians provides us with a deeper understanding of them and their roles. Here a contrast may be provided by a Marxist thinker who no longer enjoys the vogue he had in the 1960s and 1970s, Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci and Gramscian vocabulary can be glimpsed in the publications of some of the brightest young luminaries in medieval scholarship in the 1970s—Jean-Claude Schmitt and Grado Merlo—but only fleetingly.<sup>32</sup> Let us conclude with this counterfactual conditional. How would the Church’s intellectuals have appeared if a Schmitt or a Merlo had followed these ideas further? The enterprise would have involved taking Gramsci’s views of ‘traditional’ and ‘organic’ intellectuals and trying them out on medieval data. Gramsci updated Marxism by allocating a large role to ideas and culture in the maintenance of rule, such that the non-elite classes could not conceive of any fundamental challenge to the *status quo*, a process he called ‘hegemony’. At the heart of this was what he labelled ‘recuperation’: the syphoning-up of elements of the culture of the ‘subaltern’ classes into the culture of the ruling group, which induced in these subaltern classes passive acceptance of that culture and the consequent continuation of their subaltern position. Traditional intellectuals, for Gramsci, are those whose ideological work is already embedded in the dominant class; ‘organic’ intellectuals allow the rising new social class out of which they have grown to assimilate and conquer the traditional ones ideologically (before, most likely, then becoming the ‘traditional’ ones themselves).<sup>33</sup> Applying this to the high middle ages we see how some sort of selection of friars and parish priests could have worked as ‘organic intellectuals’. A thirteenth-century Dominican or Franciscan supported and coloured his preaching of doctrines with stories, *exempla*, which sometimes contained ‘folkloric’ elements. Such stories could be seen as being part of the culture of the subaltern classes, while formally articulated Church doctrine could be seen as part of hegemonic culture. In this way mendicant sermons effected a ‘recuperation’; but perhaps also occasionally opened a space for resistance?

Thus the 1970s witnessed a possibility. Such historians *could have* shaken up the kaleidoscope of medieval clerical intellectuals and allowed us to see a wholly new arrangement of the little coloured pieces, thereby articulating a subtler and richer Marxist



view of the way the Church's intellectuals maintained hegemony. It did not happen and the moment passed; but as contemporary debate about the position of intellectuals in modern society continues, perhaps it is an area worth revisiting.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I am grateful to John Arnold for the stimulus of the invitation to write about medieval Christianity in terms of ‘intellectuals and the masses’. In 1982 I was one of the members of York’s History Department invited to teach in collaboration an undergraduate Comparative Special Subject on ‘Intelligentsias’. This was organized by my former colleague John Parker (1927–2013), an historian of medieval Byzantium and modern Russia and the Middle East. I owe much to the masterful introductory lecture in which John surveyed various positions of intelligentsias vis-à-vis their societies, from conservative support through reformist criticism to revolution and finally anarchism. I dedicate this chapter to his memory.

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# CHAPTER 20

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## ‘POPULAR’ RELIGIOUS CULTURE(S)

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LAURA A. SMOLLER

IN March 1454, in the Breton town of Dinan, a lawyer named Guillaume de Liquillic appeared before a panel of ecclesiastical authorities to testify about the sanctity of Vincent Ferrer, a charismatic Dominican preacher who had spent a week or so there some thirty-five years previously. After describing the friar’s sermons and his own brother’s cure by the holy man’s touch, Guillaume recounted a miracle experienced by his parents. Guillaume’s father, Jean, served as Dinan’s *miseor*, or official in charge of the town’s accounts and, thus, of expenditures in conjunction with Vincent’s preaching there. Thanks to his proximity to the friar, Jean had been able to procure the stubs of two candles used in Vincent’s daily celebration of mass. Several months later, just prior to the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Candlemass, 2 February), Guillaume’s mother sought these sacred relics in order to have new candles made to be blessed at the feast, ‘as was customary’. Candlemass celebrations entailed a procession with all members of the parish carrying lighted candles to offer to the priest; at the end of the service, each congregant received a blessed candle to take home, objects that were believed to have sacred powers. Guillaume’s mother, thus, had hoped to use Vincent’s candles in the Candlemass procession, but when she searched diligently for the tapers, they were not to be found. Some time later, however, Jean awakened to discover two candles burning on the chest where the tapers had been stored. As he learned, Vincent Ferrer had died that very hour, and Jean believed firmly that the candles—now found again—had been miraculously illuminated in honour of the holy friar’s death.<sup>1</sup>

Guillaume de Liquillic’s testimony illustrates a number of characteristics scholars have ascribed to ‘popular’ religion in the later middle ages: the veneration accorded to saints and holy people, the importance of miracles worked by saintly intercession, the role of the mendicant friars in preaching to large, responsive audiences, the increasing participation of the laity in the administration of religious activities, the centrality of the liturgical cycle in patterning life’s rhythms, the properties of so-called sacramentals (materials associated with the liturgy or blessed by the clergy), and the involvement of women in the devotional life of home and parish. But it also raises some of the problems involved in the study of popular religious cultures. Who are ‘the people’ whose religion is being studied here? Guillaume’s title, ‘licensed in the laws’, indicates his successful completion of a university degree in civil law and might imply his clerical status. His father held a position of some prominence in Dinan. Is their religion ‘popular’ or ‘elite’? What about Guillaume’s mother, who shared neither their education nor their titles? Does ‘popular’ religion equate with the experience of lay people in general? Or only of the illiterate or non-Latinate? And is ‘popular’ religion somehow different from ‘elite’ religion, whatever that is? Many scholars in the 1970s and 1980s thought so, while in recent years the pendulum has often swung in the direction of seeing a single, broadly-shared religious culture.

Guillaume’s testimony underscores the difficulties in parsing the situation in such black and white terms, however. True, the tale’s teller and actors may well have had a vastly different interpretation of the events from that of the bishop and abbot who were Guillaume’s audience. What mattered most to Guillaume and his parents, after all, seems to have been the candles themselves—powerful relics of a man whom all considered to be a saint. For the commissioners investigating Vincent Ferrer’s sanctity, however, the crucial

fact must have been the *supernatural* lighting of the candles at the holy man's death, a miraculous sign of God's favour. And yet, a set of religious ideas, beliefs, stories, and practices shared by Guillaume and his interlocutors gave his tale additional depth and meaning for both narrator and audience. For the miracle's power to both consisted not simply in the re-appearance of the candles and their illumination at Vincent's death, but in the way those events wrapped themselves around the liturgical celebration of Purification.

The candles in Guillaume's tale were not just ordinary pieces of wax, but rather symbols capable of conveying a variety of religious meanings. Yes, for the theologians evaluating Vincent's candidacy for sainthood, they primarily represented a supernatural sign of the preacher's closeness to God. But in their connection to the Feast of Purification, they also embodied the mystery of the Virgin birth, Mary's and Jesus's submission to the law, and the community of the faithful who participated in Candlemas processions. For Guillaume's mother and father, the candles may have been chiefly sources of supernatural aid, but they also evoked the tapers glittering before saints' images and on altars, as well as those blessed at Candlemas and lit by the faithful in times of need. Still, it was the lawyer Guillaume who inscribed the memory of the miraculous candles around the liturgical celebration, while the bishop and abbot to whom he testified must also have valued saintly relics and clerical blessings. Multiple resonances might thus be attached to the miracle of relic-candles lost and found, by both elite and popular observers.

## WHAT IS 'POPULAR' RELIGION?

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Part of the trouble in attempting to speak of a distinctive 'popular' religion in medieval Europe has to do with the slippery nature of what is meant by 'the people'. Exactly whose religion is being studied under that rubric? Accordingly, the phrase 'popular religion' has given way since the 1970s to a variety of other formulations, reflecting not simply the problem of defining 'the people', but also the genuine difficulty scholars have found in slicing the medieval world into two distinct groups, be they popular and elite, lay and clerical, unlettered and educated, or poor and rich.<sup>2</sup> For example, Karen Jolly has proposed an alternative schema in which 'popular religion' and what she calls 'formal religion' be seen as 'overlapping spheres of influence', with the latter only a small subset of a popular religion broadly writ,<sup>3</sup> while Daniel Bornstein has recently written about 'a religion of the people' that is '*additive*, not *subtractive*', encompassing the devotions of peasants, artisans, and women as well as those of religious and social elites.<sup>4</sup> Some historians have dispensed with the concept of 'popular religion' altogether, in favour of such formulations as 'local religion', 'traditional religion', 'vernacular religion', and 'lived religion'.

In the 1970s, many scholars maintained that popular religion was vastly different from the Christianity espoused by medieval theologians and preached from the pulpit. This so-called 'two culture approach' is epitomized in such works as [Keith Thomas's \*Religion and the Decline of Magic\* \(1971\)](#) and [Jean Delumeau's \*Catholicism between Luther and Voltaire\* \(1971\)](#). Thomas painted medieval popular religion as essentially a collection of supernatural remedies against misfortune, which Protestant reformers rightly condemned as magical and superstitious, while Delumeau suggested that the religion of the masses in the so-called 'Christian middle ages' should be seen instead as a mixture of magic, folklore, and pagan survivals, over which the Reformations of the sixteenth century laid only a thin veneer of Christianity.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Jean-Claude Schmitt in 1979 contrasted the 'learned culture' of an inquisitor who sought to extirpate the 'superstitious' practices attached to the cult of a holy

greyhound with the ‘folk culture’ of the peasant women who, for centuries, continued to participate in a ‘folk rite’ aimed at healing sick children.<sup>6</sup>

This confident elaboration of a folkloric, even pre-Christian popular religion began to break down in the 1980s with the work of scholars such as John Van Engen, Peter Brown, and William Christian.<sup>7</sup> The trend continued in the 1990s, as historians such as Valerie Flint and Karen Jolly looked afresh at those aspects of early medieval Christianity depicted as ‘magical’ by Keith Thomas and discovered instead a complex process of accommodation, negotiation, and ‘mutual assimilation’, as clergy on the ground faced the practical realities of incorporating Christianity into everyday lives.<sup>8</sup> For the later middle ages, Eamon Duffy and John Bossy both eschewed the two cultures model, describing instead a single Christian community bound together by common beliefs, practices, and rituals.<sup>9</sup> More recently, Augustine Thompson has depicted Italian communes of the twelfth through fourteenth centuries as bound together by a ‘shared ... communal—that is, urban—religion ... experienced by all its practitioners, from the common people to the elites’.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, several scholars have begun to complicate this view of a broadly shared Christian culture, noting significant local differences in religious behaviours, the existence of doubt and ignorance about the faith, and numbers of ambiguous practices that seem to straddle the line between religion and magic, all pointing to different *possibilities* of pious expression, depending on status, gender, and wealth.<sup>11</sup> All of these various religious cultures emerge in testimony like Guillaume de Liquillic’s.

## THE EVIDENCE

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The possibility of studying the religion of the people—that is to say, of lay people who were not members of aristocratic families—is complicated by the available sources. For most of the middle ages the great majority of people did not read and write, and so descriptions of the religious lives of ordinary people come to us mediated through the writings of clerics, who were themselves frequently trying to change the laity’s behaviour. Texts that envision the clergy confronting and correcting the laity, such as penitentials, confessors’ manuals, and inquisition records, tend to reinforce the notion of two vastly different cultures, as their authors focus on beliefs and activities they wish to root out. Furthermore, such writers frequently repeat injunctions from previous texts (concerning prohibited ‘magical’ superstitions, for example), often with little regard for whether the condemned practice actually persisted. Sermons, didactic writings, and *exempla*, in which clerics directly address a lay audience, have also supported the two cultures model, as their authors are assumed to mediate between two religious worlds, the learned and the folkloric.<sup>12</sup> There are, however, other types of sources, more abundant for the later middle ages, that afford a more intimate glimpse of religious practices and in some cases offer us the words of ordinary people themselves: guild and confraternity records, churchwardens’ accounts, wills, canonization processes, miracle collections, indulgences, images, and material artifacts. Scholars utilizing these types of evidence, as well as offering creative readings of more traditional sources, have begun to deepen our picture of the lived religion of medieval people at all levels of society.

## WHAT DID GOOD CHRISTIANS *DO*?

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Most medieval people viewed religion primarily in terms of actions. The decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council defined good Christians by the performance of certain deeds: baptism, and participation in the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist at least once a year. Thus, when witnesses at the early fourteenth-century canonization inquest for Thomas of Cantilupe, bishop of Hereford, were asked whether people had become ‘more devout and firmer in their faith’ as a result of the bishop’s miracles, they spoke of doing rather than believing. ‘Yes’, responded one witness, ‘because of the said miracle they more frequently cr[ie]d out to God and visit[ed] churches and [made] pilgrimages to the tomb of the said Lord Thomas’.<sup>13</sup> Those who testified on behalf of Vincent Ferrer’s canonization likewise described the preacher’s having transformed *behaviour*. As many witnesses noted, the holy friar had an associate who instructed young boys in the faith. The fundamentals he taught, however, were mainly deeds: ‘to say the Lord’s prayer and *Ave Maria*, and the symbol of the faith, and to sign themselves with the sign of the holy cross’.<sup>14</sup> Another witness recalled that, following Vincent’s sermons, ‘Blasphemies ceased, and the great and small were taught to invoke and honor the name of Jesus, to say the Lord’s Prayer and the Apostles’ Creed, to hear Masses, to make the sign of the cross, and many other things concerning the faith and *divine duties*’.<sup>15</sup>

Many of these ‘divine duties’ revolved around the sacraments or elaborations thereof, starting with one’s entry into the Christian community at baptism, a ritual in which lay people were participants as well as observers.<sup>16</sup> In Italian communes, baptisms were performed in a single ‘mother church’ at Easter, simultaneously creating citizens and Christians.<sup>17</sup> English parish records similarly indicate the importance attached to this. As priests were instructed weekly to remind their flocks, in an emergency, any person could baptize an infant in danger of dying.<sup>18</sup> Still, parents were evidently reluctant to settle for a make-shift rite they clearly saw as inferior.<sup>19</sup> In fact, observers considered it a miracle if an infant at risk were to be revived or sustained simply long enough to be baptized, as did a Breton woman named Jeanne, who, having feared her unborn baby’s death, implored the miraculous intercession of Vincent Ferrer, with the result that the baby was born, baptized, and lived for fifteen days.<sup>20</sup>

The sacrament that involved people most frequently, however, was the mass.<sup>21</sup> Although many Christians perhaps took communion only once yearly, at Easter, people heard mass with great regularity, frequently made donations to have masses performed, and attributed great powers to the service and to the consecrated host.<sup>22</sup> In a large church with many side altars, attendees could witness many masses in a single sitting, their timings staggered so that the moments for the elevation of the host would not conflict. Gazing at the consecrated host was believed to impart all sorts of blessings to the viewer.<sup>23</sup> Aside from Sundays, ordinary people also sought to hear mass to aid them in some undertaking or trouble. At a judicial inquiry to verify a person’s age held in Walton, Lancashire, when witnesses to the individual’s baptism were asked why they were in church that day, they offered such reasons as ‘to hear mass before going to buy fish’ and ‘to hear mass before going to Kirkdale to buy two oxen’.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, some witnesses at the Brittany inquest into Vincent Ferrer’s sanctity paid to have a mass said in the course of soliciting the saint’s assistance. When four-year-old Guillaume Rouxel appeared to have died, for example, his mother Catherine ran out to the nearby Franciscan church and had a mass celebrated, invoking God, the Virgin, and Vincent Ferrer on behalf of her little son.<sup>25</sup> And in increasing numbers through the later middle ages, testators left money to endow masses for their souls after their deaths, often in sets or for a specified time, although a wealthy person might stipulate



the expeditious performance of as many as 50,000 masses or endow a chantry priest in perpetuity.<sup>26</sup>

Although lay people watched the priest perform mass, often inaudibly and in Latin, and partook of the Eucharist infrequently, they were not simply passive observers.<sup>27</sup> The thirteenth-century Franciscan chronicler Salimbene commented that the laity, unlike the clergy, knelt to pray during mass and that they genuflected on a single knee at the elevation of the host—another lay innovation.<sup>28</sup> Rood screens may have separated the nave (lay space) from the choir (clerical space), but they did not prevent people from seeing the mass performed (some were equipped with special viewing ‘squints’, and elites might have their own fixed pews close to the altar) or even from circulating into the choir. One late medieval author complained that the congregation was wont to ‘go nyghe and about the aulter and stond so nyghe the aulter that they trouble oftymes the preest’.<sup>29</sup> Further, for those who could afford them and could read, books of hours and handbooks to the mass enabled one to follow along with the liturgy or to recite separate prayers during the celebration.<sup>30</sup> If nothing else, one might utter a *Pater Noster* or *Ave Maria*, or say the rosary. As Robert Reynes, a fifteenth-century English reeve and alderman, noted in his commonplace book, ‘Man, do not stand idle in the church/ but take your beads in your hands’.<sup>31</sup> Even those who did not understand the priest’s words might still appreciate the drama being enacted before them. A fourteenth-century English treatise admonished lay people to stand during the reading of the Gospel because even ‘when not understood, the power of God’s word still avails’.<sup>32</sup> The entire congregation was invited to kiss the pax board following the priest’s prayer for peace. And at the end of the mass, even when they did not partake in communion, lay people received blessed bread from the priest’s hands.

Although it figured less frequently in day-to-day life, the sacrament of penance also formed an essential aspect of medieval people’s religion.<sup>33</sup> Individuals evidently attached great importance to the aural confession of sins, particularly when facing imminent death. At the height of the Black Death, the bishop of Bath and Wells instructed his clergy to let their flocks know that, in cases of emergency, confession could be made ‘to any lay person, even to a woman’.<sup>34</sup> And, in peril of death, Christians did avail themselves of this opportunity. When a horrible tempest overtook Breton merchant Eudo de la Barre’s boat, the occupants of the vessel, ‘fearing for their lives ... all confessed their sins to each other’.<sup>35</sup> Still, people set greater store by proper confession to a priest. When the Breton archer Jean Guerre lay wounded and dying in the home of Catherine Guernezeve, her neighbours berated her that Guerre might die without confession. After a priest was unable to rouse the archer, however, Catherine induced the bystanders to make a vow to Vincent Ferrer, specifically so that Guerre might be resuscitated and confess his sins.<sup>36</sup> Confraternities and other lay religious groups often enjoined their members to confess several times annually, but not necessarily to communicate as frequently.<sup>37</sup>

Gifts and offerings represent another way in which ordinary lay people participated in and gave meaning to a Christian life. Although tithes and other offerings were mandatory, and testamentary alms-giving was necessary to hasten the soul’s exit from purgatory, evidence suggests that people paid these dues more or less willingly and used gift-giving as an opportunity to shape their own religious worlds and to establish a personal intimacy with the holy.<sup>38</sup> Women were particularly ingenious in adapting domestic items for sacred use, donating embroidered fabrics to be used as altar cloths or bequeathing their wedding rings to adorn holy images.<sup>39</sup>

## CULTIVATING RELIGIOUS EMPATHY

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Aside from partaking of the sacraments and making appropriate oblations, ordinary Christians enacted their religiosity in a variety of additional ways. Liturgical celebrations often drew in the laity as participants and served to structure the experience of time. Taking part in a mystery play, for example, encouraged an emotional identification with the subject being staged. In some cases, players must have felt particular empathy with their roles, as perhaps did the York vintners' guild, whose job it was to depict the Marriage at Cana and Jesus's miraculous changing of water into wine.<sup>40</sup> Religious feasts also served to mark the seasons. Witnesses at canonization inquests frequently dated events by reference to the church calendar, and, for the more devout of them, elements of the day's liturgy inscribed themselves onto their memory of other events.<sup>41</sup>

Through confraternities and religious guilds, lay people experienced personal immersion in sacred narratives. Vernacular chants used in Italian confraternities, for example, encouraged members to empathize with Mary's grief at the crucifixion, not simply through the use of rhythmic language, but also by adopting the intimate vocabulary of mothers and children. 'Mamma', says Jesus in one such chant, 'your lament torments me like a knife'.<sup>42</sup> Flagellant confraternities and processions also invited participants and viewers to share the suffering of Jesus's passion. Inspired by the preaching of Vincent Ferrer in 1416, for example, crowds of penitents in the south of France nightly formed flagellant processions, beating themselves until the blood ran, as they cried out, 'In memory of the passion of our Lord God Jesus Christ'.<sup>43</sup> One observer, who had washed the garments worn by the flagellants, recalled with some emotion that he found stuck to the cloth 'bits of lacerated flesh, of a finger's length'.<sup>44</sup>

Indulged prayers and images provided yet another vehicle for emotional identification with religious drama, while easing the burdens of purgatory. While it is not clear exactly what a non-Latinate believer experienced in repeatedly uttering a Latin prayer, one can imagine the reciter understanding the gist of the text, if not the meaning of individual words. Images, however, such as depictions of the instruments of the passion, supposedly sanctioned by Innocent IV in 1246 (which could yield one 6755.5 years and three days' indulgence over the course of a year's devotions), or those reproducing allegedly life size images of nails from the crucifixion or of the side wound of Christ, were accessible to all and appealed to the emotions in their graphic portrayals of Christ's sufferings.<sup>45</sup> As the fifteenth-century preacher Geiler von Keyserberg urged, 'If you cannot read, then take one of those paper images ... You can buy one for a penny. Look at it... Then show your extreme reverence ... kiss the picture on the piece of paper, bow down before it, kneel in front of it'.<sup>46</sup>

Images were, in fact, a key component of religious devotion at all levels of society. Illustrations of the side wound of Christ, for example, can be found in altarpieces, lavish illuminated manuscripts, prayer rolls, and inexpensive woodcuts. Evidence suggests that owners of such images did make use of them as preachers like Geiler von Keyserberg advised, and the depictions were often accompanied by texts granting indulgences for certain devotional acts. One woodcut of Christ's side wound promised any viewer who 'kisses this wound with remorse and sorrow, also with devotion... seven years' indulgence'. On the print, just as on a similar illustration from a lavish fourteenth-century manuscript, the red paint is worn off, presumably from just such kissing.<sup>47</sup> Owners of religious images hung them on doors and in their homes, prayed (and invoked saints) kneeling before them,

pasted them into books of hours and professional manuscripts, and even manipulated the images by colouring, cutting, and writing on them, as did one Italian notary and lawyer who cut out and rearranged woodcut images of saints to create his own *sacra conversazione*.<sup>48</sup>

## WHAT DID CHRISTIANS BELIEVE?

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While surviving sources, particularly from the later middle ages, yield a fairly good picture of what ordinary Christians *did*, it is much more difficult to get at what people actually believed. In some texts, such as inquisition records, witnesses' words are distorted by the application or threat of torture. Even with less confrontational sources, such as wills and canonization inquests, the contents may be guided by formulas, a notary's prodding, or questions posed by the orchestrators of a saint's cult. Still, with careful consideration of the mechanics by which a source was produced, scholars can cautiously use the information therein as a fairly accurate representation of the subject's words.<sup>49</sup> Remnants of material culture, particularly objects that have been manipulated in some way by their possessors, also give a clue to an inner disposition. These types of sources, read with creativity and sensitivity, have enabled scholars to begin to approach the beliefs of ordinary Christians.

Most people, it seems, viewed religion in terms of reciprocity, of supernatural favours granted in exchange for counter gifts or deeds. The act of seeking a miracle was typically expressed with the word vow (*votum*), underscoring the contractual nature of the utterance, in which the invoker promised the saint certain behaviours or offerings in exchange for his or her intercession with God. When the fifteenth-century Breton Alain Bocher sought Vincent Ferrer's intercession on behalf of his dangerously ill child, he promised the saint 'that if he recovers his health, I will go on my knees from my house to your tomb, dressed only in woolen cloth and will visit [the tomb] and give an oblation there for the same'.<sup>50</sup> When Pierrot Plouher failed to realize any improvement from a grave illness after invoking Vincent Ferrer and promising an annual offering of five pennies, his wife urged him to make a new vow for five shillings yearly. At once he was cured.<sup>51</sup> People would sometimes select the purest or most innocent of a group to petition a saint, believing the request would be looked on more favourably; a successful invoker might, likewise, regard the miracle granted as a sign of spiritual status.<sup>52</sup> The logic of mutual obligation could also operate in inverse. A miracle of the Virgin Mary involved a woman whose son had been taken into captivity. After several unsuccessful prayers for his release, she removed the baby Jesus from the arms of the statue of Mary in her local church so that the Virgin might feel the same loss. Only then did the Virgin restore her son to her.<sup>53</sup>

## RELIGION OR MAGIC?

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Early studies of the topic caricatured medieval popular religion as superstitious or magical. Yet, while practices involved in seeking supernatural aid could veer into such directions, clerical observers well into the fifteenth century did not seem to find them particularly disturbing. In several Scandinavian miracle collections, for example, petitioners seeking a saint's intercession frequently drew lots to choose which saint to invoke.<sup>54</sup> Supplicants throughout Europe often measured the person on whose behalf a miracle was being requested, pledging to offer the saint a candle in the length of the measured individual.

While one might suspect some sort of sympathetic magical thinking in this practice, clerics approved of it. One curial commentator not only observed that such measuring was customary, but also provided biblical precedents for it.<sup>55</sup>

Further, sources indicate a widespread instrumental view of sacred words and objects, in which the desired effect was obtained more or less automatically. Again, there was no unambiguous clerical condemnation of such beliefs as magical or superstitious. For example, although a theologian named Werner of Friedberg in 1405 was himself put on trial for teaching that anyone writing ‘the word was made flesh’ on an amulet would not suffer from demonic illusions, a Swiss canonist named Felix Hemmerli disapproved of Werner’s condemnation. Furthermore, Hemmerli passed on other powerful phrases to his readers, such as an aged peasant’s adjuration against agricultural pests.<sup>56</sup> In such instances, accurate reproduction of a precise formula was key to the charm’s success. An English soldier’s book of hours contains numbers of protective prayers and devotions, including a votive mass which, if one were to have it said on thirty consecutive Fridays, would preserve that person from dying without contrition and satisfaction. As Eamon Duffy has remarked, ‘Late medieval people collected prayers as we collect recipes’, and many of them, cleric and lay alike, seem to have believed that such prayers worked automatically.<sup>57</sup>

Sacramentals and other holy objects similarly were held to have special powers, which earlier scholarship often interpreted as magical. A newly baptized child might be given a drink of the water with which a priest had washed his hands after holding the consecrated host, or water that had rinsed out the chalice used in the mass might be sprinkled on animals for protection.<sup>58</sup> Pilgrims routinely brought home ampoules containing water or oil that had been in contact with saints’ relics or tombs. So-called *Agnus Dei* pendants, made from consecrated wax or candles embossed with the Lamb of God on one side and the saints on the other side, frequently served as protective amulets. And Anglo-Saxon manuscripts contain formulas for priests to bless herbs for use against ‘elfshot’; according to Karen Jolly, priests may routinely have kept herbs and other substances under the altar to be sanctified by the performance of the liturgy.<sup>59</sup>

In some cases, holy texts and symbols could blend with words and items also found in magical writings, but, again, they received clerical approval. The nonsensical word ‘ananisapta’, for example, was widely employed to ward off plague and other misfortunes in the later middle ages, appearing on town gates, on rings and jewels, on church bells, and in the Emperor Maximilian I’s prayer books. A fifteenth-century engraved golden pendant known as the Middleham jewel contains, following a Latin inscription beginning ‘Behold the Lamb of God’, the two words ‘tetragrammaton’ (the unutterable name of God in Jewish belief and element of much ritual magic) and the ubiquitous ‘ananyzapta’.<sup>60</sup> Theologians debated about the origins of the word, but endorsed its use. Whatever ananisapta’s source, what was important was its evidently automatic spiritual power.<sup>61</sup>

Textual amulets mingled instrumental prayers with images, characters, and names sometimes associated with learned magical texts. A parchment leaf from the early fourteenth century, for example, while inscribed on one side with the life of St Margaret (frequently called upon by French women in childbirth), contained, on the other side, thirty-six squares incorporating such charms as the seventy-two names of God, magical characters, and the so-called ‘prayer of Charlemagne’, as well as formulas against nosebleeds, fevers, and serpents. An inscription promised protection to whoever wore this amulet on his or her person.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, a deluxe fourteenth-century French reliquary pendant for the Holy Thorn also likely saw use as childbirth amulet, its outer cover of



amethyst probably chosen as much for the stone's occult properties as for its apt symbolism of wine and blood.<sup>63</sup>

As recent scholars have emphasized, these sorts of practices constitute a grey area condoned and even encouraged by members of the clergy, even as a growing body of 'superstition literature' in the later middle ages began to worry about such beliefs. Thomas Aquinas, after all, had argued that it was permissible for Christians to wear around their necks amulets inscribed with extracts from scripture, as long as it was done in sincere devotion.<sup>64</sup> While *some* theologians might rail against such usages, these practices continued to receive the support of many in the clergy, numbers of whom were in fact making such items for the use of the faithful. The author of a 1373 commentary on Dante, for example, noted that Giovanni Boccaccio had recently visited the venerable library at Monte Cassino, only to find that the monks were cutting apart books to obtain little pieces of parchment from which they were producing amulets to sell. A fifteenth-century Florentine Dominican convent had numbers of such amulets printed for distribution. Even the inveterate opponent of superstitious magic Heinrich Kramer recommended that inquisitors protect themselves against witches' spells by carrying a parchment cut to the *mensura Christi* and inscribed with the Seven Last Words of Christ.<sup>65</sup>

And if some clerics encouraged practices that straddled the line between magic and religion, others were engaged in overtly magical activities. Members of what Richard Kieckhefer once termed 'a clerical underworld' relied upon Latin texts describing elaborate rituals for invoking spirits to pursue a variety of ends, whether to affect others (love magic, curses), create illusions, or divine hidden or inaccessible knowledge.<sup>66</sup> Inquisitors worried most about so-called demonic magic—and the threat that the practitioners might be consciously or unwittingly worshipping demons in their rituals. Recent scholarship suggests some cautious acceptance of the possibility of invoking angels as well, for purposes such as attaining the beatific vision or instantly mastering a body of knowledge.<sup>67</sup> Clerics engaged in such practices may well have seen their actions more as religious devotions than as magical rites. While the clerical necromancer was a figure of legend and literature, the survival of such ritual texts, along with judicial records of prosecutions for illicit magic, indicates the existence of clerical magicians, ranging from the producers of textual amulets to summoners of demons.

And beyond the interpenetration of magic and religion, there must have been some people who doubted or whose religious beliefs and behaviours did cross a line, even if they considered themselves good Christians. In some instances, it seems, people were simply ignorant—or so at least our sources suggest. Was it merely a hagiographical *topos*, for example, that prompted so many Breton witnesses to declare that Vincent Ferrer had taught the elements of the faith to young and old alike? Or did some Bretons really not know the *Pater Noster* and *Ave Maria* or that they should fast before hearing mass on Sunday?<sup>68</sup> Others took perhaps a too literal view of their religion. In one miracle attributed to Vincent Ferrer, a young man described as a 'simpleton' was inspired by the saint's preaching on St Margaret to pray that he, too, might bodily fight the devil one day. When a mute woman appeared in a field, carrying a sickle and making incomprehensible noises, the youth took her for the answer to his prayers and fell on her, mortally wounding her.<sup>69</sup> And aside from heretics who overtly rejected the authority of the Catholic church, there were doubters who questioned some of its pronouncements.<sup>70</sup> Miracle collections abound with stories in which those who disparage the subject's sanctity find themselves punished at the saint's hand.<sup>71</sup> Finally, cracks in the sources occasionally illuminate a pre-Christian world lurking beneath the surface: early fifteenth-century demonologist Johann Lagenator of Dieburg noted that



some people believed that a person born in a membrane would be ‘one of those, who travel over a great distance in one night, commonly called “die ferne leude”’.<sup>72</sup> Jean-Patrice Boudet has suggested a possible subterranean survival of Jove’s day celebrations in the numbers of accused witches who placed the witches’ Sabbath on a Thursday night.<sup>73</sup> Vincent Ferrer, preaching in the Alps in the early fifteenth century, converted a village whose inhabitants were accustomed to venerating the rising sun.<sup>74</sup> But for most scholars, it no longer makes sense to regard such examples as the proverbial tip of a large iceberg.

## CONCLUSIONS

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When Guillaume de Liquillic’s mother went to church on that memorable Candlemass—without a candle made from Vincent Ferrer’s tapers—she perhaps heard a sermon based on Jacobus de Voragine’s *Golden Legend*. If so, she witnessed a perfect example of the multiple ways in which a religious celebration might be experienced and understood by medieval Christians. The preacher would have first explained the ancient Jewish ritual of purification, which Mary had followed, though she had conceived without pollution. He would have told his flock that the light of the candles they carried symbolized illumination by grace, the ‘light to the revelation of the gentiles’ of Luke 2:32. The preacher would have reminded his audience of the day’s procession and noted its origins in an ancient Roman celebration of the mother of Mars. And he perhaps would have included the story of a Candlemass miracle that befell a noble lady.

The miracle is one of two included in the *Golden Legend*’s entry on Candlemass, and it goes as follows: unable to hear mass on the Feast of Purification, the lady prostrated herself before an altar to the Virgin, whence she found herself taken up in a vision to a beautiful church, in which a man began distributing candles to an array of young men and women, led by a crowned virgin. When the priest reached the offertory of the mass, and the congregants came forward to offer him their candles, the woman was unwilling to part with such a treasure. At last a messenger was sent to wrench the candle from the lady’s hands, and, in the struggle that ensued, the candle broke in two. Immediately, the lady returned to her senses, still holding the broken candle half. Thanking Mary for finding her a way to participate in Candlemass, she retained the candle as a precious relic, which effected many cures in later years.<sup>75</sup>

As illustrated in Jacobus de Voragine’s explanation of the Feast of Purification, medieval people experienced religious beliefs and practices on a variety of levels. A festival such as Candlemass could represent a musing on God’s grace, a celebration of the Virgin’s purity, an affirmation of community, a reworking of a Roman festival, a source of powerful blessed candles, or even perhaps an irksome duty. Some of the faithful must have been aware of all of these meanings, others maybe of only a few, but, for all, religion shaped their behaviours and defined their communities. Participation in religious rituals such as the Candlemass procession was a requirement, but it was one that created mutual obligations, as the Virgin (and her Son and the saints) rewarded the devotion and offerings of those who implored their help. People might view relics and other sacred objects as working in a somewhat automatic fashion, but they did so in part because it was a message that they heard from the pulpit.

The bulk of the evidence suggests, then, that it is wrong to view medieval popular religion as a set of beliefs and practices set in opposition to some dominant culture, whether clerical, learned, or elite. Many behaviours and beliefs once read as folkloric or magical, or

even as pagan survivals, can be found at all levels of society, such as the sorts of instrumental prayers that appear both in the books of hours of great nobles and on inexpensive woodcuts. Nor can such practices be attributed exclusively to lay, as opposed to clerical culture, when theologians endorsed and monks distributed amulets with divine words whose power lay in merely carrying them on one's person. Still we cannot either speak confidently of a single shared religious culture embraced by all European Christians. Theologians disagreed among themselves about what practices constituted proper Christian behaviour, and which should be dismissed. And parish clergy ministering to the needs of real people often found that practical considerations outweighed too obsessive an adherence to the directives of theologians, anyway. Rather, it makes sense to speak of many religious cultures, both clerical and lay. Actions, objects, and beliefs could all contain multiple layers of meaning: a procession could harken back to pre-Christian practices, and a reliquary could equally be a magical apotropaic charm, while a candle such as Jean de Liquillic's could represent an offering, a relic, and a miracle in and of itself.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# NOTES

1. Archives départementales du Morbihan, MS 87G11 (hereinafter ADM-Vincent), witness 247; Candlemas: Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400–c. 1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 16–22; Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Cities of God: The Religion of the Italian Communes, 1125–1325* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2005), 160–161.
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3. Karen Louise Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf Charms in Context* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 13.
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10. Thompson, *Cities of God*, 8.
11. Local variations: Andrew D. Brown, *Popular Piety in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Katherine L. French, *The People of the Parish: Community Life in a Late Medieval English Diocese* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); C. S. Watkins, *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Doubt: chapter by Weltecke, this volume, and Dorothea Weltecke, ‘Beyond Religion: On the Lack of Belief During the Central and Late Middle Ages’, in Heike Bock, Jörg Feuchter, and Michi Knecht, eds, *Religion and Its Other: Secular and Sacral Concepts and Practices in Interaction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 101–114; John H. Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief in Medieval Europe* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), esp. 216–231. Grey areas: Don C. Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2006); Euan Cameron, *Enchanted Europe: Superstition, Reason, and Religion, 1250–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
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16. Katherine French, *The Good Women of the Parish. Gender and Religion After the Black Death* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 57–61.
17. So Thompson, *Cities of God*, 9, 26–33.
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19. E.g., French, *Good Women*, 57–58.
20. ADM-Vincent, witness 66 (Jeanne, wife of Guillaume Silvester).
21. See Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, ch. 3; and John Bossy, ‘The Mass as a Social

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22. Brown, *Popular Piety*, 82–83; French, *People of the Parish*, 175.
  23. Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 98–100.
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# CHAPTER 21

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# DOUBTS AND THE ABSENCE OF FAITH

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DOROTHEA WELTECKE

## DOUBT, SCEPTICISM, ATHEISM

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DOUBT, and the absence of faith in the existence of God, has been a marginal topic in the study of medieval religious history. The main goal of this chapter is to introduce the lines of medieval discussion, and the state of modern research; and to identify the proper discursive place of doubts, or the absence of belief in fundamental theological principles, in the medieval period, prior to the development of a specifically ‘atheist’ discourse in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the light of recent studies, it will be argued that this discursive place can best be found not at the extreme margins of Christianity, but at its centre.

The overall situation concerning doubt in Christian teachings might be summarized as follows: studies in the history of philosophy, religious minorities, and medieval Christianity have shown that the middle ages as an ‘Age of Faith’—as a time of religious unity and naivety—is a myth. It is not possible to suggest any statistical proportion of deviant individuals and groups within the more standard, ‘believing’ Christian masses, as they varied depending on period and regional conditions. And yet, no Christian theological tenet—the Trinity, the sacraments, Christ’s incarnation, transubstantiation, purgatory, heaven and hell, the resurrection of the body, apostolic succession, and the divine authority of the pope, to name just a few—was left unquestioned on the theological and philosophical level. On the contrary, some orthodox tenets of faith were formulated as official dogma in order to curb opposition, such as the dogma of transubstantiation during the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215.

Since the twelfth century heretical groups like the Cathars or the Waldensians, as well as members of other religions such as Jews and (in southern Europe) Muslims, lived as minorities within the realm of Latin Christianity and created their own institutional and social frameworks. Thus moments of religious debate and polemics between these ‘marginal’ groups and the Christian ‘centre’ reoccurred in different parts of Europe during the following centuries. Furthermore, again particularly from the twelfth century, philosophical and theological works from outside Latin Christianity were translated into Latin. Influenced by these non-Christian ideas, some masters in the universities held their own views on theology, the cosmos, creation, the stars, life and death, and on anthropology.<sup>1</sup> These theories are more properly part of the history of science and cannot be dealt with in detail in the present chapter; but suffice it to say that neither these intellectuals, nor heretical groups, nor non-Christians, believed slavishly in the doctrines of the Roman Church. Non-Christians or heretical groups questioned, for example, the rationality of Christianity, the claims of authenticity or divine inspiration of specific texts, and Christian teaching as well as Church institutions. Not a few of their arguments produced texts, either for apologetic or polemical purposes. Arguments and debates were also produced by the sometimes bitter philosophical, theological, and institutional controversies fought *within* the Roman Church.

These remind us of an important fact about the history of Christianity in the middle ages: the acknowledged existence, long before Renaissance ‘humanism’ and the eighteenth-century ‘Enlightenment’, of theological and philosophical arguments against Roman Christian teachings on both theology and ecclesiology, in theory and in practice. There never existed a period during the middle ages when Roman Christian teachings were *not* questioned; and in fact various of these medieval arguments reoccur in modern atheistic discourse.

However, none of these medieval intellectual works ever denied the existence of God. There existed no positive theory of atheism, except the two arguments brought forward (as part of scholastic dialectic, in order ultimately to be rebutted) by the scholar Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–74) in support of the notion that it can seem that there is no God. As God is thought of as the infinitely good, he wrote in his *Summa Theologia*, this notion is contradicted by the existence of evil. And as other principles can explain everything existing in the world, the notion of a God is redundant.<sup>2</sup> Since Anselm of Canterbury’s (1033–1109) influential *Proslogion* (wherein he set out his ontological proof of God’s existence), many of the main theological schoolbooks for the universities—the theological *summae* and the commentaries for the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard—similarly discussed the proof of God in their first chapters. These discussions necessarily entailed the hypothesis that there is no God. The purpose of these arguments was, however, to probe human cognition by means of logic and rational reasoning, even in regard to Almighty God. With these proofs, Latin Christian thinkers of the twelfth century onwards were flexing their newly acquired rational muscles, as it were, during a period in which antique and Arabic science was starting to influence western thought. However, university scholars did not seek to justify faith in God, because His existence was given as a matter of faith before all reasoning. Thus, conservative opponents of scholastic methods considered these proofs superfluous at best and heretical at worst, because God surpassed human reasoning and could not be proven by acts of thought.

While it was therefore possible to formulate the thought that ‘there is no God’ and to present it in a theoretical framework, the idea was not taken seriously by theologians or philosophers. Consequently, unlike many other propositions (such as the eternity of the world, or the unity of the soul), the sentence ‘there is no God’ was never banned from being discussed in the schools. It could be treated as a sophistic assertion of the same quality as the absurd statement that ‘the Trojan War is still continuing’; as something so clearly untrue that it did not threaten faith. In this context Siger of Brabant (c. 1240–after 1282) presented the idea that ‘there is no God’ in his so-called *Impossibilia*, intended for the training of students in logical disputation.<sup>3</sup> Only one medieval scholar addressed the thought that there is no God as a theological error and developed a more lengthy answer. William Peraldus (d. 1271) treated it as an utterly foolish proposition, quoting Psalm 13 and 52 (‘the fool says in his heart, there is no God’) and an already long tradition of commentary literature. For Peraldus, those who believed such a proposition were not even worthy of punishment. They needed brains instead of beatings. Interestingly, his argumentation is not presented in a scholarly work but in one intended for pastors, his *Summa of Vices and Virtues*.<sup>4</sup> This context, and Peraldus’ understanding, is typical for the scholars of the middle ages.

The world of popular belief and practice within Christian communities was neither simple nor homogeneous. Again we see a multitude of contentions against the teachings and demands of local Christian institutions and representatives, such as (in the early middle ages) a continuing preference for ‘pagan’ or magical practices and, consequently, a mistrust of the utility and effectiveness of Christian spiritual interventions. For long periods and among substantial parts of the lay world, sheer ignorance alone led to beliefs which differed



from the received theology. Lay adherents to heretical sects held their own views on tenets of faith such as the Eucharist, purgatory, or the authority of priests to bind and release. Common sense often struggled with the teachings and demands of the clergy, such as the virgin birth or the resurrection of the body. However, lay doubt over, or rejection of belief in, the existence of God was only rarely expressed in writing, because it was treated as an emotional or moral problem, not as an intellectual challenge.

## TRADITIONS OF RESEARCH

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The majority of historians of the middle ages refrain from taking part in the debates which surround the pre-history of atheism. Yet research in this field has a long tradition. Theologians and philosophers, reinforced in the twentieth century by historians of literature, dominate the field. The historical search for individuals who rejected the existence of God began in the early modern period. The term ‘atheism’ itself did not occur in Latin Christianity before the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, entering into Latin through translations from Greek. In Greek the term *atheos* had been widely used both in the classical and later periods, mostly as a synonym for ‘impious’ in polemical use. It was, for example, directed against Christians and Jews in antiquity, and at the same time used by them against their opponents. Following this line, writers in the early modern period used the term ‘atheism’ as a polemical weapon in the theological controversies between the reform movements and the Catholic Church of the Council of Trent. At first it was a non-specific, polemical term, meaning religious deviance in general and the religious opponent in particular. A moral rather than a theoretical term, the meaning can best be translated as ‘godless’. Early modern theologians bewailed the state of the world, which from this perspective seemed to be full of ‘atheists’. In this sense, they followed medieval texts, which had described unlawful and irresponsible people as saying ‘there is no God’ (Ps. 13 and 52). This Psalm was directed against the evil-doers, the mighty lords, who only cared about their own desires. We have already seen that, during the period of scholasticism, it had gained a new valency, and its meaning was to change once again in the developing atheism discourse of early modernity.

As scholars defended themselves against the polemical accusation, theologians and philosophers began to ponder the literal meaning of the phrase and question whether the thought ‘there is no God’ was rationally possible, and whether any person existed who in earnest defended this proposition. For a long time both questions were usually answered in the negative; but definitions of different levels of ‘atheism’ were produced during the seventeenth century. Systematic classifications were published which differentiated between ‘theoretical atheism’—the philosophical argument against God’s existence—and ‘practical atheism’. ‘Practical atheism’ denoted much of the older tradition of moral and religious deviance, but also a general disinterest in and ignorance of the teachings and moral demands of the Church. Both terms shaped the study of atheism and are still in use today.

These different definitions produced controversies within the research of the history of atheism. Some scholars insist the term ‘atheism’ should indeed only designate theoretical atheistic thought, which includes an explicit denial of the existence of any God or gods. In this view, atheistic thought began only in the mid- to late seventeenth century. Others define as ‘atheist’ anyone who was classified as such by theological polemics, and hence their history of atheism starts at about 1500, when the term came into polemical use. Scholars following this line feel that the denial of the existence of any gods is only an extreme graduation of the religious deviance and the widespread criticism of the clergy in the

sixteenth century. They are prepared to consider authors as ‘atheists’ (even if the authors themselves vowed that they were believing Christians) when they set aside confessions of belief, and wrote texts which criticized religious conventions as insincere acknowledgements of common expectations, done only through fear of persecution.

Both positions, however, follow the same master narrative, which developed alongside the specific discourse of atheism. The history of atheism is here told as a heroic drama. Historians of atheism display a critical *habitus* towards religion, searching for the origins of emancipation from the yoke of the church, as they perceive it. The narrative *topoi* which recur in these narratives—predominantly an assumption that violent persecution was visited upon atheists by the Church—are already formulated in the first fully developed historical narrative of atheism, the anonymous tract *Theophrastus redivivus* from about 1650.<sup>5</sup> This tract also presented the second corner stone of the narrative, the idea that advanced thinkers (*sapientes*) had always seen through the machinations of the clergy. Thus for a long time the search for early atheists looked exclusively at scholars and intellectuals.

In fact, the history of medieval atheists was shaped very much in the model of early protestant historical identity. The first protestant historical accounts ennobled medieval heretics and critics of orthodoxy as *testes veritatis*, witnesses of the truth, persecuted by a tyrannical Roman Church. Attempts to give atheism a history also adopted the sources gathered by the opposing parties at the Reformation. Catholics had produced encyclopaedic texts of religiously deviant individuals in the middle ages, in order to denounce them; thus all sides used, and indeed further developed, medieval manuals about heresy. In this way a corpus of sources was gathered during the seventeenth to the early nineteenth century. One side saw the individuals and groups mentioned as heroes of rationality and emancipation; the other saw them as demolishers of the Church, belief, and all good order. That is to say, before the critical studies of the twentieth century, a certain consensus persisted over the terrain if not the meaning. The modern scholarly debate on atheism has inherited various key figures from these texts, such as the assumed atheists Emperor Frederick II Hohenstaufen (1194–1250) or Friar Thomas Scotus, who taught in the schools of Lisbon in the early fourteenth century.

Since the end of the eighteenth century the term ‘atheist’ was used by atheists themselves, who presented their cosmology as intellectually advanced, more rational, and (in the nineteenth century) more liberal and socially emancipating than theological faith. As an historical identity for intellectuals, the history of atheism is deeply linked to the likewise heroic European narratives of Renaissance, Enlightenment, and secularization—an integral part of the discourse of Western modernity. While the middle ages did not usually play an important part in these histories, some works appeared in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which set paradigms for the current debate. While drawing upon the older collections of names and sources, as well as the traditional master narrative, they transformed these materials into modern historical analysis: Hermann Reuter, John Robertson, and Fritz Mauthner wrote large histories of enlightenment and atheism in which for the first time the middle ages found an important place. They presented a chain of bold individuals and groups who criticized the Church, displayed rational doubt, and pursued scientific research despite persecution and authoritarian pressure. In their eyes their protagonists belonged to the avant-garde paving the way to modern rationality (a line of thought also pursued in the second half of the twentieth century by Hermann Ley). In the twentieth century, terms and categories were sharpened as various source texts for medieval heresies and philosophical thought were edited. Looked at more closely, many *testes veritatis* turned out to be less radical than previously thought. Averroism and Epicureanism, as the assumed rationalist heresies of the medieval philosophers, were rehabilitated or

discredited (depending on one's perspective). But in the wake of these large monographs, a number of historical studies moved the topic onward, gathering new material mainly from inquisition records and spiritual literature.

Many of these more recent studies criticized Lucien Febvre's seminal work on *Le Problème de l'incroyance au XVI siècle* (1947).<sup>6</sup> Febvre had dismissed the existence of serious challenges to religious faith up to the sixteenth century, and his criticism of the indiscriminate use of the term 'atheism' resulted in the overall rejection of the word to designate the absence of faith before the early modern period. Instead the term 'religious scepticism' has often been used. The term 'scepticism' for the disbelief of lay people underlines the potential critical abilities even of uneducated people such as peasant women or artisans. While it is fitting to defend the assumption that simple people can think, the term 'scepticism' tends to elevate their lack of conviction in transubstantiation or the virgin birth to the level of philosophical thought, putting it on a par with something like John Duns Scotus's (c.1265–1308) *Theoremata*.<sup>7</sup> In this text the famous scholar stated that it was impossible to *prove* the living God, incarnation, the necessity of the sacraments, and other doctrines—which to him, of course, implied nothing against the importance or truth of these teachings. 'Sceptical' thinking of this kind, as a philosophical technique, was not concerned with religious doubts but with epistemology, the limits of human cognitive abilities.

As an alternative, the terms 'unbelief' and 'disbelief' are becoming accepted categories in medieval studies, even if very marginal ones. They have already found their way into approved handbooks and introductions to medieval Christianity.<sup>8</sup> Despite some strong opposition by the anthropological school of French religious history, and many other historians of the middle ages, the idea slowly seems to be gaining ground that it makes theoretical and empirical sense to assume the existence of religious doubts, ignorance, disinterest, and the absence of faith in the Latin Christianity of the middle ages. In this light, traditional sources are reconsidered and new ones uncovered.

## MEDIEVAL NORMS AND PERSECUTION THEORY

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Both the terms 'belief' and 'unbelief' today designate matters of conviction. A demand for just such a personal acceptance of belief, even by lay people, was expressed in the opening canon *Firmiter credimus* of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215). Lay people were also supposed to confess regularly. Inquisitors did not, however, systematically seek to establish whether an accused person believed a tenet of faith to be true in his or her heart. Following the principle that the Church is not entitled to judge mere attitudes, they were more interested in acts and outward manifestations.<sup>9</sup> Neither *fides* (faith) nor *infidelitas* (disbelief) as categories in medieval thought denoted only, or even predominantly, personal convictions. The terms categorized, rather, a mutual commitment, the avowed relation to a powerful person. In secular matters such as charters, laws, and historical narratives it was *infidelitas* to break a contract, to act against an oath, to act disloyally, or to breach trust. The English terms 'infidelity' and 'faithlessness' still show traces of this meaning.

Most importantly, there was no conception of *infidelitas* as such. Again it was Thomas Aquinas who made this point explicit. Although one could with some justification assume that there was only one kind of *infidelitas* as there was one *fides* against which it is opposed, there were in fact several different kinds, Thomas declares.<sup>10</sup> Those who are designated as *infideles* in medieval thinking were first and foremost those who acted disloyally in some way or those who, by way of treason or of bad luck, played no part in the mutual relations

between God, Latin Christians, and their kings. The term *infidelis* consequently designated all those who were not Christians, most prominently Muslims, as is still the case with the English term ‘infidel’, because they were neither loyal to the Christian God nor to their kings and laws. Non-Christian *infideles* were clearly known by the Latins to believe, even if it was not the truth in their eyes. Heretics were also a category of *infideles*; blasphemers and apostates were another, because they acted disloyally towards their vows and their affiliation to Christianity—not because they did not believe in God. The same is true with so-called schismatics: anti-popes and their supporters for example could be considered as *infideles*, disloyal in their relation to the pope and the Church of Rome, although they did not err in theological matters. Normal Latin Christians could be yet another category of *infideles* in the eyes of the preachers. They might have held perfectly orthodox convictions, but still acted disloyally or distrustfully with respect to God, His commandments, and His community; an infidelity of practice rather than interior belief. The normative treatment of these different kinds of *infidelitates* differed greatly, as we shall see. While *infidelitas* and *infidelis* are juxtaposed to ‘orthodoxy’ and ‘loyalty’, and also designate the lack of trust in saints or relics, no medieval discussion is known where *infidelitas* is used unambiguously as meaning ‘to assert that there is no God’. It is not synonymous to the modern conception of ‘unbelief’ and thus always needs to be interpreted carefully according to the given context.

‘Disbelief’ or ‘unbelief’, whatever the term might designate, was not a legal category like ‘heresy’ or ‘apostasy’. Blasphemy, such as disrespectful and abusive swearing against the Trinity and the saints, was increasingly considered to be a crime from the thirteenth century. It was persecuted not by inquisitorial tribunals but by secular authority, particularly civic courts. As a crime, blasphemy was understood not as an expression of religious doubts or lack of belief, but as a hostile speech act against God or the Saints. In everyday life, as recent studies have argued, it arose particularly as a demonstration of masculine power. Lawyers acknowledged that not all blasphemous talk was serious but could easily have been caused by gambling, drink, and quarrels. Yet, aggressive speech acts could attack the relation between God and His community on earth and thus be a potentially life-threatening form of foolishness. Another category of blasphemy was so-called ‘blasphemy of the heart’, a sin to which we shall return later.

Doubt itself was again evaluated in many different ways, according to the social or textual circumstance. As a form of mistrust against dubious acquaintances it had social value; as *dubitatio* in scholastic studies, a component of intellectual competence. The word *dubius* as an adjective, on the other hand, could carry the meaning ‘unreliable’, be it an insecure road or a suspicious man. But ‘doubt’ as religious doubt was not featured in canon or criminal law. The famous phrase *Dubius in fide infidelis est*, from the decretals of Pope Gregory IX, cannot be translated as: ‘The one who doubts faith is an unbeliever’.<sup>11</sup> The sentence never became a norm in guiding inquisitorial activity or the like, though it is best understood in the context of the persecution of heretics: it meant that witnesses whose relation to heretics was dubious (*dubius*) should be regarded as unreliable or disloyal (*infidelis*) and thus not be heard in court. This had also been its original meaning in the source which Gregory IX was in fact quoting, the ninth-century pseudo-Isidorian *Decretals*.

There was thus no formal law against doubting or not believing in the existence of God in the middle ages. Sheer lack of conviction was no crime and it was therefore never mentioned in these legal sources. This is the reason why specialists only very rarely found apparent disbelievers in inquisitorial records. The few individuals who seem to be featured in these registers were caught in the processes more or less by bad luck, officious neighbours and zealous inquisitors. As inquisitors were asking for acts which could indicate the affiliation to a heresy, disrespect for the Eucharist for suspected Cathars, Waldensians,



or Lollards for example, the odd artisan woman or peasant could find her- or himself in a potentially life threatening process. She or he might simply never have believed in transubstantiation but was no adherent of a heresy either. For example, in a record from a Bohemian inquisition in 1338, Nicholas Hofman alleged that one 'Henry the cap-maker (*pilleator*) is suspected of heresy, because when he is in church, when the body of Christ is elevated in the mass, he does not respect the body of Christ, but only gives the appearance of respecting it'.<sup>12</sup> At other times and other places the inquisitors asked different questions—for example, about participation in prayers for the deceased—and people like Henry the cap-maker might have been left alone, while others found themselves in an awkward situation instead. If convicted, they were found guilty of adherence to one of the many categories of heresy, but not of 'disbelief' as a crime in itself. Other inquisitors would see to it that such suspects went through the trial more or less unscathed, their utterances considered as mere blasphemy (a lesser crime in comparison) or imposing a punishment *pro forma*.<sup>13</sup>

The reason for this apparent paradox was the different evaluation of religious deviance in the middle ages. While the idea of atheism became very important to modern Europe, it was rather 'heresy' which mattered to medieval Christendom, because of the way it was understood to destabilize the community's relation to a jealous God. It was also deeply concerned with maintaining the ever-fragile order and internal peace in the world. Personal loyalty or rather faithfulness was one of the central building blocks of society and therefore a crucial issue. Religious doubts and the absence of belief as a vacuum, which was not refilled by a potentially opposing theology or group spirituality, were in comparison considered minor problems. Pastoral reformers emphasized this perspective to village priests, admittedly not always successfully.<sup>14</sup> At worst, a lack of conviction concerning tenets of faith was considered a sin. It was also regarded as normal everyday behaviour by the none-too pious flock or even as a spiritual merit, as the circumstance may be.

## CONCEPTIONS OF DOUBT AND THE ABSENCE OF FAITH

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While doubt and the absence of belief was no concern of legal theory, it was dealt with extensively in spiritual and pastoral literature. In hagiography we find either pagans or incredulous Christian *infideles*, as those who did not believe in the holy powers of a certain saint or relic. Countless stories were related since the early middle ages in which the saint proved his or her holy powers. The resistance of the incredulous is often depicted very vocally in these stories, as they do not refrain from attacks on saints, relics or representatives of the Church. In this context a typical form of miracle story is told in which these disbelievers are punished and thus converted. For example, the bystander of a procession in Malmsbury, who showed his behind to the relics of St Aldhelm and broke wind into their direction, was caught by demons controlled by the saint who made him spin foolishly, bark like a dog and spit foam.<sup>15</sup> These sometimes coarse stories entertain and compensate the pious or clerical narrators for their inability to curb such acts without the powers of a saint.

Since the high middle ages church reformers increasingly observed lack of devotion and disbelief in certain teachings among the lay community. This change over time indicates nothing about a factual increase of impiety or rationality, but demonstrates a new pastoral concern. Not only the clergy and members of religious orders, but every member of the community, was now required to live a devout life. The laity obviously fell short of this



ideal. Many examples have been collected during the last two centuries, which show how material knowledge leads to conflicts with spiritual and dogmatic demands. Men and women knew about the process of procreation, life and death, the production of food, the necessities of commerce, social realities, and other everyday concerns. In preachers' and confessors' manuals their spiritual failures are presented in order to confront them through pastoral efforts.

Impious behaviour and an everyday lack of devotion, then, are phenomena which pastoral literature observed without horror. But were these acts also an expression of a lack of belief? Present day sociological studies warn against drawing overly simple conclusions, for example between church attendance and personal spirituality. As the pastoral reformers tried to systematize acts and thoughts by the flock since the thirteenth century they developed some analytical categories which at least informed their interpretation of what they heard and saw.

There was first the sin of *acedia*. Unlike early modern 'melancholia' or the spiritual *acedia* of the early monastic movements, *acedia* in the spiritual literature of the high and late middle ages seems to be mainly understood as laziness. And indeed, to explain *acedia* to lay people the preachers pointed out neglectful community members who never went to confession, who did not go to church, and if they did go, only went to entertain themselves by looking at the other sex.<sup>16</sup> Yet, there is more to it. *Acedia* could become a capital sin when the relation between the person towards faith and the Church in general was affected. In this case feelings like strong tedium, dislike of, or indifference toward God and other spiritual matters accompanied the reluctance to act as one should. Penitents were regularly asked whether they disliked going to church or praying. Both the lay people themselves and their confessors were asked to be precise in detecting and describing this kind of internal rejection.

In the middle of the fifteenth century in Vienna the Augustinian canon Stephan of Landskron (d. 1477) wrote a spiritual work in German for literate civic lay people. He had in mind ordinary burghers who had neglected their Christian life for some years and, becoming older, were interested in learning about the basics of Christianity, such as the prayer 'Our Father', moral rules, annual celebrations, basic teachings, and fasting times. His book, *The Road to Heaven (hymelstraß)*, is very mild and easy to read. Stefan apparently did not want to scare off his uneducated and easily bored flock. Talking about *acedia* he expressly acknowledged feelings and thoughts against Christianity and against faith, like other pastors before him. According to him, these feelings destroyed one's internal consent towards faith, even if they were unwanted. Such uncontrolled thoughts are human, Stefan says, and should not cause distress to oneself. Only when a person gives his or her inner consent to this dislike, when consciously and due to this strong resentment against faith (and not because of sheer boredom) he or she then disturbs the service with riot, derision or even bodily assaults against community or clergy, does his or her *acedia* become a capital sin.<sup>17</sup> This is also the case for those who for this reason despised, actively scorned, or disturbed the celebration of the sacraments.<sup>18</sup> As a sin it was punished with excommunication, and to obtain penitence one had to come forward and ask for it with contrition. Stefan is very aware that these measures reached only those who had not come this far. *Acedia* therefore by definition named a pure rejection of, and disinterest in, faith on an ascending scale.

Overlapping in some respect, but concentrated on internal thoughts and emotions, are two other concepts of religious doubt and lack of faith: temptation and the already mentioned 'blasphemy of the heart'. In the present day both sociological studies of religious doubts, and pastoral care within contemporary religion, acknowledge that religious believers

undergo periods of undesired doubt and suffer from it depending on certain circumstances.<sup>19</sup> Again, medieval reactions to doubts were conceptualized within the long tradition which stretched back to the Desert Fathers and Mothers of early Christianity. They recognized temptations (*temptationes*) and assailments (*impugnationes*) as things which torment the believer, with God's assent, to prove his worth. In the late middle ages secular pastors allowed that the lay community might also suffer temptations, and they addressed them with, for example, consolatory literature and books on dying well.

Yet for a long time these conceptions were only applied to the feelings of monks and nuns, and not to the laity in general. They were still seen as having this limited application in the early thirteenth century by Cesarius of Heisterbach. He declared that secular people could not have real temptations: their unintended desires and feelings were entirely worldly.<sup>20</sup> During the early and high middle ages, therefore, temptations tended to remain behind the walls of the monasteries and inside the confessor's chamber. The Benedictine monk Otloh of St Emmeram (d. c.1072) wrote openly about being tempted by such thoughts. He calls the protagonist of his story a 'friend of doubts' (*amator dubitationis*). This persona doubts the truth of the Holy Scriptures and the existence of God. A demon seems to whisper these destabilizing thoughts into his ear. So plausible is the demon's talk that the poor young monk is not able to defend his faith. His own situation and the terrible state of the world are the best arguments against the existence of an almighty God.<sup>21</sup> The young monk finds consolation in a vision in which God proves His existence, and affirms His relation to him. Visions are often recorded as the means by which religious doubts are comforted. Otloh intended his *Liber de temptatione* for novices, who might suffer the same. Edifying works like this are published to this day.<sup>22</sup> It has been difficult for past historians to accept Otloh's thoughts for what they were, yet there is no room for speculation, because Otloh is entirely explicit about them. This is not usually the case, because religious or lay people afflicted in this way often only mention 'terrible thoughts against faith'. This is the case with the mystic Henry Suso (1295–1366). He relates that he was tormented for nine years with 'wrong thoughts about faith' such as the question how God can become a man.<sup>23</sup> He, too, writes his feelings down to edify others in a similar situation.

These sources were gathered during the last century and deserve to be read again. Yet self-descriptions of doubting thoughts are very rare. More often we find them related about others, as was the case in edifying *exempla*. For this purpose Caesarius of Heisterbach gathered stories about tempted monks and nuns in the fourth part of his *Dialogus miraculorum*. One *exemplum* relates the often-quoted story of a recluse who fell into a crisis after starting her religious life. She hated to pray, she hated her religious life; in other words, *acedia* had befallen her. When her pastor reminded her that she had chosen to devote her life to God she asked moodily, who even knew that God, the angels and Heaven existed? Nobody had ever seen them. She only could believe what she saw and that was all there was to it.<sup>24</sup>

When pastors became more interested in thoughts and feelings of lay communities, here, too, absence of belief in the existence of God became apparent as was related in the foreword by Peter of Cornwall, the Prior of Holy Trinity in Aldgate, to his collection of visions. Here, too, the narrator is explicit and therefore leaves no room for doubt about what he is talking about: few people still believe in idols nowadays, but many assume that there is no God, that the world is eternal and ruled by chance, not by divine providence. Peter interprets these erroneous convictions as childish ignorance, and in order to confront them, he says, he publishes this collection of visions.<sup>25</sup>

Besides visions, pastors commended psychological tactics against these thoughts. They explained to tormented religious or lay people that it was not profitable to ponder them or to discuss them on an intellectual level. Rather it was better to set them aside and be silent about these thoughts, even when they were confessing their sins. In this spirit, in the fourteenth century the Dominican Nicholas of Strasbourg, who had pastoral care of nuns, advised his flock. With a dramatic description of a dialogue between a wailing penitent and himself as confessor, he recommended letting go of these thoughts and not thinking or talking about them:

‘...O milord, I have so terrible thoughts, I don’t know what to do, I am close to desperation’, I say ‘they may be as evil as they can be, about God or about the Saints, if you are sorry about them, they do no harm’, ‘Yes, milord, I am sorry for them from my heart...’ ‘Reject them then; it is enough that you reject them and that you are sorry about them. I do not want to hear about them; let them go now until you are free of them. That we all become free of guilt in this way, Amen’.<sup>26</sup>

As was the case with *acedia* as a capital sin, the dialogue opens up the acknowledged possibility that other people would not reject these thoughts nor be sorry for them.

By asking the penitents regularly whether they believed ‘firmly’ as was demanded by the Fourth Lateran Council, confessors became aware of doubts. They had also produced them. Terrifying sermons and introspection together with natural catastrophes and other calamities had resulted in sometimes over-scrupulous piety, and consequently religious doubts that could result in great anxiety. The confessors knew this, and from the thirteenth century onwards some pastors saw the necessity to soothe their flock; not only nuns—although the literature for nuns is especially rich in this respect—but also the lay community. Reformers advised parsons not to be too harsh with penitents and criticized father confessors who scolded sinners and drove them to desperation. In this context Robert Grosseteste (c.1175–1253) reminded pastors and the miserable sinner on the brink of desperation that King David had committed murder and the Apostle Paul had even persecuted Jesus Christ himself, and still they were holy.<sup>27</sup>

In this context the Parisian theologian and chancellor of the university, Jean Gerson (1363–1429) related the story of a hermit, who was lucky to meet a father confessor who did not condemn penitents instead of soothing them. The hermit is terribly tormented by thoughts he does not even dare to say, nor even silently to write down. The father confessor recommends declaring audibly that he does not give his assent to his own thoughts—and the hermit feels relieved.<sup>28</sup> Johannes Geiler of Kaisersberg (1445–1510), a secular cleric in Strasbourg, recommends that lay people turn to something else like working instead of brooding. Geiler, Gerson, and others repeatedly emphasized the difference between temptation and criminal or sinful deviance from faith. Thoughts could not be controlled just as the wind could not be caught with the hand. Using words familiar for the laity they often called these thoughts not temptations or *acedia* but ‘blasphemy of the heart’. ‘Blasphemy of the heart’ was no crime and in most cases not even a sin—unless, again, individuals gave their consent to such thoughts.

These sources also explain why fundamental doubts and absence of faith are recorded so rarely. Doubts, absence, and rejection of faith were there, they were fundamental, uncontrollable, and revealed (as well as perhaps sometimes provoked) by the questions that pastors asked. Their existence was acknowledged. But very few people wanted to transfer them to writing, as nobody would benefit from that. On the contrary, it would do more harm than good, says Caesarius of Heisterbach, and therefore he would not add any more stories about temptation and *acedia*. They remained individual experiences. Conversation about

them was not encouraged, and they were not taken seriously as theological or philosophical problems. Thus their presence in the written record is sparse.

This is also the case with another kind of doubt, the experience of a contradiction between the theology of a good and almighty God and the suffering of the innocent. The theodicy problem usually was again of no concern for philosophy or theology because in theory there were satisfactory answers. The *Consolatio Philosophiae* by Boethius (475/8–c.525) for example was widely read and commented on during the entire middle ages. Personally concerned with the issue, Boethius had treated the question of why evil seemed to be so powerful.<sup>29</sup> The embodied figure of philosophy answers that the power of evil is a mere illusion. The tyrant might do what he liked but not what he really wished, because the true aim of all human beings is the highest good. The tyrant can never reach it and thus he is powerless. More than 400 manuscripts of this text are extant, with many additional commentaries. This text, therefore, provided a model for thinking about theodicy, fugacity, felicity, and providence and for writing similar works, the consolatory books.<sup>30</sup> Other philosophical or even astrological theories existed which could explain misfortune.

Theologians therefore rarely took up the question in their own writings. One rare example is a work by the Florentine Dominican Riccoldo da Monte di Croce (c.1243–1320). He presented contradictions between promises made in the bible and the contemporary experiences of defeat and helplessness in the late period of the crusader states.<sup>31</sup> He asked some difficult questions in a series of letters to the Heavenly Curia, to God, Mary, Christ and the saints, which he wrote after his return from a mission to the Middle East after 1300. In his letters his epistolary persona demands to know why God consented to the conquest of the last crusader strongholds, to the death of innocent friars, who had not committed sins worthy of such a punishment. Why did Mary not impede the abduction of nuns? Riccoldo openly questions the providence, the vigilance, and the benevolence of God and the saints. He wants to know why they did not oppose Islam and its distortions of biblical doctrines as he sees it, regarding the Trinity and the Virgin Mary. Do they perhaps not know the Koran? Riccoldo demands they should catch up quickly. Or is it possible that God wants the Christians to pay homage to Mohammed? To the very last page Riccoldo goes on to protest and to lament. The only hope that remains is that compensation will be granted one day in the future. These texts were probably written in the context of Riccoldo's preaching in Florence. As a preacher Riccoldo more often used his own person to voice sentiments of his listeners. The conquest of Acre in the year 1291 and other defeats were discussed among Italians. They asked the friars to explain why God had let it happen.<sup>32</sup> Riccoldo's work was translated into Italian and thought of as a useful and edifying text well into the fifteenth century.

Usually, however, pastors preferred a different solution. They conceptualized these thoughts and protests as a vice, the vice of *murmur*. Numerous examples in the spiritual literature confirm that murmur was something of the ambient noise of medieval Christian life. Pastors found it very widespread indeed and tried to contain it. The vices that were said to cause murmur or were connected to it were rage (*ira*), avarice (*avaritia*) and envy (*invidia*). In sermons and in confession it was mentioned in connection with the First Commandment. In this context Jean Gerson scolded those who murmured against God's resolutions and thought that he was not just, benign, and good.<sup>33</sup> As usual Stefan of Landskron followed him and transferred Jean's writing to the situation of the late fifteenth-century Vienna. Many pastors saw murmur during a deadly disease as especially dangerous for the soul, and constantly warned against impatience (*impatientia*) during illness. They



acknowledged that on their deathbed people were afflicted by murmuring against God's justice and spoke in their hearts 'there is no God at all, there is no justice'.<sup>34</sup>

Again it was the thirteenth century and its pastoral reform which first saw systematic thoughts about the murmur of the lay community. William Peraldus differentiated between different categories of murmur against God: murmur in illness, because of poverty, because of bad weather (of peasants), because of the thriving of the wicked and the suffering of the innocent.<sup>35</sup> To him, murmur was foolish but widespread, which is why he presents many useful *exempla* for pastors to confront it. Foolishness of murmur, especially murmur about the power of the wicked, was however also often presented in a laughable way. The *Tabula Exemplorum* presents a story for this occasion: on his deathbed an entertainer bequeaths his considerable fortune to rich people. Challenged by the cleric that it would be better to think about the poor, the entertainer replies dryly that he only follows God's example, as he was told he should.<sup>36</sup> The laughter unites the afflicted listeners with the preacher, because he acknowledges their thoughts, not least their attitudes towards the clergy, and at the same time exposes them as mistaken. In a similar way the Franciscan Johannes Pauli (c.1455–c.1530) relates the story of a sick man on his deathbed. To soothe him a priest explains to him that God's friendship is displayed especially through suffering. The argument was well known and well used. The sick man, however, answers unaffectedly that now he understands why God has so few friends.<sup>37</sup>

In Europe, it was only in the early modern period that theologians began to take these thoughts seriously, not as emotional problems but as real theoretical questions. The Latin scholars did not want to probe their theology as was done after the earthquake of Lisbon. Their learning—theological, philosophical, and astronomical—actually impeded serious thoughts about theodicy. As these thoughts were considered foolish, a learned man would disqualify himself before his own eyes and before the world; an attitude displayed in Petrarch's letters about the plague. The same had been the case with doubts in the existence of God. Not even the Humanist philosopher Marsilio Ficino (1433–99) addressed this question. He only defended devotion to God (*religio*) in his *Platonic Theology*, not the proposition that there is a God.

## CONCLUSION

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Hugh of St Victor, writing in Paris in the thirteenth century, explained different levels of faith and thus different ways of defining them. On the lowest level the existence of God is recognized (*fides cognitionis*). On the next levels the divine truth is accepted and actively taken on: the believer entirely trusts his life to God, he now believes in God.<sup>38</sup> To fail on the first level would be 'not to believe that there is a God'. As we have seen, this is indeed the phrase which was needed to express this proposition clearly. No other term or conception—atheism, disbelief—was available. It could be contained within conceptions like *acedia*, temptation, blasphemy of the heart, or murmur.

This sentence refers to the Latin version of the Psalms 13 and 52, where the fool (*insipiens*) says that there is no God. As was said, scholars—philosophers as well as theologians—considered this statement too foolish even for a fool to utter it. At the same time, the sentence could be interpreted in a moral way. All those who do not care about God's demands, then, deny him, because they act as if there were no God or as if He were not God. Still, in early scholastic thinking the sentence gained a new profile, as Anselm of Canterbury and others took the fool as a starting point for speculative thought. They started



a discourse, which only in later centuries came to gather within it and make more explicit all the sentiments, discussed above, that had nonetheless existed during the middle ages. Until then, however, individuals affected with doubts or those who had entirely lost their faith, or those who hated everything religious and were utterly disinterested, struggled with what they were taught to consider as immoral or tempting thoughts. And as not every member of the community intended to be so very pious, not all of them may have struggled so very much.

# NOTES

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1. See also chapter by [Biller](#), this volume.
2. Aquinas, *ST*, I-I, qu. 2, art. iii.
3. Siger von Brabant, 'Impossibilia', in Siger de Brabant, *Écrits de logique, de morale et de physique*, ed. Bernardo Bazán (Louvain/Paris: Peeters, 1974), 67–97.
4. Guillelmus Peraldus, *Summa virtutum ac vitiorum*, ed. Rodolphus Clutius (Paris: Coloniae Agrippa, 1629), 46.
5. *Theophrastus redivivus. Edizione prima e critica, I–II*, ed. Guido Canziani and Gianni Paganini (Florence: La nuova Italia edn, 1981).
6. Lucien Febvre, *Le problème de l'incroyance au XVIe siècle. La religion de Rabelais* (1947. Paris: Albin Michel, 1968).
7. Johannes Duns Scotus, 'Theoremata', ed. Mechthild Dreyer and Hannes Möhle, in Girard Etzkorn, Romuald Green and Timothy B. Noone, eds, *Johannes Duns Scotus. Opera Philosophica, II* (St Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2004), 567–757 (at 636–642).
8. e.g., André Vauchez, ed., *Die Geschichte des Christentums, V. Machtfülle des Papsttums (1054–1274)* (Freiburg, Basel & Vienna: Herder, 1994), 910.
9. Stephan Kuttner, 'Ecclesia de occultis non iudicat. Problemata ex doctrina poenali decretistarum et decretalistarum a Gratiano usque ad Gregorium PP. IX', in *Acta Congressus Iuridici Internationalis. VII saeculo a. decretalibus Gregorii IX et XIV a codice iustiniano promulgatis Romae 12-17 Novembris 1934* (Rome: Pontificum Institutum Utriusque Iuris, 1936), 227–246; and P. Biller, 'Deep is the Heart of Man, and Inscrutable: Signs of Heresy in Medieval Languedoc', in H. Barr and A. M. Hutchison, eds, *Text and Controversy from Wyclif to Bale* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005).
10. Aquinas, *ST*, II-II q. 10–12; 17, 24.
11. Decretal. Gregor, IX, Lib., V, Tit. vii, De haereticis, Cap. i. [*CIC*, II, 778].
12. Alexander Patschovsky, ed., *Quellen zur böhmischen Inquisition im 14. Jahrhundert* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1979), 181. Similarly, a suspect claimed that he did not believe in transubstantiation for more than 40 years: D. P. Wright, *The Register of Thomas Langton, Bishop of Salisbury 1485–1493*, Canterbury and York Society 74 (Oxford: Canterbury and York Society, 1985), 49–51 (no. 419). See also nos. 486, 490, 501, 503.
13. Albert Lecoy de la Marche, ed., *Anecdotes historiques, légendes et apologues tirés du recueil inédit d'Étienne de Bourbon* (Paris: Librairie Renouard, 1877), 227; [Patschovsky, Quellen](#), 268; J. Duvernoy, ed., *Le Registre d'inquisition de Jacques Fournier, évêque de Pamiers (1318–25)*, 3 vols (Toulouse: Privat, 1965), II, 103–104.
14. Klaus Berg and Monika Kasper, eds, 'Das buoch der tugenden'. *Ein Compendium des 14. Jahrhunderts über Moral und Recht nach der 'Summa Theologica' I-II des Thomas von Aquin und anderen Werken der Scholastik und Kanonistik, I. Einleitung. Mittelhochdeutscher Text, II. Lateinische Quellen* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1984), 271. See also Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, qu. 97, art. ii.
15. William of Malmesbury, *Gesta pontificum anglorum*, ed. M. Winterbottom (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 438–439; see also 439–440.
16. J. Th. Welter, ed., *La Tabula exemplorum secundum ordinem alphabeti. Recueil d'exempla compilé en France à la fin du XIIIe siècle* (Paris and Toulouse: E. H. Guitard, 1927), 247, 295, 207.
17. Gerardus Johannes Jaspers, ed., *Stephan von Landskron. Die Hymelstrasz. Mit einer Einleitung und vergleichenden Betrachtungen zum Sprachgebrauch in den Frühdrucken (Augsburg 1484, 1501 und 1510)*, Facsimile (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1979), f. 102r–102v.
18. See also Stephan von Landskron, *Hymelstrasz*, f. 53r.
19. Neal Krause, 'Religious Doubt and Psychological Well-being: A Longitudinal Investigation', *Review of Religious Research* 47, no. 3 (2006), 287–302; Andrew Sloane, 'Lament and the Journey of Doubt', *Christian Scholar's Review* 29 (1999), 113–127.
20. Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, ed. J. von Strange, 2 vols. (Cologne: J. M. Heberle, 1851), cap. IV, i.
21. Sabine von Gäbe, ed., *Otloh von St. Emmeram ›Liber de temptatione cuiusdam monachi‹. Untersuchung, kritische Edition und Übersetzung* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999), 286, 256.
22. Mother Teresa, *Come be my Light. The Private Writings of the 'Saint of Calcutta'*, ed. Brian Kolodiejchuk (New York: Doubleday, 2007).
23. Heinrich Seuse, *Deutsche Schriften*, ed. Karl Bihlmeyer (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1907), 61–62.
24. [Caesarius of Heisterbach](#), *Dialogus Miraculorum*, IV, xxxix.
25. London, Lambeth Palace Library, MS 51, fol. 2r, quoted in Sabina Flanagan, *Doubt in an Age of Faith: Uncertainty in the Long Twelfth Century* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 86 (who, however, rejects the idea that religious doubts are here intended).

26. *Deutsche Mystiker des Vierzehnten Jahrhunderts, I. Hermann von Fritzlar, Nikolaus von Straßburg, David von Augsburg*, ed. Franz Pfeiffer, 2 vols. (Leipzig: G. J. Göschen, 1845–57), I, 269–270.
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28. Jean Gerson, ‘Contre les tentations de Blasphème’, in G. Palémon, ed., *Jean Gerson. Oeuvres Complètes*, 10 vols. (Paris: Desclée, 1960–73), VII.i, 412.
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30. Albert Auer OSB, *Johannes von Dambach und die Trostbücher vom 11. bis zum 16. Jahrhundert* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1928).
31. Riccoldo da Monte di Croce, ‘Lettres de Ricoldo de Monte-Croce. Ricoldi de Monte Crucis Ordinis praedicatorum Epistolae V commentariae de perditione Acconis 1291’, ed. Reinhold Röhrich, *Archives de l’Orient latin*, 2 B (1884), 258–296; Emilio Panella, ‘Preghiera e protesta. La prima lettera di Riccoldo’, *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum*, 59 (1989), 17–88.
32. Alexander Murray, ‘Piety and Impiety in Thirteenth-century Italy’, in Geoffrey Cuming and Derek Baker, eds, *Popular Belief and Practice*, Studies in Church History 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 83–106.
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35. Peraldus, *Summa*, 383.
36. Welter, ed., *Tabula exemplorum*, no. 76 (Elemosina).
37. Johannes Pauli, *Schimpf und Ernst*, ed. Johannes Bolte, 2 vols. (Berlin: H. Stubenrauch, 1924), II, 53. See also John H. Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief in Medieval Europe* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), 220.
38. Hugo of St Victor, *Quaestiones in epistolas Pauli*, PL 175, 438.

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PART V

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# IDENTITIES

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## CHAPTER 22

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# MEDIEVAL MONASTICISMS

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CONSTANCE H. BERMAN

THE organization of monastic space often replicates the late Roman house or villa, in buildings surrounding a colonnaded central atrium. For indeed the assumption of many monastic founders in late antiquity was that the monastic community would resemble the noble estate as well in its secure endowment of income from land worked by peasants and even slaves. This can help us begin to think about the variety of medieval monasticisms, and the ways in which wealth, gender and material culture entered into continued debates about the lives of monastic communities and monastic vows of personal poverty: while ideals of the ascetic life may have been worked out in the desert, it was such holdings of estates and villas that characterized most early medieval monastic communities.<sup>1</sup>

While early medieval monastic communities could be for men or for women, or double communities (the last often under the aegis of a great abbess whose power came from her ties to royal and noble family), early medieval monasteries might be described as ‘full-service’ communities. They provided a variety of services in addition to prayers: hospitality for travellers, pilgrims and merchants, treasure houses for storing wealth, access to relics of saints along with medical and spiritual care for the sick and dying, indoctrination in the faith through the sculpture of portals and capitals, book learning for future monks, nuns and other elites. The nuns of Whitby hosted a great synod in 664. They also had scriptoria and we owe the preservation of much of the literature of antiquity as well of new medieval texts—chronologies and annals, lives of saints and their miracles, the Gospel and service books used by such communities—to production of manuscripts in monastic scriptoria. Monasteries were often consumers in international and local trade, and among the nodes around which commercial life developed in the West. Finally, surviving monastic land records provide valuable information for social history.

After the early medieval period most monks and nuns (the latter called *monacae*, *sanctimoniales*, or *nonnains*) came to live in abbeys or priories that were for men or women only, although later exceptions include twelfth-century Fontevrault and Sempringham and fourteenth-century Bridgettine abbeys. Any organized community of religious women, moreover, needed to have the services of a priest, sometimes formally attached to a house of women, in other cases providing the *cura monialium* as part of his parochial duties. From early Christianity there were also women living religious lives at home as recluses or in the later middle ages enclosed in church walls as anchoresses. That women were a large part of the total religious population even in Rome is revealed by a document from c.1300 called the Catalog of Turin which counts men and women from all ranks of monastic and clerical life in that city. From abbesses to lay sisters and recluses, women comprised about a third of all such individuals.<sup>2</sup>

Distinctions between monks and priests blurred in the central middle ages. Many congregations and Orders of canons arose living a regular life (i.e. living ‘under a rule’) like monks; they included the Praemonstratensians who in their earliest guise lived in double communities with canonesses, but later separated into houses of men or women. While both men and women could enter monasticism, only priests could celebrate anniversary masses for the souls of monastic donors. Because by the eleventh century monks not only took vows, but were frequently ordained as priests, modern historians have concluded that

women's monasteries were consequently at a disadvantage in an 'economy of salvation' associated with prayers for souls. The facts were otherwise. Medieval donors did not hesitate to make bequests to houses of nuns for anniversary prayers, and the women themselves participated actively in such commemoration. Performance of anniversary masses was simply one more priestly duty for which monastic women hired priests. Some houses of nuns, like eleventh-century le Ronceray in Angers or the twelfth-century German communities under the care of Hildegard of Bingen and Herrad of Hohenberg, established groups of dependent priests or canons to provide them with priestly services. Others like Saint-Antoine-des-Champs in Paris would have hired priests for the various chapels founded in their church.<sup>3</sup>

The expansion of monasticism in the twelfth century brought changes in services and recruits. After clerical marriage was definitively condemned in the twelfth-century West, married clergy founded family monasteries, practising celibacy with their wives. These tiny communities were often later swept into the larger reform communities, as we see at Obazine and Coyroux.<sup>4</sup> Services once provided by every monastery or by the wives of priests were taken over by specialized institutions, including cathedral schools, castles and palaces, and urban guilds. Specialized monastic groups provided housing for travellers, care of the sick or lepers, ransom prisoners, or supported crusaders by collecting funds and *matériel*.

The monastic life might still be entered in childhood by oblates—children given or vowed to God by their parents. The aged took monastic vows on their deathbeds to be buried in monastic garb like any other member of a monastic community. Elderly couples made post-mortem gifts to monasteries in return for life annuities. Women's ability to become nuns and sisters expanded along with population in the central middle ages because society's need for women to reproduce became less pressing. Young girls, like Christine of Markyate (b. c.1095–after 1155), might refuse marriage to fulfil religious ambitions.<sup>5</sup> Wives might join Hospitaller communities when their husbands departed on crusades.<sup>6</sup> Married women with their husbands, or widows might also found hospitals designed to care for lepers or the elderly, as we see in a remarkable foundation made by the sister of the lord of Montpellier in the 1190s.<sup>7</sup> Widows who retired to monastic houses rather than remarry were seen as excellent administrators and often came to control houses of nuns, as was the case for the widow Petronilla of Chémilly, appointed to be abbess of Fontevrault by its founder, Robert of Arbrissel.<sup>8</sup> Many such entrances into the religious life followed a dramatic adult conversion, as seen in the examples of a number of twelfth-century religious men and women, including Bernard of Clairvaux, Pons de Léras, and Yvette of Huy.<sup>9</sup>

Although children given to monasteries might spend years being educated, formal entrance into a monastic community involved an apprenticeship called the novitiate. During this year-long period before final vows, the novice monk or nun was educated in the Psalms and liturgy and in the community's rule and customs. Permanent entrance into monastic life required a promise of obedience to a superior—the abbot or abbess of an abbey, the prior or prioress of a priory. At communities exempt from episcopal oversight, like Cistercian ones for men or for women, the nuns, lay-sisters, and even lay-brothers made vows to the abbess just as monks and lay-brothers did to abbots. Nuns had lay-brothers attached directly to their abbeys, and there was also papal expectation that neighboring houses of monks might provide them to nuns' abbeys. In non-exempt communities vows were made to the bishop. The same is true of visitation and correction of daughter-houses. This was usually the duty of the bishop, but in exempt orders it was undertaken at first by both abbesses and abbots, and only later by abbots assigned to women's houses as visitors.

By the twelfth century not only were there more monastic women, but in addition monastic houses with both choir monks and lay-brothers, or holy nuns and lay-sisters, became common. One had to be free to take monastic vows, but monastic entrance might follow manumission from serfdom. By the thirteenth century, there were also considerable numbers of foundations for women who took temporary vows such as recluses, anchoresses, *pinzochere* or penitents, or eventually as mendicant tertiaries—sisters caring for lepers, the poor, and the needy. Many young girls or widows migrating to towns from the late twelfth century on found safety and spirituality in communities of Beguines who took temporary vows. For some the intention was to stay only long enough to amass a dowry before returning to a village for marriage, but in other cases such devout women spent their entire adult lives working to support themselves in what gradually became Beguine parishes that would be enclosed with gates that were locked at night.<sup>10</sup> These religious women's work was often in the growing textile industries of the cities. Such work should not be dismissed as merely a means of avoiding boredom or idleness, for such women not only supported themselves but also made valuable contributions to medieval economic life. Yet although such houses of Beguines and extra-regulars expanded rapidly in the thirteenth century, it was not, as was once thought, at the cost of more traditional nunneries for religious women. These too continued to be founded at a furious rate, and we find many patrons of such new houses of nuns among the most powerful women of the thirteenth century.

Such productive interactions between religious and the secular women who were their patrons may be seen for the abbey of Cistercian nuns at Saint-Antoine-des-Champs, founded c.1200 just outside the gates of Paris. That abbey received one of its earliest donations from the widow Agnes of Cressonessart, who had sold the dower lands from her first husband (they had no surviving children) to the bishop of Beauvais, in order to purchase land at Aulnay which she gave to Saint-Antoine for her soul and in order that anniversary masses be said for her soul and that of her first and second husband. With the assent of sons from her second marriage, she also granted rights in the tolls on the port of Mantes on the Seine River. Abbesses of Saint-Antoine then acquired (often through cash purchases) additional tolls at Mantes. More importantly the lands at Aulnay, located in the great open fields of France north of Paris, would form the basis of some of the abbey's largest grange properties. While Agnes's early gifts to Saint-Antoine added to its rents and properties in the surrounding countryside, Paris's wealthy bourgeois of the city and clergy associated with the burgeoning university also made generous gifts and by around 1300 the abbesses had amassed houses and other properties in the city that produced more than 300 *livres* of annual income over houses in Paris itself. The active management by nuns in building Saint-Antoine's endowment is apparent, as is the activity of Agnes herself, who entered the abbey to become an early abbess there.<sup>11</sup>

There is a certain fluidity to these newer women's religious communities, relative to those for men. In the early middle ages in particular it is difficult to tell the difference between organized communities of canonesses and those of nuns, and in German lands this continued throughout the middle ages. That movement from one status or one Order to another appears invariably to be in the direction of more enclosed religious lives; rarely was it possible to move from a strict to a less strict Rule. Thus in the Low Countries and the Rhineland we see communities of Praemonstratensian canonesses or Beguines that become Cistercian or Dominican nuns.<sup>12</sup> Those of women penitents in Italy might evolve gradually into houses of enclosed nuns or tertiaries associated with the mendicant Orders, as was the case in the evolution in the fifteenth century of a group of pious lay-women at Corpus Domini in Ferrara into two enclosed communities of nuns; a process that occurred slowly



and only after considerable dispute.<sup>13</sup> This fluidity has added to the difficulties in studying such groups: given the considerable confusion in handbooks and archival collections many historians stayed away from studying them.

Although Beguines supported themselves by their spinning and weaving, and all monks and nuns produced manuscripts, the sale of which may have brought cash into their communities, most fully-fledged monastic communities lived on endowment in lands and income. Indeed, monastic entrance of either children or adults came with the expectation of an entrance fee or dowry, often masked as a freely-made gift in order to avoid charges of simony (the sin of buying and selling Church office).<sup>14</sup> Added to the 'recruits' bringing dowry gifts were friends, relations, and servants of bishops, kings and founders who 'were appointed' to monastic communities, but whose patrons often failed to provide dowries; this could constitute a considerable hardship for communities. Entrance payments to the many new houses of nuns in the later middle ages were especially important because those abbeys for women were often bulging at the seams.

Generally an abbey or monastery was like any other lord, owning villages with tenant farmers paying rent.<sup>15</sup> Already in the twelfth century a few eremitical foundations, like the Grandmontines, had attempted to live without owning any property at all, but the more successful twelfth-century reform foundations, like those of the Cistercians, quickly moved from eremitical towards coenobitic lifestyles. Although founded on the peripheries of existing settlements, they created great granges by using cash to consolidate long-fragmented holdings and found markets for their surpluses in growing towns that were never far away. The difficulties such reformers faced in acquiring endowment and the assiduous record-keeping they used contributed to growing reputations of being land-hungry and avaricious. From the twelfth century onward nuns—in contrast to reform monks—had a strong propensity for charitable activities. Such religious women appear less willing than their male counterparts to deny the poor at their gates, and more apt to grant relief to tenants faced with poor harvests. Such lack of regard by abbesses and prioresses and their communities for preserving property was viewed by visitors as indicative of bad management: abbesses were accused of giving too little attention to limiting entrants and too little attention to accounting. Indeed, an early thirteenth-century visit to the priory of Nun Cotton in England includes instructions about who kept the seals and how many nuns needed to be consulted in decisions about expenditures.<sup>16</sup> Despite common assertions that women were less able to manage monastic property than were men, there is evidence that it was more often monks who fell into debt.<sup>17</sup>

Sometimes, however, such condemnations—that abbesses did not manage population size or limit charity—were made by those envious of nuns' properties. We see this, for instance, when Abbot Suger of Saint-Denis (b. c.1091–1151) forged documents to take over the properties of the nuns of Argenteuil, or when late thirteenth-century Staffarda tried to acquire tithes held by the nuns of Rifreddo, or in suppressions of communities of Cistercian nuns in the fifteenth century at la Cour-Notre-Dame and Clairmarais.<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, the accusations of mismanagement or sexual misconduct against such houses of nuns by such 'reformers', even when inspired by envious eyes and having no basis in reality, have stuck, and are too often taken at face value by modern historians. In fact, abbesses turn out often to have been effective managers and many of women's community's financial difficulties derived from patrons and churchmen granting oversight of nuns' properties to father-visitors, provosts and other 'advocates', who could be either incompetent or rapacious.<sup>19</sup>

By the thirteenth century only royal foundations were given entire villages. Indeed even kings and queens rarely had extensive lands to give out. Queen Blanche of Castile, in

founding a house of nuns at Maubuisson, and Louis IX, in founding that for monks at Royaumont, each gave holdings that had been reassembled by recent purchase and consolidation. The gradual but constant increase in the total numbers of monastic foundations and properties caused considerable concern also among kings and nobles, who attempted to limit alienations to monastic groups and the Church more generally—for instance by limiting the almsgiving of their relatives.<sup>20</sup>

The problem of wealthy endowment versus personal poverty was a constant one for the monasticisms of the middle ages. Reform often centred on the desire of new groups to live more abstemious lives, but they soon encountered donors who sought out the poorest groups of monks or nuns on which to lavish land and income. Such donors, moreover, increasingly equated charity, which may have once targeted the truly needy, with making gifts to monastic communities. Moreover, an inherent contradiction in the often-used Rule of Saint Benedict was that it enjoined personal poverty, but made the abbot responsible for the material needs of the community. This meant that those monastic leaders who amassed new properties and built buildings were often those most praised. It is not surprising then that by the thirteenth century a new cycle of reform advanced notions of not only personal, but corporate poverty, or that disputes arose among the newly established mendicant Franciscan Order about accepting gifts of land and buildings as opposed to relying wholly on mendicancy.

Standard accounts tend to describe monastic history in cyclical fashion: a drama of reform, consolidation and decline that restarted every few generations.<sup>21</sup> Such narratives often draw on those of medieval monastic writers who used the failures and decadence of their predecessors to justify their own groups' foundations and successes. This is seen for example in the *Exordium Magnum Cisterciense* written c.1206 by the Cistercian Abbot Conrad of Eberbach. Conrad's account of monasticism prior to the arrival of the Cistercians is a selective and rhetorical one. He had trained at Clairvaux in the second half of the twelfth century and was strongly influenced by Cistercian diatribes against the Cluniacs and other traditional Benedictine houses and by accounts of Clairvaux and its famous abbot, Bernard.<sup>22</sup>

The first book of Conrad's history traces the origins of monasticism up to the foundation of Cîteaux and the early history of that abbey; the other five books concentrate on Clairvaux. Conrad points to the inspiration of the lives of Christ, John the Baptist, and the early apostles. Turning to the flight of Christians to the deserts of late antiquity he makes brief reference to early fourth-century Anthony and Pachomius in Egypt, and then to the writers of Rules: Basil of Caesaria (c.329/30–379) who had made monasticism acceptable because of its prayers for the larger community, and Benedict of Nursia (c.480–c.547) whose foundation at Montecassino, south of Rome, would include composition of a Rule to be widely promoted by Pope Gregory the Great (c.540–604).

Conrad's genealogy of monasticism leaves out things we now consider important. For instance, there is no reference to early Christian women living chastely in their family homes, or to the lives of female prayer implied in Ambrose's discussion of the relative spiritual values of married women, consecrated widows and dedicated virgins. Conrad neglects to mention women among the early Christian martyrs, or those in eastern monasteries founded by Jerome (c.345–420) and his companion and patron Paula, or by Basil's sister, Macrina; and Scholastica, Benedict's sister, is mentioned by Conrad only obliquely, without being named. Just as he left out any mention of Cluny's one foundation for nuns at Marcigny, he similarly makes no remark on Cistercian nuns, except to cite the story of an apostate nun in book six.

While Conrad promotes the Rule of St Benedict, his account is so tilted towards the coenobitic life eventually adopted by the Cistercians that he misses the historical significance of the formulation of the four types of monks—cenobites, hermits, gyrovagues and sybarites—in Benedict's prologue. Yet Benedict's emphasis in the sixth century on moderation was a veiled criticism of those eremitical 'athletes of Christ' who practised an excessive asceticism (such as the fifth-century St Simeon Stylite who is reputed to have lived on a pillar for forty years). Moreover, the author's insistence on daily manual labour was a response to the sybarites, who believed their saintliness entitled them to support without work. Concern with stability was a response by Benedict to the gyrovagues, those wandering monks who had descended 'like locusts' on imperial cities expecting to be fed and housed and disrupting ecclesiastical elections, only to disappear again.<sup>23</sup> In Benedict's day there was no concern about enclosure of either men or women, but the gradual development of such concern, particularly of enclosure for women and provisions against their begging, probably derives from concern in Benedict's Rule about stability.

But Conrad does not appear to have recognized even legitimate changes in interpretation of the Rule—such as, for instance, the need for different clothing in colder areas further north than Italy. Conrad sees only illegitimate innovation by those who are not from Clairvaux or the Cistercian Order. He sees the Cistercian practices as a return to the source—to the original Rule of St Benedict—as if centuries had not intervened and as if there had been no institutional change over those centuries. Moreover, he sees no developments based on experience within the Order itself over the century that he has recounted. It is a history wholly without change or development: what happens in his own abbey at the time he was writing (c.1206) is identical to what happened when he was a novice at Clairvaux, and identical to what had been done at Clairvaux from the moment that Bernard arrived there in 1113. For him, Cistercian practices and customary of the Order showed no change over the course of an expansion from a handful of houses to more than five hundred. There was no difference between the early occasional meetings of a dozen Burgundian abbots before 1150 from the General Chapter meeting that he had attended as abbot of Eberbach the year before. Different issues might be discussed at different annual meetings, but for Conrad all the problems were only ones of execution. For him solutions to the problems of running a fast-growing religious Order had been foreseen by the founding abbots. He believed that no change had happened, or been necessary from the early twelfth century forward.

We can recognize that the monks discussed by Conrad had a common way or life or collective identity, but we can also argue for a different history of institutional development—by trial and error, by borrowing from other groups, and by solving problems when they arose, rather than apparently omnisciently anticipating them. Cistercian spirituality may well have been quite similar in Conrad's time to its earlier expressions, more so than the changing institutional aspects of the movement. The conversation about the life of monastic charity (*caritas*), the life of providing love, attention and care towards one's fellow monks or for the abbey of Cistercians virtually next door, perhaps evolved more slowly. Indeed much of Cistercian spirituality would come to be based on the writing and teaching of Bernard of Clairvaux. But even Bernard's ideas changed on occasion, as has been suggested by a number of recent writers. The abbot Bernard occasionally retracted something he had said a decade earlier. He sometimes asked someone else to smooth over a difficulty that he had created earlier when he had been convinced that he was correct. While it may have become frozen in time by those of his writings that were preserved and most copied, his thinking itself still evolved.<sup>24</sup> And there could be a distance between thought and action. At one point it was possible for Cistercian abbots to agree in the Charter of Charity that they would make common cause in support of an abbey in need. In fact this rarely actually

happened. At one point too they agreed that they must preserve their contemplative lives by allowing no secular visitors to their communities; but we know that shortly after Conrad's composition, the Queen of France, Blanche of Castile, would visit the general Chapter with her children in order to ask the Order for its prayers.<sup>25</sup>

Conrad's tracing of monastic history from Benedict and Gregory the Great skips over much from the next centuries. In Conrad's account, the transfer of monasticism into Gaul began with Benedict's dispatch of St Maur to Le Mans; there is no reference to the French monastic saint, Martin of Tours. There is also no reference to monks at Lérins, the conversion of Patrick, the transfer of Celtic monasticism from Ireland back to Britain, or the missions of Anglo-Saxon monks and nuns to the continent to convert the pagan Saxons. Reference to Carolingian monasticism encompasses only a passing nod to legislation requiring the use of the Rule of Benedict, and there is no reference to the reformer, Witiza, who orchestrated Carolingian efforts to achieve monastic uniformity in customs, and who took the name Benedict of Aniane (c.750–821). Indeed it is not clear that Conrad recognized the distinction between the two Benedicts. Certainly there is no reference to some of the largest monastic communities of the Carolingian period. Conrad, in his *Exordium*, describes a sequence of priors and abbots at Clairvaux, but in his presentation of monastic history, they ruled an unchanging institution.

Conrad also says little about the great Burgundian abbey of Cluny, which was established in 909/910. Cluny was founded by William, duke of Aquitaine, at a location isolated enough from centres of power to be immune from local influences, answering only to the distant papacy. Cluny's growth into a famed liturgical centre offering impressive anniversary masses, its magnificent church financed by gifts from the tribute in gold paid to the princes of the Iberian reconquest by neighboring Muslim rulers, and Cluny's ties to the pilgrimage to Santiago of Compostela, are all noteworthy. The abbey was fortunate in having a series of long-lived abbots who took Cluniac reform to monastic communities elsewhere at the invitation of patrons. The congregation of priories that developed was headed by the single abbot of Cluny, a veritable monarch, from whom all Cluniac monks took their vows. The Cluniac monks were increasingly also priests, but even they had to respond to the religious vocations of women when in the mid-eleventh century a house of Cluniac nuns was founded at Marcigny for some of the female relatives of Cluniac monks. Yet in Conrad's presentation Cluny is dismissed as no longer relevant. Indeed even the incidents from the Life of Abbot Odo of Cluny (r. 927–942) cited by Conrad are used to foreshadow the miraculous rise of the Cistercians: thus a Cluniac brother's dream of heaven filled with white-garbed monks was in Conrad's view a clear reference to the rough, undyed, white garb of the new Cistercians.

For Conrad what was important about Cluny was the early twelfth-century crisis in its monasticism, which inevitably led to its replacement by Cistercian reformers. The obvious inference that the disappearance of the Cluniacs led to Cîteaux's rise, however, does not accord with what we know about either abbey today. Cluny quickly recovered from a disputed abbatial election in the early twelfth century and resolved the budget crisis caused by the cessation of deliveries of gold from Spain, and remained a powerful and influential abbey. In the twelfth century, donations to Cluny exceeded those made to Cîteaux and Clairvaux, and Cluny's abbot Peter the Venerable (r. 1122–56)—not only considered himself and his abbey the centres of the monastic world, but saw it as his duty to collect and publish arguments useful for preaching against heresy, Judaism, and Islam.<sup>26</sup> In the expanding society and economy of the central middle ages, Cluniac monasteries did not disappear but were supplemented by new reform communities.



For Conrad, Cluny's black monks are there to provide a contrast to the new reformers in their white garb at Cîteaux. Conrad tells us that Cîteaux was founded in 1098. The foundation was done by monks with their abbot Robert who left the reform house of Molesme to found a still stricter reform community. Robert would soon be recalled to Molesme and later there would be criticism about Robert abandoning his earlier community, which would make Cistercians themselves a little worried about the legality of their own mother-house's foundation. Conrad describes difficult early years, followed c.1113 by Cîteaux beginning to found daughter houses. Among these was the abbey of Clairvaux, following the conversion to the religious life and entrance of Bernard of Fontaines (1090–1153) who was soon sent from Cîteaux to become Clairvaux's first abbot. He would become one of the great intellectual and spiritual leaders of the period. His Latin compositions on biblical texts, his great sanctity, his complete confidence that there was no better life than that of the Cistercians as practised at Clairvaux, and his preaching against heresy and for the Second Crusade, spread his fame. He inspired converts to the life at Clairvaux including his protégé, the future Pope Eugenius III (1145–53).

The usual understanding of the Cistercians is that they had reduced the elaboration of liturgical celebration of earlier communities of monks, avoiding prayers for the dead, saints, relics, and pilgrims. They practised a new austerity that eschewed the sculptural art and gold altar furnishings that had attracted travellers to earlier monasteries but might distract the monks from their prayers. Altars should have nothing more ornate than wood and silver crosses and chalices. They wore cheap, un-dyed wool for their garments, abandoned the additions to monastic food that had been provided by gifts of pittances or special dietary treats, often given on days when they celebrated anniversaries. Buildings were in simple local styles and materials, without spires, vegetable motifs were to replace the elaborate historiated capitals used earlier, and stained glass was replaced with the less expensive grisaille in windows. To avoid living from the labour of villagers and the income of tithes and altars, and to pursue their contemplative lives 'far from cities, castles, and villages', such reformers supported themselves by working in the fields rather than by the more usual monastic activity of copying manuscripts. Whatever manuscripts were produced as service books or to record donations were in a simple style without illumination or ornamentation.

The economic success of these new reformers came in part from such austerities. They amassed cash surpluses, allowing the purchase of land to establish their grange agriculture. They also arrived on the scene at a propitious moment. Seeking areas to settle as far from existing settlements as possible, they arrived within long-established areas that were often undergoing changes in settlement patterns. Lords were moving villagers, once scattered on isolated farmsteads and in tiny hamlets, into nucleated villages near castles and with amenities such as water-powered mills and central ovens. Demands for payment for protection or use of such amenities made it harder for peasants to tend to the fields farthest away, on the margins of those villages and parishes. These were, of course, the precise holdings that new monks and nuns—seeking to live far from inhabited places—wanted to acquire, but despite Cistercian rhetoric these were often areas that had long been cultivated.

While some early reform houses disappeared below the radar, or were wholly absorbed by other larger communities, other reform houses that would become Cistercian sought to rely on their own labour by taking up pastoralism and animal husbandry, which were less labour-intensive than agriculture. In some cases such abbeys concentrating on pasturing animals rather than agriculture created small congregations of associated abbeys at different elevations. Pasture rights shared among them allowed the practice of a short-distance transhumance (moving animals annually from high mountain pastures to those of coastal marshes). In this regard the reformers were riding an economic wave in which a growing



demand in nearby cities for meat, cheese, parchment, leather, and wool made animal husbandry particularly profitable.<sup>27</sup>

Conrad saw the early founders at Cîteaux as the inventors of a new institution, the religious Order—an institution that for him (and for many subsequent historians) explained much of Cistercian success. A religious Order is a collection of monastic communities adopting a single monastic rule and set of customs (often organized into families of mother and daughter houses or provinces) which exercises internal visitation and correction and enjoins uniformity in practice, whether overseen by a master general or a collective head as in a General Chapter. But in more recent examinations of the record, such an Order did not appear before Bernard's death. There may have been a meeting at Cîteaux in 1147, but it was not the annual, mandatory assembly of all abbots that the General Chapter would become. Conrad describes papal approval in 1119 of a version of the Cistercian Charter of Charity, which he assumed indicated a full-blown order by that date. In fact, the charisma of Bernard would have held a congregation together without such institutions until his death in 1153. Conrad projected current institutions back onto too early a date, while until relatively late in the twelfth century, there was less need for such institutions.<sup>28</sup>

A different type of distortion is seen in Conrad's treatment of Cistercian nuns, who were simply left out of the story. Yet a likely reason for the secession from the recently-founded community of Molesme was that it was a double community to which women and children were admitted. Conrad does not mention that Stephen Harding, abbot of Cîteaux, had promoted a foundation for Cistercian nuns at Le Tart c.1120, and that the community of nuns at Le Tart had at least twenty daughter-houses by the end of the twelfth century—possibly even hosting its own General Chapter of abbesses.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Clairvaux's foundation was accompanied by one for nuns at Jully that accommodated the women from Bernard's own family. Up into the 1140s Bernard was a strong supporter of those nuns. Then the relationship between Jully and Bernard was severed, probably by Eugenius III who attached the Jully nuns firmly to Molesme. This was a period when association with women even in religious communities was increasingly deemed heretical, and possibly Bernard's efforts at Jully were seen by supporters like Eugenius as compromising to hopes for his immediate sanctification (which still took twenty years, being achieved only in 1174). A mid-century account by Herman of Tournai described Bernard of Clairvaux as promoting separate houses of monks and nuns, but being opposed to those 'double communities' founded by the Premonstratensians.<sup>30</sup> Moreover there are instances from the mid-twelfth century in which what had once been a double community was incorporated into the Order as two separate communities: one for women and one for men, as at Obazine and Coyroux.

By the early thirteenth century, when Conrad was writing his *Exordium Magnum*, the Cistercian Order had indeed become an institution to be admired, although its expansion owed much to the affiliation of independently-founded reform communities than was acknowledged in such official histories. In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council praised the Cistercians in announcing that all other monastic groups should emulate its organization, but also reacted to criticism of its wealth by limiting the Order's tithe exemption to properties already in hand by that date. New groups like the mendicants soon adopted the form of a religious Order as well—although in the case of Dominicans and Franciscans, in having a single Master or Minister General as did the new military religious Orders as well.

What Conrad of Eberbach cannot see at all is that the downside of Cistercian success was an increased complacency, and an intolerance toward rivals—whether the decadent Cluniacs or the austere *perfecti* of the Cathars. Cistercian grange agriculture had been brought into place not only by replacing, but sometimes expelling, peasant cultivators, a

practice which led in at least one case to the murder of a Cistercian lay-brother by villagers in Gascony when he attempted to lay out boundaries of a new grange.<sup>31</sup> Divorcing themselves from the traditional manorial regime in favour of living on the labour of their own hands had meant disavowing some of the more traditional monastic services to the poor, sick, and travellers, in favour of a new form of *caritas*, found in discussions of love of one's fellow monks or nuns, that looked inward to the monastic community itself.<sup>32</sup> In contrast, other reformers among the new hermits of the twelfth century, like those associated with Norbert of Xanten (c. 1080–1134) at Prémontré, became regular canons whose mission was to provide parochial services for the rural areas where they settled, and to support nursing sisters as canonesses doing similar social service. Nonetheless, as Conrad could not have anticipated, as their wealth and power increased, the popularity of the Cistercian Order's monks decreased, only made worse by their widely ineffective preaching against Cathar heretics.<sup>33</sup> Ironically, it was from 1200 to 1250 that we see a great expansion of Cistercian houses for nuns, which after the middle of the century would rival those for men in number (although women's houses were often smaller in size). To historians of the twenty-first century, reintegrating the story of such Cistercian women and other nuns into the history of twelfth-century monasticisms had meant rejecting large parts of Conrad's account. Instead it is more useful to consider Cîteaux and Clairvaux as part of the larger movement of what Henrietta Leyser has called 'the new hermits' of twelfth-century western Europe, and to recognize that women were part of that movement.<sup>34</sup> Such reformers were inspired by wandering preachers of the early twelfth century who espoused returning to the lives of the Desert Fathers, or the primitive Benedictine practice, or the life of the apostles without all the accretions of later Christianity. These new 'monastic' or 'eremitical' reformers may have appeared earliest in Italy where new foundations were made at Fonte Avellana, at Camaldoli, and Vallombrosa, but there were also a number of reformers in western France associated with the forest of Craon, that would develop into Savigny, Tiron, and Fontevrault, and in eastern France associated with la Grande Chartreuse and Prémontré as well as Molesme and Cîteaux. Countless other such reform groups arose independently only to be incorporated into larger communities of monks practising the common life as we see at Silvanès, Valmagne and Obazine.

Such twelfth-century reform groups also included large numbers of religious women's communities. There were groups for which women were central, such as the Orders of Fontevrault and Sempringham, but we also see early Prémontré incorporating nursing sisters as canonesses, and Hospitallers and Templars incorporating many independently-founded houses of sisters who cared for the sick, the poor, and travellers.<sup>35</sup> Monastic women of the twelfth century, moreover, could be intellectual powerhouses: we have only to mention the encyclopedic *Hortus Deliciarum* compiled for her nuns by Herrad of Hohenburg, or the *Scivias* and many other texts and treatises of Hildegard of Bingen, or the letters that include consideration of both the married and the monastic life by Heloise (c.1100–63) abbess of the Paraclete, and her correspondence with Peter Abelard (1079–1142/3) who, like the founder of Fontevrault, Robert of Arbrissel (c.1045–1116), was an advocate of the efficacy for their own salvation of men caring for women's religious communities.<sup>36</sup>

An interest in the apostolic life and efforts to draw lines between what was orthodox and what was heretical among its new practitioners, expanded in the thirteenth century. New recruits to religious life, describing themselves in terms of the biblical sisters Martha and Mary, struggled between their desires for the active versus the contemplative life. Others were inspired to lead penitential lives by the hope for salvation found in the life of the great

sinner and even greater penitent, Mary Magdalene. There were many individuals who could be immediately identified as heretical either because of their explicit anti-clericalism or their attacks on crucifixes and crosses. Others like the Waldensians, Humiliati and early penitents might approach the boundary with heresy when they showed diminished respect for the clerical establishment by their preaching, teaching, and advocacy of lay access to the Bible, or by pointing out that clerics were ignoring the needs of the urban poor.<sup>37</sup>

It is in this context that we must regard the conversion of the wealthy bourgeois, Francis of Assisi, who gave up his possessions, and even the clothing he stood in to wander from place to place restoring churches and preaching the Gospels without concern for what he would eat on the next day. As he gained followers in this life of mendicancy, they came close to becoming heretical, but the new movement was harnessed for the Church when Pope Innocent III (r. 1198–1216) impressed with their piety, authorized Francis as a preacher and approved Francis' rule in 1210. The Franciscans or Brothers Minor thus traced their origins to a dramatic conversion, that of Francis himself, seeing in him a Christ-like figure of extraordinary significance who would receive the stigmata at the end of his life. Franciscans, as they organized themselves into an Order, came more and more to resemble the other great new mendicant movement, the Dominicans. This was to move away from the primitive notions of absolute poverty that Francis had advocated and would lead to considerable later struggle between those who saw themselves maintaining Francis's original notions and those who sought urban preaching and education.

The Franciscan and Dominican Orders—despite their very different origins—came to be closely allied. Their organizations too were similar. It was primarily the Franciscan 'conventuals' who incorporated aspects of the Dominican constitution and its emphasis on study and preaching. Both groups developed houses of study at major theological faculties, and at Paris, the Dominican Thomas Aquinas and the Franciscan Bonaventura would be deemed among the greatest thirteenth-century theologians. Faced with conflict with seculars at the University of Paris, the Dominicans and Franciscans joined forces to present a common front with regard to their teaching privileges. The two groups would come to be closely identified with the study of theology, with the exercise of inquisition, and with preaching against heresy as well as attempts to convert Jews and Muslims.<sup>38</sup>

Unlike the personal conversion of the Franciscan founder, Francis of Assisi, the creation of the Dominicans brought with it a different meaning of conversion, for in the Dominican case, conversion became their mission rather than the precipitating event of their foundation. The Spanish canon, Dominic of Osma and his followers initially focussed their efforts on preaching to the dualist Cathar heretics of southern France and on converting them back to orthodoxy. In preaching and debating with those heretics Dominic advocated a posture of simplicity and humility: meeting heretics in simple garb, barefoot, and without ceremony. Such an approach adopted by Dominic and his fellow priests inspired an existing community of nuns at the abbey of Prouille, who converted to the notions of Dominic and his fellow preachers, who in turn joined the nuns at that community before establishing separate houses in Toulouse and Fanjeaux. As the earliest authentic documents show, there were in fact nuns already established there.<sup>39</sup> But as in the case of Franciscans, or for that matter of the Cistercians, the issue of the *cura monialium*, the care of nuns' souls, arose as the Dominican Order became more established. In one of the earliest histories of the Dominicans, *The Little Book on the Beginnings of the Order of Preachers* written in the 1130s by Jordan of Saxony, the first master general of the Dominicans, (r. 1222–37), the rejection of the *cura monialium* by the Dominican brothers involved a recasting of Prouille's origins. Apparently in response to rejoinders from women's communities that Dominic and his companions had ministered to the nuns of Prouille, Jordan attempted to

argue that Prouille was an exceptional case by asserting that the religious women at Prouille were Cathar women converted to orthodoxy for whom Dominic and his early companions provided spiritual care. However, this is simply not the case: Prouille's nuns were Catholic women who had been inspired or converted to a higher religious life—supporting Dominic in his mission against Catharism.<sup>40</sup>

Indeed Catholic women penitents, inspired to service even before there were mendicant Orders, were incorporated as an important constituent of the new mendicant groups. The absorption of their communities contributed to the rapid growth of Dominicans and Franciscans. Such communities of women, moreover, had sometimes already developed rules and customs before their incorporation into those Orders, and their in-house rules contributed to later ones adopted more widely.<sup>41</sup> Among the Franciscans, later misogynous exaggerations created a very negative position on women, and as the Franciscans like the Dominicans struggled to escape what they saw as the burdens of the *cura monialium*, they came to attach negative views about women to official accounts of Francis' life.<sup>42</sup>

The importance of early penitent women for the growth of the Franciscan movement is reflected in certain 'diversionary' tactics by the thirteenth-century papacy. In 1219 Cardinal Hugolino (the future Gregory IX), who had been appointed by Honorius III as Protector of the Franciscans, wrote a form of life for penitent women inspired by the Franciscans, calling it the Order of San Damiano in a deliberate, but unsuccessful, attempt to merge the penitent women he oversaw with the followers of Clare of Assisi living in Assisi at the church of San Damiano. While Clare (the follower of Francis) and her sisters at San Damiano had been persuaded to adopt the life of enclosed nuns, they also sought (and gained at the very end of her life) the privilege of absolute poverty. They were allowed to own no property, but were instead dependent on Franciscan friars to beg for them. Innocent IV granted their privilege of absolute poverty only a few days before Clare's death in 1253, and the women of Clare's community were unsuccessful in trying to extend that practice to their own daughter-communities in an Order of Saint Clare. The privilege was soon rescinded, although Isabelle of France, the sister of Louis IX, did get permission establish a Franciscan life for nuns similar to that of the Order's friars at her foundation at Longchamps.<sup>43</sup>

That all such communities of nuns, whether Cistercian, Franciscan, or Dominican, receive adequate priestly services became a priority of the papacy and the religious Orders. But the institutional Church was also concerned that they be adequately enclosed and separated from the men who provided that care, and that they have endowment adequate to prevent begging. The establishment of nuns' choirs, grills and screens to isolate the nuns from the priests celebrating mass also limited the nuns' ability to see the mass and the crucial moment of the Elevation of the Host, when the consecrated bread and wine became the body and blood of Christ. In the third quarter of the thirteenth century papal instructions to the Cistercian abbots required establishing a maximum size for every house of nuns according to its endowment. Among the mendicants this appears to have been handled by a formula of so much income per nun. Such efforts culminated in Boniface VIII's bull of *Periculoso* on the enclosure of nuns in 1298. Its basic point was that nuns should have sufficient endowment to avoid having to leave their enclosure to beg and that their land-holdings should not be unnecessarily dependent on their being able to make homage for their holdings, but that abbesses could always leave enclosure with the permission of the bishop to undertake monastic business. Thus the 1298 terms were considerably less severe than the later Tridentine 'reissue' of *Periculoso* in 1563.<sup>44</sup>



With the Avignon papacy, the Black Death and a general economic downturn in western Europe, and despite new initiatives by Bridget of Sweden and Catherine of Siena, the history of monasticism at the end of the middle ages is primarily one of internal reform rather than new initiatives. Increasingly such reform targeted women, such as those in northern Germany that the ‘observants’ of the 1400s saw as violating monastic rules by holding private income and property. Thus reformers from Windesheim arrived at houses of Cistercian and Benedictine nuns in the region of Luneberg, bringing vehicles along because they anticipated having to carry off unco-operative abbesses and prioresses. Interpretation of such histories requires careful evaluation of larger contexts, for in this case the reformers wholly failed to recognize the ways in which the private funds of elite women within the religious communities had sponsored pious activities and fed and clothed poorer members of their communities when monastic endowment failed.<sup>45</sup> The situation of such nuns becomes increasingly complex in places like Italy where the economic downturn of the Renaissance had begun to lead some families to place some daughters in convents as a means of avoiding excessive dowries, whereas elsewhere the communities of nuns would have worked at some activity such as printing in order to support themselves.<sup>46</sup>

Whatever the case, recent reassessment has underscored the importance of women within medieval monasticisms and the abilities that those women brought to monastic affairs. Although by failing to mention those women, medieval monks like Conrad of Eberbach might imply that they did not exist, women nonetheless played important roles in the varieties of monasticisms that developed in the central middle ages. At a time when the economy was thriving and population still expanding, society could have the luxury of supporting both male and female specialists in prayer. In that period from roughly 1000 to 1300 ad the overall numbers of monks and nuns rose from less than 1 per cent of the entire population up to perhaps double that number—and if can judge from the evidence from Rome cited above, at least a third of them were religious women.



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## CHAPTER 23

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# MYSTICISM AND THE BODY

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## ROSALYNN VOADEN

Thus by stages I passed from bodies to the soul which uses the body for perceiving, and from this to the soul's inner power, to which the body's senses present external things...

[Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*<sup>1</sup>]

AMBIVALENCE about the body is a fundamental aspect of Christianity. On the one hand the body is the site of sin and carries the consequences of original sin in man's condemnation to physical labour and woman's sentence to suffering in childbirth. On the other, Scripture teaches that God created man in his own image, and that it is through the Incarnate Christ that salvation is found. This ambivalence about the body is reflected in perceptions of Christian mysticism, which tends to be represented as a yearning to transcend the body but which is, as this chapter demonstrates, in fact inextricably linked to bodily experience and physical sensation. In the first part of this chapter, which offers a survey of medieval mysticism, we shall see how this ambivalence about the body shaped the Church's teaching about mysticism and influenced the mystical experiences of devout Christians.

During the high and late middle ages, the desire to experience communion, or, ultimately, union with the divine influenced much devotional practice and gave rise to some of the most vivid religious writing that we have, writing which illuminates the connection that existed for medieval women and men between the body and mystical experience. In medieval mystical practice the body functions as a vehicle for divine union in a variety of ways, ways which differ significantly over time and place. Mysticism in the Christian tradition is a vast and complex topic that does not readily lend itself to easy definition. In its most basic sense, it is founded on the conviction that God reveals hidden knowledge to some of the faithful, and that those he chooses may apprehend him directly. This can be either in the form of direct communication through the senses, or in the form of deep, inchoate, spiritual knowing. Both forms are based on the belief that one can approach the divine in the hope of ultimately achieving union with God before death. Theologians since the days of the early Church have sought to understand the nature of mystical experience and identify how a believer can become receptive to the divine. In pursuit of this end, theologians describe two main categories of mystical experience: the *via negativa* and the *via positiva*. The *via negativa* is based on the belief that God is ultimately unknowable and that any experience of the divine is ineffable. The *via positiva* affirms that God can be known to believers experientially, through the spiritual senses, and that the experience can, and usually should, be shared with others.

While these forms of mysticism derive from Greek and Jewish mystical practices, in the Christian tradition the earliest significant development of the concepts is found in the writings of Augustine of Hippo (354–430). In *De Genesi ad Litteram* Book XII, Augustine identified three forms of vision, a definition which has had a profound and lasting effect:

Hence let us call the first kind of vision corporeal, because it is perceived through the body and presented to the senses of the body. The second will be spiritual, for whatever is not a body and yet is something, is rightly called spirit: and certainly the image of an absent body, though it resembles a body, is not itself a body any more than is the act of vision by which it is perceived. The third kind will be intellectual, from the word intellect.<sup>2</sup>



Augustine clearly establishes a hierarchy of vision, stating, '[f]or spiritual vision is more excellent than corporeal, and intellectual is more excellent than spiritual'.<sup>3</sup> Corporeal vision is that which is seen with the bodily eyes, or perceived by the bodily senses. By spiritual vision, sometimes called imaginative vision, Augustine means things which are perceived internally, through the soul. Imaginative vision accords with the *via positiva*. Both corporeal and imaginative vision are suspect—your bodily eyes can deceive you, and the images which constitute spiritual vision could be inspired by the devil. In contrast, intellectual vision, that is vision experienced by way of the *via negativa*, is inchoate, often described as a deep, inward knowing which defies articulation. Gregory the Great (540–604) describes the experience in *Moralia in Job*:

[E]xultation can be known in the understanding, though it cannot be expressed in words... Through it we know what is beyond knowing, and since the consciousness of the one knowing is scarcely adequate to contemplate it, how could the speaker's tongue suffice to express it?<sup>4</sup>

This form of vision is not perceived as suspect, since neither the bodily nor the spiritual senses are involved. The section of this chapter titled 'The Absent Body' discusses the influence of intellectual vision on the reception of revelatory writing.

Other patristic authors adopted Augustine's typology of vision, sometimes varying the terms but maintaining the vital distinction between sensual and intellectual apprehension, and the superiority of the latter. The privileging of intellectual over spiritual (imaginative) vision continues in a virtually unbroken line throughout the middle ages. Gregory the Great, for example, emphasizes the need to guard against spiritual vision:

For these appearances of bodily figures it has attracted to itself within, through infirmity of the flesh. But when it is completely filled with compunction, it is here specially on its guard, lest the imagination of circumscribed vision should delude it, when it is searching after truth; and it rejects all imaginations which present themselves to it.<sup>5</sup>

In a particularly comprehensive dismissal of imaginative vision, the English mystic Walter Hilton (d. 1395) writes in *The Scale of Perfection* that:

visions or revelations of any kind of spirit, appearing in the body or in the imagination, asleep or awake, or any other feeling in the bodily senses made in spiritual fashion—either in sound by the ear, or tasting in the mouth, or smelling to the nose, or else any heat that can be felt like fire glowing and warming the breast or any other part of the body, or anything that can be felt by bodily sense, however comforting and pleasing it may be—these are not truly contemplation.<sup>6</sup>

Conviction of the superiority of intellectual vision was reinforced by the discovery in the West of the works of pseudo-Dionysius (the Areopagite), a theologian and philosopher of the late-fifth to early-sixth century whose works include *Mystical Theology* and *The Celestial Hierarchy*. These works show a strong neo-Platonic influence, and focus on the *via negativa*, which teaches that because God is wholly other one must leave behind the body and sensory awareness in order to approach the divine.

While Dionysian mysticism was embraced by the Scholastics and the newly emerging universities, something of a counter movement developed in the twelfth century, based largely on the thought and writing of Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153). The Cistercian abbot's highly influential sermons on the Song of Songs speak of a desiring God who moves towards his created beings as they move towards him. Contrary to Dionysian mysticism, Bernard elevates corporeality, stating, for example, 'He [God] became incarnate for the sake of carnal men, that he might induce them to relish the life of the Spirit. In the body and through the body he performed works of which not man but God was the author'.<sup>7</sup> Bernard's sermons on the Song of Songs had an immense impact on the language

subsequently employed to express mystical desire and experience. Perhaps the most notable example of the use of the 'language of love' to both understand and articulate mystical experience is found in the *brautmystik* ('bridal mysticism') tradition of women visionaries, particularly in northern Europe and among the Beguines, from the thirteenth century onward. In this tradition, which fits within Augustine's definition of spiritual, or imaginative, vision, language and images are derived from the Song of Songs, both directly and from Bernard's sermons, as well as from southern French troubadour lyrics and the *minnesang* of the Low Countries.

In addition to the impact of Bernard's works, imaginative vision was given a significant impetus by the teaching of the Franciscans, who established a popular movement toward the exercise of affective piety in prayer and contemplation. Affective piety is a form of meditation which focuses on the Nativity and Passion of Christ—those events of his life which most vividly feature his humanity, that is, his bodiliness. Worshippers are encouraged to imagine themselves present at the events of Christ's life, to visualize the scene in great detail, and to suffer and rejoice with those who participated in those events.

Affective piety—creating and appearing in their own spiritual dramas—had a great appeal especially for women, and may well have influenced their propensity for imaginative vision. Most male mystics had intellectual visions. One can almost count on the fingers of one hand those men experiencing imaginative vision: Robert of Uzès, Joachim of Fiore, John of Rupecissa, and Richard Rolle are probably the best known of the few. However, in this same period, between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, there was an enormous increase in the number of women receiving imaginative visions, and writing about them. On a simple level, this gender division can be attributed in part to the fact that most treatises on intellectual vision were written in Latin, and circulated within monastic networks and so were less accessible to women, even enclosed women, the majority of whom were not Latin-literate. In addition, intellectual vision eschewed the body and the senses, both of which were perceived to be primarily women's attributes. It is not surprising that, consequently, women's transcendental experiences would echo their supposedly fleshly, sensual natures, and would be in the form of imaginative vision. In addition, imaginative vision, unlike intellectual vision, is nearly always accompanied by a divine injunction to communicate the vision to fellow Christians. Since women were forbidden to preach, imaginative visions were therefore usually disseminated in writing, often in the vernacular. Many of these works of revelation offered a compelling narrative of spiritual experience and so provided models for other women to understand and articulate their own contemplative experiences.

This did not ameliorate the suspicion attached by ecclesiastical officials to imaginative vision. If anything, it was intensified, since women were, by definition, easily deceived and prone to deceive; the combination of women and vision was one fraught with danger. Consequently, the Church imposed rigorous tests on women who claimed to have visions, and attempted to control the influence and spread of revelatory writing. Mysticism is potentially destabilizing to the institutional Church, in large part because direct communication with the divine obviates the need for priestly intercession and threatens sacerdotal authority. This is a particular concern with imaginative vision, with its divine injunction to communicate the revelation; the concern is heightened when women are the receivers of the revelation.

The process developed by the Church for testing whether visions were of divine or demonic origin is based on the discernment of spirits—*discretio spirituum*—which is one of the charisms of the Holy Spirit mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:10. Treatises on the discernment of spirits offered a kind of handbook for both clerics and visionaries, outlining

the acceptable qualities of both vision and visionaries. One of the most significant expectations was that visionaries be under the guidance of a spiritual director who would counsel and reassure visionaries—many of whom initially doubted the truth of their own revelations. Frequently, the spiritual director served as amanuensis and/or editor of the written revelations, ensuring the orthodoxy of expression and facilitating the dissemination of the works. The relationship between visionary and spiritual director was a very powerful one for both parties, though the nature of the relationship varied widely over time and place and was often influenced by the policy of the Order to which the spiritual director belonged.

With this very brief survey of the major trends and issues in medieval Christian mysticism, I now move to an examination of the ways in which the body functions in mystical praxis. The subject of this chapter is mysticism and the body, so it is inevitable that the main focus of the discussion in the next section is imaginative vision—those revelations received through the spiritual senses as things seen, heard, felt, or smelled. In addition, because it is mainly women who receive imaginative visions, this section largely features women and their visions. The first four sections—Christ’s body, the erotic body, the suffering body and the gendered body—offer illustrations and analysis of the intimate association of body and vision in medieval mysticism. The last section of the chapter, the absent body, examines the intellectual vision, or Dionysian mysticism, the form of vision which is held to be superior to imaginative vision because it eschews the body and the senses. In addition to a brief discussion of Dionysian mysticism, this section focuses on the ways in which the body of the visionary or, indeed, of the divine, is made to disappear in the articulation of revelation,

But first, a note about nomenclature. Modern scholarship tends to label all transcendental experience mystical. However, as we have seen, since the days of Augustine such experiences were usually categorized as vision, albeit of different kinds, and the devotional activity leading to those experiences as contemplation (*contemplatio*). I think it useful to maintain the medieval distinction, and in this chapter I refer to those who receive mostly spiritual visions as visionaries, and, with a nod to modern terminology, those who experience intellectual vision as mystics.

The purpose of this part of the chapter is to demonstrate that body and vision are inextricably linked in medieval mysticism, and that physical sensations frequently served as an impetus to visionary experience. It is, for example, in her body that Margery Kempe (c.1373–after 1438) feels the presence of the divine. She describes how, for sixteen years, she had ‘a flame of fire, wonderfully hot and delectable and right comfortable... though the weather was never so cold, she felt the heat burning in her breast and at her heart, as verily as a man should feel the material fire if he put his hand or fingers therein’.<sup>8</sup> When she first feels this warmth she is alarmed, but the Lord consoles her, telling her that what she feels is the heat of the Holy Ghost and the fire of love which quenches all sins. Here it is evident that she actually feels the warmth in her body. The homely comment that this heat keeps her warm when the weather is cold makes this clear. But, and this is very much a factor in imaginative vision, the bodily sensation propels Margery into a visionary state, where she hears God speak to her and is brought to understand the spiritual significance of that bodily sensation.

Margery’s experience, described above, is but one example of how bodily sensation is depicted in visionary narratives as leading to spiritual understanding. The remainder of this chapter explores five ways in which the body is represented in visionary narratives as a means of moving the faithful towards communion with the divine.

## CHRIST'S BODY

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While the body of the visionary is the site of sensations which induce mystical experiences, it is also a locus of physical response to the image or idea of Christ's body. Since our topic is Christian mysticism and the body, it is fitting that I begin with a discussion of that one body which is central to Christianity, and an analysis of some of the ways in which Christ's body is represented in the vast literature of mystical experience. There are three main ways in which Christ in incarnational, human form appears in vision: as a child; as a comely young man, sometimes a lover; and as the tortured figure on the cross. Sometimes Christ's body is given symbolic form: for example, in some eucharistic visions he appears as a mass of bleeding flesh, or as a lamb. In other visions, his body is a house, or a shelter into which the faithful can creep.

First, an examination of visions of Christ as a child. In many of these visions the visionary is onlooker rather than participant. The child in the vision generally does not speak, so, while the vision conveys no spoken message it does intensify spiritual fervour and heighten devotion. Many such visions occur at the Eucharist. Marie of Oignies (1177–1213) frequently saw 'when the priest was raising the host... between the hands of the priest the outward appearance of a beautiful boy...'. Angela of Foligno (1248–1309) saw the Christ Child in the host '...so beautiful and so magnificently adorned... This vision was a source of such joy for me that I do not believe I will ever lose the joy of it'.<sup>9</sup> Here the visionaries recount their emotional response and resulting spiritual fervour on seeing the host transformed into a physical body, the body of Christ.

Many visions of the Christ Child focus, not surprisingly, on the Nativity. When she was in Bethlehem on pilgrimage, Birgitta of Sweden (1302/3–73) received a vision which influenced subsequent artistic representations of the nativity. Prior to Birgitta's vision, most paintings showed the Virgin, after the birth, lying down and cradling the new-born Christ, in a posture characteristic of most women. Birgitta, however, sees the pregnant Virgin kneel at prayer 'and in a moment and the twinkling of an eye, she gave birth to a Son, from whom there went out such a great and ineffable light and splendor that the sun could not be compared to it... His flesh was most clean of all filth and uncleanness'.<sup>10</sup> The result of Birgitta's vision is to intensify the distinction between the birth of Christ and that of ordinary children, and between the birth experience of the Virgin Mary and that of ordinary women. The bodies of both Virgin and child in Birgitta's vision are purified—the afterbirth comes 'neatly wrapped' and the Virgin's womb 'at once retracted, and her body then looked wonderfully beautiful and delicate'.<sup>11</sup> However, despite the fact that there are no blood, sweat and tears in Birgitta's narrative of her vision—those, of course, being reserved for the Crucifixion—it is undeniably bodily, from the reference to the afterbirth to the description of the swaddling clothes.

The details of Birgitta's vision—the afterbirth, cutting the umbilical cord, the swaddling clothes—clearly derive from her own experience of giving birth to eight children. In contrast Gertrude the Great of Helfta (1256–1301/2) recounts a vision in which she is a participant and where her unfamiliarity with babies seems apparent. Gertrude entered the monastery of Helfta as an oblate at the age of five, so it is entirely likely that she had no experience of babies or young children. In her vision, she is chastised by the Virgin Mary for her clumsy handling of the newborn babe.<sup>12</sup> Gertrude's description of her awkwardness in holding the child heightens the sense of physicality in the visionary experience. The Virgin Mary's response to Gertrude's ineptitude in holding the child makes her aware of her



spiritual unworthiness and lukewarm devotion. As is so often the case with visionary narrative, bodily involvement gives rise to spiritual insight.

Some visions of the Christ child can be related to the use of Christ-dolls as spurs to devotion; in many of these visions, the visionary is an active participant, embracing, cuddling or suckling the babe. Examples abound of these dolls, which were often elaborately dressed according to the liturgical season, and laid in ornate cradles, sometimes designed to resemble a church. The Dominican monastery of Maria Medingen has preserved a Christ-doll in memory of Margaret Ebner (c.1290–1351), a nun whose transcendental experiences were incontrovertibly rooted in her body (the doll was thought to be contemporary with Margaret Ebner until restoration work in the 1930s revealed that it dates instead from the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, it remains beside Margaret's shrine in the monastery). Margaret had a Christ-doll which she embraced and suckled in obvious *imitatio Mariae*, and which spoke to her:

'If you do not suckle me then I will draw away from you and you will take no delight in me.' So I took the image out of the crib and placed it against my naked heart with great delight and sweetness, and perceived then the most powerful grace in the presence of God so that I began to wonder how our dear Lady could have ever endured the continuous presence of God.<sup>13</sup>

This vision too evokes a powerful physicality, not only in relation to Margaret's suckling of the Christ-doll, but to the Virgin's suckling of the Christ child. In both cases, the bodily function of breast feeding is equated with the infusion of God's grace.

A second shape in which Christ appears in visions is as a comely young man. It is generally in this form that Christ appears and speaks to visionaries in order to intensify their devotion, to reveal his intentions for them, or to communicate instructions for their fellow-Christians. This obviously reflects both scriptural and artistic representations of Christ during his earthly mission, between the ages of thirty and thirty-three, when he was teaching and preaching. When Margery Kempe suffers from madness after the birth of her first child, her affliction is profoundly bodily as well as spiritual—she bites herself and tears her skin with her nails, and has to be tied to her bed. She is returned to health by the appearance of Christ on her bedside 'in likeness of a man, most seemly, most beautiful, and most amiable...'.<sup>14</sup> It is worth noting here that Christ appears to Margery on her bedside, locus, presumably, of both the conception and birth of her child, thereby associating himself with these most bodily—and female—functions. Gertrude the Great of Helfta recognizes a physical as well as a spiritual kinship with Christ when, at age twenty-five, she first encounters him. 'He was lovely and refined and looked about sixteen; his appearance was such as my youth would find pleasing'. She responds to his looks and comments on his youth, which she links to her own bodily age. Gertrude sees his body and responds to it as a body in her own body—'burning with desire and almost fainting'. She is given the promise of spiritual union as Christ lifts her bodily to stand beside him, and promises to 'make her drunk with the rushing river of my divine pleasure'.<sup>15</sup> Again, bodily sensation precedes, even initiates, spiritual union.

It is also, not surprisingly, as a handsome man that Christ features as lover in the visions of many women. The early thirteenth-century visionary Hadewijch of Brabant, for example, describes his appearing to her 'in the form and clothing of a Man...looking like a Human Being and a Man, wonderful and beautiful and with glorious face'.<sup>16</sup> We will encounter further examples below, in the section on the erotic body.

Finally, and not surprisingly, the tortured figure on the cross is a powerful focus of many visions. For it is in the body of the crucified Christ that the locus of redemption resides; visions of the crucified Christ are therefore powerful spurs to devotion and reminders of the



way to salvation. Few such visions feature an explicit, spoken message; rather, the message is implicit in the broken, bleeding body. Margery Kempe, while on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, has a vision which initiates the tears of compassion and bodily writhing which stay with her for at least a decade, earning her much reproof and hostility from clergy and lay alike:

[I]t was granted this creature to behold so verily his precious tender body, completely rent and torn with scourges, more full of wounds than ever was a dove house of holes, hanging upon the cross with the crown of thorns upon his head, his blissful hands, his tender feet nailed to the hard tree, the rivers of blood flowing out plenteously from every member, the grisly and grievous wound in his precious side shedding out blood and water for her love and her salvation...<sup>17</sup>

Margery's graphic vision of the torn and bleeding body of Christ finds a response in her own bodily writhing and vocal roaring. She understands her bodily transports and the social isolation which ensues as a manifestation of God's desire that she share in Christ's suffering, that she live in *imitatio Christi*.

Julian of Norwich (1332–after 1416) wishes for three things: bodily sickness, three wounds and a 'bodily sight' of the Passion of Christ, arguing that this would be a truer recollection of his suffering than that offered by the teaching of the Church and the paintings of the Passion. Julian seems to think that through her own bodily suffering she might come to that 'bodily sight' of Christ's suffering, and this is, in fact, what happens. She becomes seriously ill, and, while she is lying on her sickbed she receives a series of sixteen revelations. The first vision of Christ shows her 'the red blood trickling down from under the crown, all hot, flowing freely and copiously, a living stream, just as it seemed to me that it was at the time when the crown of thorns was thrust down upon his blessed head. Just so did he, both God and man, suffer for me'.<sup>18</sup> As with Margery, Christ's suffering is reproduced in Julian's own body, while at the same time her own fervently desired bodily suffering induces her visions.

In addition to the pictorial and graphic depictions of Christ in so many visions, Christ's body also features symbolically, or metaphorically. For example, in some eucharistic visions the host is transformed into a pile of bleeding meat, into a baby, or a lamb. His body is also frequently represented as a shelter for the faithful, especially the suffering or troubled faithful. Mechtild of Hackeborn (1241–99), suffering a severe headache, asks Christ for solace. 'Our Lord then showed her the wound in his heart and said, "Go in here, so that you may rest." And she entered with great gladness and joy into the heart of God which was like a most beautiful house... Then it seemed to her that there were as many silken pillows there as she had previously had painful throbbings in her head'.<sup>19</sup> Although in this example, and others like it, the body of Christ assumes a symbolic significance beyond that of his physical, human body, yet it is still with a body, recognizably human though enhanced through his divinity, that the body of the visionary can unite.

In sum, then, Christ's body is frequently, and perhaps always implicitly, either the focus or the origin of vision. In such cases the visionary is generally an onlooker, is passive. Perhaps he or she reacts—with tears of compassion to the vision of the crucified Christ, for example or with love and wonder to the vision of the Christ child. However, there are other occasions when the visionary is a full participant, and it is in his or her own body that the mystical experience is felt. Inevitably these categories are not exclusive—reaction to a vision of Christ's body can elicit profound sensations in the body or emotions of the visionary. This is perhaps most evident in the frequently discussed and often controversial erotic visions. Much scholarly attention has been paid to these visions, which were particularly prevalent among the beguines of northern Europe in the thirteenth and

fourteenth centuries. As I indicated above, the language of the Song of Songs, brought into the mainstream of popular religion by the sermons of Bernard of Clairvaux, had a profound impact on the articulation of vision. Secular love poetry—that of the troubadours and of the *minnesingers*—also influenced the development, particularly among the beguines of the Low Country and Northern Germany, of the bridal mysticism known as *brautmystik*.

## THE EROTIC BODY

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While modern readers might be surprised, even shocked, by the intensity and overt sensuality of descriptions of physical intimacy with the incarnate Christ it is not surprising that this most-longed for mystical union should be expressed in the language we use to describe our own sexual desire and fantasies. Limited as it is, this language is all that we have to describe transcendent longing and ultimate fulfilment. Accounts of erotic visions offer such vivid detail of their physical and emotional effects that there can be little doubt the experience was felt bodily and then understood spiritually. Erotic visions run the gamut from yearning desire for Christ, through kisses and embraces, to mystical marriage and descriptions of erotic union which suggest orgasm.

Sensations of warmth and sweetness suggestive of erotic feelings appear in the accounts of many visionaries, such as Margery Kempe's description of the burning in her breast which I discuss above. Richard Rolle (d. 1349) writes of his amazement when '[I] first felt my heart wax warm, truly, and not in imagination, but as if it were burned with sensible fire...ofttimes I have groped my breast seeking whether this burning were from any bodily cause outwardly. But when I knew that it was only kindled inwardly from a ghostly cause... Gladly therefore I am molten into the desire of greater love'.<sup>20</sup> Rolle's account offers a rare example of a male visionary experiencing the same kind of physical sensations as did many women visionaries. And, for Rolle as for the women, bodily sensation encourages spiritual awareness.

Many of the embraces and kisses described in visions focus on the Wounded Side of Christ, and involve an exchange of blood, or of hearts. While, as described above, the Wounded Side, or Sacred Heart serves as a shelter for the faithful, in many narratives it becomes an eroticized locus for entry and for union. In a graphically detailed vision which leaves actual bodily traces, Gertrude the Great is embraced by Christ against his Wounded Side:

[f]rom the loving wound in the Lord's most holy side she had contracted a pink scar on her left side. After this when she was approaching to receive the body of Christ, the Lord himself seemed to receive that sacred host in him with his divine mouth. Passing through his inmost being it emerged from the wound in Christ's most holy side, and like a dressing, fitted itself over that life-giving wound.<sup>21</sup>

Christ then tells her that the dressing formed by the host covers both of their wounds, thus further uniting them in the flesh.

The bodily exchanges described in this account are complex and erotically charged. Gertrude is endowed with a pale copy of the wound in Christ's side, with its obvious vaginal echo, and the two wounds are the site of union. Christ consumes his own body, in the form of the host, which then emerges from his Wounded Side to become a dressing which further unites Gertrude and Christ. This redaction of the Eucharist restores the real presence of Christ to the host, and is in the blood imprinted on Gertrude's side through his loving embrace.

In addition, visionaries frequently describe themselves sucking or drinking from the Wounded Side. Catherine of Siena is guided by Christ to drink from his side, ‘she fastened her lips upon that sacred wound, and still more eagerly the mouth of her soul, and there she slaked her thirst’.<sup>22</sup> Catherine distinguishes between her bodily lips and the lips of her soul which suggests strongly that she first feels/imagines the physical sensation of her mouth sucking at the wound, a sensation which then acquires a spiritual resonance. Similarly, Angela of Foligno is called by Christ to drink from his side: ‘I saw and drank the blood which was freshly flowing from his side. His intention was to make me understand that by this blood he would cleanse me’.<sup>23</sup> Again, bodily sensation is followed by spiritual understanding.

One of the most vivid articulations of mystical consummation is that of Margaret Ebner who describes the divine response to her desire in a surprisingly knowing fashion:

I felt such a strong, powerful grace from my desires that I thought I could not survive from one desire to the next. I felt the sweetest thrusts against my heart with the most powerful grace and the sweetest movements, so that I thought my heart would fly to pieces from His raging love and would like to dissolve from His grace. But then he acted like a clever, knowledgeable lover and withdrew the turbulence from me so that my frail humanity could better bear it.<sup>24</sup>

The intense physicality of this description makes it clear that Margaret experiences her union with Christ in her body and through her body. What is more, she makes explicit comparison with Christ as a lover—a clever, knowing lover, what’s more, a comparison which suggests a strong and acknowledged erotic response to the presence of Christ. For Margaret, annihilation into God, that longed-for mystical union, is orgasmic in intensity.

Erotic union is also conveyed, or implied, in narratives of mystical marriage. Sometimes these accounts place less emphasis on eroticism and more on the concept of union through marriage. Mechtild of Magdeburg (c.1208–c.1282) was a beguine whose six-volume mystical work *The Flowing Light of the Godhead* aroused such controversy that she retreated to the enclosed nunnery of Helfta, where she wrote the final volume. In lyrical prose and poetry she conveys a dialogue between God and the Soul. Her account of mystical marriage combines both erotic and social elements:

And our Redeemer becomes a Bridegroom...

The more his desire grows, the more extravagant their wedding celebration becomes.

The narrower the bed of love becomes, the more intense are the embraces.

The sweeter the kisses on the mouth become, the more lovingly they gaze at each other.

The greater the distress in which they part, the more he bestows upon her.<sup>25</sup>

Accounts of erotic union with Christ are some of the most powerful visionary narratives that we have. Understandably, desire for union with Christ is translated into the language in which human beings express their own desire for intimacy, their yearning to be at one with another person. Imaginative visions of Christ as lover, inspired by bodily sensations and evoking an erotic response move the visionary to a greater sense of union with the divine and an awareness of Christ present in her own body.

## THE SUFFERING BODY

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While erotic union might seem a more obvious and desirable way to imagine intimacy with Christ, the body in pain was also a source of inspiration and intimacy for many visionaries. Affective piety had a powerful influence on this form of devotion, in that it urges

imaginative empathy with the suffering of Christ, often with highly specific focus—the pain of the nail being driven in to his hand, or of the crown of thorns on his head. The desire to emulate Christ’s suffering by living in *imitatio Christi* is evident in much visionary writing. While bodily manifestations of erotic yearning for Christ may be understood as physiological responses to desire, the deliberate infliction of pain in many cases served as a vehicle of contemplation. Visionaries routinely mortified the flesh by means of hairshirts, flagellation, tightly knotted girdles or by kneeling for long periods on dried peas or stones. For example, Birgitta of Sweden dripped hot wax into wounds on her hands every Friday; Dorothea of Montau (d. 1394) performed devotional gymnastics, standing motionless in contorted positions for hours on end. The pain which they inflicted on themselves served a dual purpose: it enhanced their contemplative state and it also served as a powerful reminder of Christ’s suffering.

In addition, many visionaries suffered involuntary illnesses—that is, bodily suffering which they did not necessarily or explicitly seek. Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) suffered chronic headaches which often left her bedridden; the visionaries of Helfta also had frequent debilitating headaches; Margery Kempe had an unspecified illness for several years; and Elisabeth of Schönau (c.1128–c.1164) was frequently overcome with such weakness that other sisters had to support her in the choir. Other visionaries, like Julian of Norwich, prayed for an illness through which they might approach the divine. Illness, whether willed or unwilled, was constructed as a divine blessing and often served to initiate a state of mystical receptivity. Margaret Ebner was seriously ill for most of her life. Ultimately she was unable to move or speak, except for crying out the name ‘Jesus Christ’, and uttering uncontrollable ‘loud outcries’ and bursts of laughter. Her bodily suffering was not only a means of identifying with Christ, but also induced a state of ecstasy. It is revealed to her that she is to share in ‘every sort of suffering that God endured’. In addition to her illness, Margaret inflicts pain on herself. She recounts taking a large crucifix and pressing it against her naked breast with all her strength, with so much force that what she describes as ‘death spots’ are left on her body. She writes ‘I cannot break off [pressing the crucifix] the whole time I suffer the divine presence with such powerful and sweet grace’.<sup>26</sup> Margaret’s sense of union with Christ, her knowledge of his presence, derives from her own infirmity which offers her a way to identify with Christ in his suffering. She achieves a state of ecstasy when his Passion is, quite literally, inscribed on her own body.

Sometimes the pain is inflicted not by the visionary herself, but by celestial forces. In one notable case, Elisabeth of Schönau describes being afraid to speak of her revelations, as, indeed, many visionaries were. She is beaten by an angel as punishment for concealing the word of God—for hiding gold in the mud, as he puts it. ‘He lifted a whip above me and five times he struck me sharply with it as if in great anger’.<sup>27</sup> The pain is so great that she languishes for three days. She is also struck dumb until she consents to speak of her revelations.

The suffering body of the visionary is not only a means to identify with the suffering of Christ, it is a way to intensify devotion and to induce a state of mystical receptivity. The tortured body of the visionary leads to communion with Christ, through whose racked and bleeding body lies the way to redemption.

## THE GENDERED BODY

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Despite the suspicion and disapprobation attached to the female body in the middle ages, there is little evidence that women visionaries sought to deny their gender in their revelations. Indeed, one could argue that the visionary body is pre-eminently the female body in that it is penetrated by divine love and gives forth the divine word. In this it not only echoes the body of the Virgin Mary, but also the influence of increasingly feminized representations of Christ's body in this period, both in writing and in art. Christ is described feeding the faithful from his Wounded Side, taking the visionary onto his lap, and gathering Christians under his robe like a mother. And His body, the body that is the locus of redemption, is ruptured, torn, and bleeding as women's bodies were perceived to be.

Perhaps the most obvious way in which the visionary body performs as female is in depictions of mystical pregnancy. Birgitta of Sweden one Christmas Eve experiences a 'marvellous and great exultation of her heart', along with continued movement in her womb 'as if a living child were in her heart, turning itself around and around'.<sup>28</sup> This event is witnessed by two of her confessors, Peter of Alvastra and Matthias of Linköping, who not only saw the movement but also felt it when they laid their hands over her heart. The Virgin Mary then appears to Birgitta and assures her that the movement she felt was a sign of the arrival of Christ in her heart.

Birgitta had given birth to eight children, so it can readily be supposed that she knew the feeling of a child moving in the womb. However, other women who had never borne children had similar experiences of mystical pregnancy, even of mystical birth. Margaret Ebner's ecstatic transports clearly mimic the act of giving birth, down to the detailed positioning of the other sisters as midwives:

Then the loud Outcries commenced and lasted a long time... The screaming was so loud that it could be heard everywhere in the monastery and in the court... This came upon me seven times before nightfall with the strong thrusts hitting against my heart so violently that three sisters had to hold me up using all their strength, one under my heart on the left side and another against her behind me and on the other side. They said they had to lean against one another with full strength and under their hands they felt something living, moving inside me and nowhere else.<sup>29</sup>

These accounts, and others like them, convey an overwhelming sense of physicality and a very precise idea of the sensations of labour. The transition from awareness of the physical body to recognition of the spiritual significance of the experience is in some cases, such as Birgitta's, explicit and rather predictable. In other cases, like Margaret Ebner's, the physical experience seems almost to obscure spiritual understanding.

## THE ABSENT BODY

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It is interesting and useful to observe that visions featuring erotic desire, mystical marriage, pregnancy and birth, and empathy with the suffering of Christ tend to be conservative in content. That is, they generally serve to reinforce faith and stimulate devotion. Yet we also find some revelations that fall in the prophetic end of the spectrum, and which disclose hidden knowledge and divine injunctions. Visionaries who receive this kind of revelation seem more likely to avoid reference to their bodies in their narratives, constructing themselves as disembodied channels for the voice of God. Revelations are often received aurally rather than visually. For example, in her prophetic work *Scivias (Know the Ways)* Hildegard of Bingen describes hearing what she calls 'the Voice of the Living Light' and seeing miraculously infused static visions, like pictures, which the Voice then interprets for her, revealing hidden things. She writes, 'The visions I saw I did not perceive... by the eyes



of the body, or by the ears of the outer self, or in hidden places, but... with a pure mind and the eyes and ears of the inner self'.<sup>30</sup> In a letter to her younger contemporary, Elisabeth of Schönau, warning against excessive bodily transport during revelation, Hildegard describes herself as 'resounding a little from the living light, like the small sound of a trumpet'.<sup>31</sup> It is as if Hildegard's body has no function other than to transmit God's word.

Similarly, Birgitta of Sweden is introduced to her prophetic role by God, who tells her 'Woman, hear me. I am your God, who wish [sic] to speak with you... I do not speak to you for your sake alone, but for the sake of the salvation of others... you shall be my bride and my channel'.<sup>32</sup> In other words, God will speak through her—his words will pass through her ear to be uttered, unchanged, by her mouth. Apart from occasional references to mystical pregnancy, Birgitta's body is relatively absent from her narrative. She recounts none of the transports of ecstasy or erotic longing that other visionaries of her time do, and, although she receives pictorial visions, such as her significant vision of the nativity, she is an onlooker not a participant and her bodily responses do not feature.

Dionysian mysticism moves disembodiment one step further: it eschews the body and the senses altogether. The mystic is enjoined to transcend all earthly things in his quest for union with the divine. One of the best-known works of Dionysian mysticism is the fourteenth-century Middle English text, *The Cloud of Unknowing*. As its editor, Phyllis Hodgson, states:

The spiritual exercise, which was inspired by Dionysius, rests upon the belief in the absolute incomprehensibility of God... the natural faculties of intelligence are impotent to comprehend the being of God because God's nature is essentially different from the nature of man... any activity of the normal faculties is a hindrance in the prayer of contemplation...<sup>33</sup>

Dionysian mysticism urges a contemplative life completely divorced from active forms of devotion and from bodily perceptions of the external world. The mystic should:

leave all outer knowledge gained through the senses; do not work with the senses at all, either objectively or subjectively. For if those who mean to become contemplatives, spiritual and inward looking, reckon they ought to hear, smell, see, taste or feel spiritual things in external visions or in the depth of their being, they are seriously misled, and are working against the natural order of things.<sup>34</sup>

While the ultimate hope for the mystic, for the follower of the *via negativa*, is annihilation into God—like a drop of water into wine, or as a spark drawn back into the fire, as common images have it—it is the struggle against the body and senses that, arguably, constitutes the work of the contemplative in his journey to God. The *Cloud*-author writes that this is 'hard work and no mistake for the would-be contemplative' in the hope that God will 'send out a shaft of spiritual light which pierces this cloud of unknowing'.<sup>35</sup> Without the continuing struggle against the body, though, the contemplative has no hope of receiving God's grace and achieving mystical union. In Dionysian mysticism negation of the body is a vehicle to mystical union, even if that union ultimately leaves behind and transcends the body.

## CONCLUSION

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There is a common modern conception that medieval Christianity had a horror of the body, particularly the female body. But in fact the body was profoundly important in the reception and understanding of medieval mystical experiences. Physical sensations often served as an impetus to visions which then led to deeper spiritual understanding. God created the body, and it is through the body that the faithful can come to know him. As Julian of Norwich

writes: 'For as the body is clad in the cloth, and the fleshe in the skinne, and the bones in the flesh, and the harte in the bowke, so are we, soule and body, cladde and enclosedde in the goodnes of God'.<sup>36</sup> In a similar vein, Caroline Walker Bynum argues that 'the cultivation of bodily experience as a place for encounter with meaning, a locus of redemption, is not "flight from" the body. Nor could it have been in a religion whose central tenet was that the divine had chosen to offer redemption by becoming flesh'.<sup>37</sup>

Christian mysticism, which tends to be represented as a desire to transcend, to escape, the body, is in fact fundamentally rooted in the body, just as Christianity itself is rooted in the incarnation of the divine.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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This chapter is dedicated to my father, Bob Voaden, 29 April 1926–23 July 2011.

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# CHAPTER 24

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# CHRISTIANITY AND ITS OTHERS

## *Jews, Muslims, and Pagans*

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SARA LIPTON

### INTRODUCTION

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IN 1084 Pope Gregory VII (1073–85) addressed a letter to ‘all the faithful in Christ’ bemoaning the persecutions inflicted upon the Holy Church. The letter accuses ‘evil conspirators’ and ‘adulterous heretics’ (by whom the pope meant the German Emperor Henry IV and his episcopal allies) of committing a host of ‘crimes of cruelty’, including destroying the Christian religion, spreading heresy, and reducing the Church to ‘slavery’. The list of afflictions culminates in what seems to be the sharpest cut of all: ‘the Christian religion, the true faith ... has fallen under the scorn, not only of the Devil, but of Jews, Saracens, and pagans’.<sup>1</sup>

We need not assume that Gregory was here responding to any actual commentary on his troubles by Jews, Muslims, or polytheists. Rather, the claim reflects the papal reformers’ distinctive and relatively new vision of the Catholic world, as a unitary but vulnerable Body Christian bounded on all sides and threatened from within by infidels. The pope sought to rally his members (‘all the faithful’) by distinguishing them from, associating his internal opponents with, and stirring latent hostility toward, these external ‘unfaithful’. These rhetorical moves—the apparently gratuitous invocation, implicit demonization, and indiscriminate conjoining of disparate ‘outsiders’—would be echoed many times in succeeding centuries, against targets ranging from Muslims and Jews to pagans, heretics, sodomites, even lepers. The letter may thus be seen to exemplify a pattern that, in the view of many historians, would come to characterize western Christendom between 1100 and 1500: the defining of Christian identity and forging of Christian unity against an abstracted, caricatured, interchangeable, or even largely imagined non-Christian ‘Other’.<sup>2</sup>

This picture, however, is somewhat complicated by a second text, also written by Pope Gregory. In 1076 Gregory wrote to the Algerian sultan al-Nasir, ‘you and we ought to love each other... more than other races of men, for we believe in one God, albeit in different ways, whom each day we praise and reverence as the creator of all ages and the governor of this world. For as the Apostle says, “He is our peace, who hath made both one”’.<sup>3</sup> This gracious overture was motivated by several policy considerations: Gregory was seeking trading privileges for Roman merchants, protection for North African Christians, and perhaps an alliance against other Muslim rulers. But it is nonetheless noteworthy that in his pursuit of practical ends a pope who soon would brand ‘the Devil, Jews, Saracens, and pagans’ implacable (and undifferentiated) foes is here able to recognize, and willing to express respect for, a belief system well beyond the bounds of the ‘true faith’.

What are we to make of the co-existence in one man of these two approaches? It suggests that although the distancing and demonizing of non-Christians was undoubtedly a prominent aspect of high medieval Christianity, there is reason for caution in reading medieval Christian representations of non-Christians narrowly through the lens of ‘Otherness’. Undoubtedly the concept of the ‘Other’, as elaborated by several critical

traditions, has helped to broaden and enrich historians' understanding of cultural and historical forces. Philosophers, most particularly Edmund Husserl, have posited an ontological/existential shift enacted through encounter with the 'Other', in which the 'transcendental self' is re-conceptualized as merely 'one among others'. Lacanian psychoanalysis has detailed the role of the 'Other' in the constitution of the subject. Durkheimian deviance theory sees the construction of the 'Other' as a means of creating social cohesion. And both Michel Foucault and Michel de Certeau stressed the exercise of power through discourses of alterity. But applying the concept of the 'Other' to historical analysis also has its pitfalls. Used too mechanically, it can (misleadingly) imply that 'difference' in and of itself provokes enmity, or that any and all differences are essentially equal. Yet although Jews, Muslims, and pagans were all identified as 'infidels' and denied hope of salvation, medieval Christian attitudes toward these groups were neither monolithic nor static. Depictions of Jews, Muslims, and pagans—and the policies applied to them—arose out of a complex interplay of symbol, discourse, and very real material circumstances. The following discussion, then, attempts to preserve specificity and acknowledge chronological change by looking in turn at representations (literary, polemical, and visual) of Jews, Muslims, and pagans and situating them in their political, social, and cultural contexts.

## JEWS

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By the time Pope Gregory penned his letters there was already a long and somewhat 'bipolar' history of Christian thinking and writing about Jews.<sup>4</sup> On the one hand, anti-Jewish expressions abound in Christian literature. The Gospels and the Epistles of Paul, grappling with the troubling fact that Christ's own people denied his salvific status, contain manifold passages excoriating 'rabbis', 'Pharisees', or simply 'the Jews' for being literalistic, legalistic, stubborn, hard-hearted, hypocritical, and mired in the material world. Though this was largely internal criticism at the time it was written, it provided an oft-plundered trove of anti-Jewish rhetoric. Less widespread but also present in early Christian texts was an association of Jews with demons and sorcery. Such language permeates, for example, the sermons of John Chrysostom (d. 407), who sought to sharpen the still-fuzzy borders between Judaism and Christianity by turning the full force of his invective against Jews: 'In their synagogue stands an invisible altar of deceit on which they sacrifice not sheep and calves but the souls of men ... Do you see that demons dwell in their souls and that these demons are more dangerous than the ones of old?'<sup>5</sup> Condemnation of Jewish error and transgression undergirds even the influential justification for tolerating Jews formulated by Augustine of Hippo (d. 420): Augustine wrote that Jews should be allowed to inhabit Christian lands because their geographical dispersal and subjugated status were simultaneously proof of and punishment for their role in the crucifixion.<sup>6</sup> Through such channels the image of the blind, carnal, stiff-necked, misanthropic, deicidal Jew—dubbed by Jeremy Cohen the 'hermeneutical Jew'—was firmly established in Christian literature.<sup>7</sup>

This negative imagery was, however, counterbalanced by more benign tendencies. Reverence for Hebrew antiquity led many Christians to regard Jews' books, rites, and even lineage with respect. Augustine included among his reasons for tolerating Jews the fact that they preserved the original text of Scripture, and Christian scholars consulted Jews regarding the wording and even the interpretation of the 'Old Testament'. Pope Gregory the Great (d. 604) wrote that Jews 'must have free license to observe and celebrate all their

festivals and holidays, as both they and their ancestors have held for a long time past'.<sup>8</sup> The fifth-century *Altercatio Ecclesiae et Synagogae* described Synagoga as belonging to a 'noble line'.<sup>9</sup> Hope for eventual Jewish conversion led ecclesiastical authorities to recommend that Jews be treated with kindness.<sup>10</sup> In early medieval Christian art Hebrew prophets and kings were endowed with signs of wisdom and antiquity.

For several centuries after the fall of the Roman Empire, this discourse—whether hostile or respectful—had little practical impact. Some Christian authorities did seem to feel it their duty to enforce Jewish subordination. We have scattered accounts of individual bishops expelling Jews from their jurisdictions, and in Visigothic Spain recently converted Catholic kings passed notoriously harsh measures designed to create a unified Catholic *regnum* by isolating Jews and preparing for the eradication of their law.<sup>11</sup> Toward the other pole, the Carolingians' identification with antique Hebrew kingship may have contributed to their favourable treatment of Jews at their court: Bishop Agobard of Lyon (d. 840) complained in a bitter screed entitled *On the Insolence of the Jews* that 'Jews boast...that they are dear to [the emperor] on account of the patriarchs'.<sup>12</sup> But in general Christian-Jewish relations were governed less by ideology or rhetoric than by custom, convenience, and circumstance. In a letter to a schoolfellow, the Gallo-Roman bishop Sidonius Apollonarius (d. c.489) expressed deep disapproval of Jewish infidelity, but this did not prevent him from valuing, aiding, and employing a Jewish acquaintance: 'The bearer of this is Gozolas, a Jew, and a client of your excellency, a man I should like if I could only overcome my contempt for his sect'. Sidonius notes in another letter that 'In the transactions and the disputes of this present world, a Jew has often as good a cause as any one; however much you may attack his heresy, you can fairly defend him as a man'.<sup>13</sup> Such privileging of personal ties and practical considerations over ideology was not unusual: many lords, lay and ecclesiastical, included Jews among their entourages as diplomats, doctors, suppliers, tax collectors, and even friends. It was precisely this gap between theory and practice, this Sidonius-style willingness and ability to distinguish between the 'heresy' and the 'man', that provoked Bishop Agobard's outburst. Inter-communal hostility undoubtedly existed: Gregory of Tours (d. 594) writes that in the city of Clermont a Christian mob tore down a synagogue in retaliation for an insult perpetrated by a Jew against a convert.<sup>14</sup> But this episode suggests that tensions had to be enflamed by specific circumstances before 'difference' provoked violence. For most early medieval Christians, while the Jews' outsider status and religious error were taken for granted, the 'hermeneutic Jew' remained an abstraction somewhat detached from contemporary experience.

In the later eleventh and twelfth centuries, however, the figure of the 'Jew' takes on greater urgency. The number and vehemence of anti-Jewish treatises increase sharply, with Jewish positions now labelled not just erroneous but senseless, even bestial. New elements are added to the traditional grab bag of Jews' materialistic and misanthropic qualities, most notably the introduction of the 'blood-sucking' Jewish usurer and the fabrication of the ritual murder libel. Finally, the literary construct of the vicious and harmful Jew begins to intersect with, in some cases apparently to dictate, policy and practice, as judicial and physical attacks against Jews multiply, and authorities begin to impose heavy and sometimes punitive taxes on Jews.

The causes of these developments are complex. Although some Christians may have noted with dismay that Jewish communities were growing in size, sophistication, and prosperity, the bulk of this increased stress on Jewish 'Otherness' is attributable to changes in Christian, rather than Jewish, society. Anna Abulafia has related the intensified anti-Jewish polemic to the twelfth-century intellectual renaissance. Committed to establishing



the rationality of Christian doctrine, she argues, Christian intellectuals derided those who rejected that doctrine as irrational, even sub-human.<sup>15</sup> Odo of Cambrai punctuates his *Debate with the Jew*, *Leo* (c.1110) by crying to the Jew: ‘Confess, you wretch, your stupidity. Were you endowed with the sense of animals but without the reason of men?’<sup>16</sup> Peter the Venerable, Abbot of Cluny (d. 1156), was even more vitriolic, thundering at the Jews: ‘Why are you not called brute animals? Why not beasts?! Why not beasts of burden?! The ass hears but does not understand; the Jew hears but does not understand’.<sup>17</sup> Though we should be cautious in taking this invective overly literally (it was penned in a monastic culture notable for its rhetorical vigour), its force is undeniable.

The rapidly burgeoning money economy is a second significant factor, though not necessarily for the reasons usually asserted. Jews began to be regularly—and negatively—associated with usury less because they were dominating the money trade (though they were certainly important players) than because they did *not* monopolize it. Disapproving moralists sought to combat Christian cupidity by evoking spirit/matter binaries drawn from traditional anti-Jewish polemic and tarring censured practices as sinful and ‘Jewish’. So, for example, Bernard of Clairvaux’s attempt to shame Christian moneylenders: ‘We lament that where there are no Jews, Christian moneylenders “judaize” worse than the Jews, if, indeed, these men may be called Christians, and not baptized Jews’.<sup>18</sup> Bernard used a similar tactic when critiquing lavish church decoration: ‘Churches are decorated, not simply with jeweled crowns, but with jeweled wheels... [These things] seem to me in some sense a revival of ancient Jewish rites’.<sup>19</sup> Bernard attributed the love of ornament to avarice, and regarded the desire to attract donations by means of artistic splendour as a form of usury, and so by implication, ‘Jewish’.

Thirdly, we can look to developments in Christian religious culture. As devotions began to focus on the human rather than the divine Christ, Christians were urged to meditate on Christ’s suffering, identify with his affliction, and excoriate those who caused or simply remained indifferent to his pain. Visual and literary depictions of Jews exaggerated their defiance and hostility, and passion narratives assigned collective and trans-historical guilt to the murderous ‘Jewish people’. Jewish cruelty and Christian victimization became so intertwined that Jews were now imagined to reenact their original crime on the bodies of Christian children.<sup>20</sup> The earliest known ritual murder accusation asserts of the Jews who allegedly murdered the twelve-year-old William of Norwich that ‘their cruelty could not be satisfied with these tortures unless they added further torments’.<sup>21</sup>

Much of this rhetoric is fierce indeed. But though these developments signal a shift in the balance of the ‘bi-polar’ textual tradition, they did not immediately or automatically undermine Jewish status or security. When in 1096 a band of crusaders viciously attacked Rhineland Jews on the way to the Holy Land, a local monk found their actions as inexplicable as they were unacceptable: ‘I do not know if either by a judgment of the Lord or by some error of the spirit, they rose up against the Jewish people in a spirit of cruelty... and most cruelly murdered them’.<sup>22</sup> Though no more forgiving of Jewish infidelity than the attackers, he condemned the bloodshed, attributing the same crusaders’ eventual miserable end to their unjustified attacks on the Jews. When Rupert of Deutz needed a reliable witness to the saint’s miraculous birth in his *Life of Saint Heribert* (c. 1129), he assigned the role to a Jewish family friend, considering a Jew an appropriate forecaster of Heribert’s future temporal glory (though Rupert hastened to note that the Jew remained blind to Heribert’s spiritual splendour).<sup>23</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux may have used ‘Jew’ as a touchstone for sin, but he worked vigorously to protect them from physical harm, writing that ‘it is an act of Christian piety... to “spare the subjected”, especially those for whom we have a law and a

promise, and from among whose ancestors Christ was according to the flesh'.<sup>24</sup> In spite of virulent rumours and the growth of a local cult to the 'martyred' boy William, the sheriff of Norwich declined to prosecute any Jews for the alleged murder. King Philip II of France cited a ritual murder accusation when he expelled Jews from the royal domain in 1182 (this was the first large-scale expulsion of Jews), but his apparently sincere belief in the accusation did not prevent him from re-admitting Jews sixteen years later, when the negative financial consequences of the expulsion became apparent. The point is not that in Jewish-Christian interactions material concerns trump religious ones or vice versa, but that both co-exist within the same culture, sometimes within the same persons, who privilege one over the other according to a complex calculus of experience, need, and context, and in doing so draw selectively from the broad rhetorical tradition.

In the thirteenth century, however, the balance of that tradition tipped still further against the Jews, as there was a veritable explosion in the diversity and ferocity of anti-Jewish texts and artworks. Jews appear as caricatured villains in a wide array of new genres: illustrated and glossed apocrypha and apocalypses, bestiaries, romances, Miracles of the Virgin, Lives of the Saints, miracle and mystery plays, treatises on Virtue and Vice, and sermon *exempla*. Their (alleged) age-old sins of materialism and literalism came to be identified with 'modern' activities and tendencies. In addition to moneylending, Jews are now accused of rationalism, philosophizing, heresy, and excessive curiosity, and are linked to animals and objects associated with evil and filth: dung, latrines, coins, cloaks, cats, dogs, crows, serpents, and toads. In a symbolic window in Chartres cathedral, for example, the personification Synagoga has a snake wrapped around her eyes instead of the traditional blindfold. Jews are labelled followers of Antichrist; seducers of women, children, and the unlettered; child-killers; Eucharist-desecrators; image-destroyers, and idol- and devil-worshippers. Some clerics adduced 'scientific' evidence to explain these behaviours and tendencies: 'I heard from Jews that certain Jews...flow every month with blood and often suffer from dysentery (from which they frequently die). However, they [believe that they] are healed by the blood of a Christian...'.<sup>25</sup> Artists devised a characteristic physiognomy for Jews by which they might be visually 'recognized', and then exaggerated this physiognomy to emphasize Jewish 'difference'. Other senses than sight were enlisted as well: Caesarius of Heisterbach, a Cistercian monk writing around 1230, tells of a Jewish girl who entered a nunnery, and was suddenly able to smell her father's repulsive stench when he came to fetch her home.<sup>26</sup> As these tales suggest, representations of Jews were highly gendered: Jewish men were portrayed as effeminate, weak, deceitful, and/or sterile, and Jewish women were either idealized as passive victims of their male relatives or feared as sexually aggressive temptresses.<sup>27</sup>

There is little evidence that this explosion in anti-Jewish themes and imagery was prompted by spontaneously intensifying religious hatred or disgust for difference. Rather, it is related to the needs and methods of pastoral reform. In their drive to make Christian society more perfectly conform to Christian ideals, reformers conceptualized and articulated theology in new ways, translating abstract moralizations into vivid and familiar narratives and imagery. But as the reformers well knew, their task was a difficult one: the line between saint and sinner was less clearly drawn in city, parish, and village than on the painted or written page. In fact, many of these apparently 'othering' texts implicitly or even explicitly acknowledge deep and disturbing similarities between Jews and Christians. Canon 68 of the Fourth Lateran Council, which imposed distinguishing clothing upon Jews (and Muslims as well), opens by noting that 'In some provinces a difference of dress distinguishes Jews or Saracens from Christians, but in others confusion has developed to such a degree that no

difference is discernible'.<sup>28</sup> The frequent repetition of such legislation in the following centuries demonstrates that in spite of the somaticizing of Jewishness by the 'new science' and Gothic art, there continued to be few detectible differences between Jewish and Christian bodies and habits. The commentary and images of the *Bibles moralisées*, deeply anti-Jewish manuscripts dating to c.1225, concede that the manifold sins embodied by Jews were rampant among Christians, and in fact spend far more time censuring Christian than Jewish transgressions.<sup>29</sup> The increasingly prominent literary (though not artistic) figure of the beautiful Jewess embodies the allure that 'Judaism' could exert over Christians. In *The Playbook of Fleury* (c.1200), Theresa Tinkle has argued, the Jew stands for monastic virtues and vices. He is simultaneously excluded and identified with; he is both religious 'Other' and a symbol of the Christian self.<sup>30</sup> Whether such subtle messages were received as intended is questionable, however—introspection and nuance are easier to achieve in word and image than in action. The French monarchy did not cease to pursue profit or pleasure in the decades following the making of the *Bibles moralisées*, but it did in 1306 empty its realm of Jews. And the most striking result of St Vincent Ferrer's 1412 preaching campaign to promote Christian purity was not the cleansing of Christian souls but the segregation and marking of Jewish bodies.<sup>31</sup>

As government became more centralized and conduct more tightly regulated in the later middle ages, the kind of improvised, inconsistent, and customized approach to Jews and Judaism exhibited in earlier centuries became more difficult to maintain. Some rulers did manage to reconcile profit, habit, and stability on the one hand, and religious ideology on the other, by symbolically chastening but effectively tolerating Jews. Alfonso X of Castile (d. 1284) incorporated anti-Jewish canons into his law code and anti-Jewish images and tales into his *Cantigas*, but continued to employ Jews in important offices and grant them certain privileges.<sup>32</sup> In c.1335 the brother of the German Emperor Henry VII proclaimed imperial sovereignty by having Henry portrayed receiving a scroll of the Law from a caricatured and appropriately submissive Jew.<sup>33</sup> But increasingly authorities distanced themselves from their Jewish subjects (not without reason: resentment of authorities was sometimes deflected onto their surrogates), and sought to demonstrate their piety and exercise their sovereignty by punishing Jewish 'transgressions'. The later middle ages were characterized by repeated expulsions and anti-Jewish attacks, and increased economic, legal, and residential restrictions. The resulting social separation and economic deterioration rendered Jews all the more suspected and despised, and (finally) as visibly and culturally different as they had long been alleged to be. This in turn generated further visual and textual stereotyping. Eventually the weight of the accumulated rhetoric and imagery, when combined with specific political and social circumstances, could result in an anti-Judaism that seems to anticipate modern racial anti-Semitism, as in the notorious 'purity of blood' statutes of fifteenth-century Iberia, which suggested Jewish sin was ineradicably rooted in Jewish flesh. Even in this late period, though, more than a few authorities continued to protect and employ Jews, and justified this policy by citing time-honoured tradition.<sup>34</sup> But in doing so they were swimming against the stream of history and, often, acting against the wishes of their people, sometimes at their own risk.

## MUSLIMS

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Historians have asserted that medieval Christendom maintained near-total ignorance of the tenets and practices of Islam, wilful in the case of Iberia and a necessity born of distance in

the case of northern Europe. Faced with a law and people about whom classical, scriptural, and patristic authorities were silent, this view held, Latin Christians either confused Muslims with pagan peoples or draped them in a veil of pure fantasy. Only in the twelfth century, it was thought, did fanciful texts such as the *Life of Mahomet* gradually begin to be replaced by more intimate and accurate knowledge. But this received narrative has recently undergone considerable modification. It is now recognized that many Christians were better informed about Islam than had previously been supposed, while conversely, greater knowledge did not necessarily undo fictions about Islam, much less lead to deeper acceptance or understanding.

When Islam burst into Christian consciousness in the seventh century, its most salient features were its military might and Arabian origins. So when Christian commentators sought explanation and solace, they found in the Bible a host of ‘relevant’ references. Muslims were likened to such Old Testament foes as the Philistines and the Amalekites, identified with the despised and rejected Hagarenes or Ishmaelites, and alleged to indulge in all the evil rites ascribed to gentiles: human sacrifice, idol-worship, sorcery, and devilry.<sup>35</sup> These wild allegations were not necessarily products of ignorance. John of Damascus (d. 749), who worked at the Umayyad court and was well-informed about Islam, rebutted Muslim criticisms of cross veneration by linking adoration of the Ka’ba to pagan idolatry: ‘This, then, which they call “stone” is the head of Aphrodite’.<sup>36</sup> And the Patriarch Sophronius (d. 638), who successfully negotiated favourable terms for Jerusalem Christians from the Caliph Umar, nevertheless called Muslims ‘beastly and barbarous...filled with every diabolic savagery’.<sup>37</sup>

Such vehement language arises from the need of Christian apologists to rationalize Muslim success and strengthen Christian fortitude. But we can presume that actual attitudes toward the new Muslim conquerors and neighbours varied considerably. The earliest Iberian Christian chronicler to comment on the Muslim invaders is undisturbed by (in fact, relatively uninterested in) their religion, noting merely that ‘the Saracens worship Muhammad with great honor and reverence, as they affirm him to be an apostle of God and a prophet in all of their sacraments and scripture’.<sup>38</sup> Christian sectarians who had been persecuted by Byzantine authorities took a different line still. The Coptic *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* regards the Muslim invasion as a liberation, and presents the commander Amr as a man of graciousness and vision: ‘Amr gave orders that [the Coptic patriarch] should be brought before him with honor and veneration and love. And Amr, when he saw the patriarch, received him with respect, and said to his companions and private friends, “Verily in all the lands of which we have taken possession hitherto I have never seen a man of God like this man.”’<sup>39</sup> The philosophically inflected letters of the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy (d. 823) are designed to counter Muslim error, but they do so in highly respectful language, reproducing (or inventing) amicable conversations held at the caliph’s court. Timothy’s Muslim interlocutors are religiously wrong, of course, but they are neither raging beasts nor licentious idolaters, and the Ku’ran is said to be in essential agreement with Scripture on matters of dogma.<sup>40</sup> In the distant West, where one might expect hostile stereotypes to prevail, the biographer Einhard reports that Charlemagne ‘had such friendly concord with Aaron [Harun-al-Rachid], the king of the Persians...that [Harun] placed the grace of his friendship above that of all the kings and princes of the world’.<sup>41</sup> This ‘friendship’ is purely political, of course, and the passage serves primarily to underscore Charlemagne’s majesty and might. But the fact remains that neither the biographer nor his most Christian emperor nor, presumably, any of the readers of the *Life* objected to allying with a Muslim. And while Einhard stresses the opulence and exoticism



of Harun's gifts to Charlemagne, neither the caliph nor his ambassadors are portrayed as particularly 'Other'.

High medieval representations of Muslims were likewise quite diverse. Not surprisingly many crusading texts perpetuate the image of the 'Saracen' as an idolatrous pagan, engulfed in greed and lust, consumed by rage and violence, and unremittingly hostile to Christians and Christianity. In the 1095 sermon with which he launched the First Crusade, for example, Pope Urban II vilified the Turks who had recently invaded Anatolia as 'a race from the kingdom of the Persians', 'gentiles [who] have established...superstitions...and pagan tyranny', 'barbarous nations' that are 'enslaved by demons', and 'base and bastard Turks' who 'erect idols', 'follow Antichrist', and spread 'the pollution of paganism'.<sup>42</sup> The roughly contemporary *Chanson de Roland* fills in these general charges with colourful detail, depicting the Iberian Muslims opposing Charlemagne as acolytes of an unholy trinity of Mahomet, Tervagant, and Apollin. Two successive centuries of extensive Latin exposure to Islam may have weakened the canard of Muslim idolatry, as John Tolan holds, but it was not wholly laid to rest: in a mid-thirteenth-century crusading sermon the Franciscan Gilbert of Tournai exhorted Christians to remember that in the holy city of Jerusalem 'the idol of abomination, that is the name of Muhammad, continues to be exalted and honoured'.<sup>43</sup> Though 'idol' may here be used metaphorically, this subtlety was surely lost on many hearers. But it is unsafe to take this rhetoric as reflecting 'the' Christian view of the Muslim. Pope Urban and Friar Gilbert had solid reasons, rhetorical and political, for caricaturing Muslims: they were trying to mobilize armies, not educate their audiences, and highlighted characteristics and behaviours best calculated to achieve their ends.

The same internal Christian concerns that shaped images of Jews also affected representations of Muslims. Scurrilous biographies of Muhammad draw on anti-heretical polemic to construct the prophet as a trickster, magician, hypocrite, heretic, and lecher—thereby projecting concerns about heresy and the indistinctness of Christian identity onto Islam.<sup>44</sup> Peter the Venerable explicitly considered Islam a heretical sect. Although he employed relatively restrained rhetoric concerning Muslims ('I approach you not with force but with reason, not with hatred, but with love'), he commissioned a translation of the Qur'an not in order to understand Islam but in order to contrast Muslim 'immorality' with Christian morality.<sup>45</sup> Internal contrasts were externalized: dark skin became a marker of Muslim physical 'difference' in such artworks as the illustrated *Histoire d'Outremer* (1337), which portrays brown-skinned Muslim warriors combatting crusaders; crucifixion tableaux featuring a black tormenter of Christ, grimacing and cruel; and romances like *Parzifal*, which conjures up a fabled Muslim land east of Bagdad whose denizens are black.<sup>46</sup> This practice presumably reflects the fact that Islam encompassed populations that were darker complexioned than many Europeans. But as was the case with Jews, it imposes distinctions that were not always evident in life: many Muslims were as fair as any Frank, as is implicitly conceded by Canon 68 of the Fourth Lateran Council and the multiple artworks distinguishing Muslims by clothing, armour, or insignia rather than complexion. Moreover, in such texts as the *King of Tars* and the *Cursor Mundi* black-skinned Saracens turn white upon their conversion to Christianity, suggesting that Muslim 'Otherness' was a contingent (moral) rather than inherent (ethnic) quality. Nonetheless, the power of such imagery should not be underplayed. When a fourteenth-century English pilgrim to the Holy Land wrote that Saracens he observed on the shore at Acre were 'giant' and 'black as soot', his direct observation was almost certainly influenced (or even fully subsumed) by biblical descriptions of the Philistine Goliath, by tales and pictures of black infidels, and by tropes of evil darkness.<sup>47</sup>



But the high medieval encounter with the wider Muslim world generated more than hostile polemics and stigmatizing signs. It also provided a canvas for the colouring of hopes, fantasies, dreams. Images of Saracens tended to bifurcate into several distinct (and sometimes opposed) figures reflecting the simultaneous fear, fascination, and desire generated by the extent, urbanity, and wealth of Islamic lands and peoples. In addition to deceitful idolaters and savage executioners, Muslims appear as gallant knights, preternaturally wise sages, and glamorous courtiers. Saladin, for example, is a chivalric hero in *L'estoire de la guerre sainte*, receiving terrified Christian pilgrims with courtesy and showering a surprised bishop with honours, protections, and gifts.<sup>48</sup> In the widely circulated and oft-translated *Floris and Blancheflur* the emir of Babylon is a gracious and magnanimous ruler whose compassion toward two young lovers earns him the narrator's well-wishes: 'Now, the Admyral—wol him tide—/Florys setteth next his syde'.<sup>49</sup> Black Muslims project sophistication as well as savagery, as in the turbaned black courtier adorning the *Three Heroes* tapestry made for Jean, duc de Berry.<sup>50</sup> A fifteenth-century London pageant included multiple exotically attired foreign figures, not in order to condemn unbelief but to celebrate the cosmopolitanism of the city.<sup>51</sup>

Muslim military might and the 'seductiveness' of Islamic civilization rendered gender and sexuality particular potent themes in literature and polemic. As far back as John of Damascus, Christian polemicists portrayed Muhammad, and by extension all Muslim men, as hypersexual. The twelfth-century *Vita Mahumeti* presents the entire Muslim religion as founded on lust: 'The Gospels must be changed; their law is difficult... since it prohibits us from adultery and wantonness... For adultery and making love you will establish by law; let food abound and let love be set free!'<sup>52</sup> Pierre Dubois explained that Muslim conquests were driven by unbounded sexuality: '[Saracens] follow such a sensuous mode of life ... that not even the many regions and kingdoms next to the aforesaid land toward the east, west, and south of the Holy Land would suffice'.<sup>53</sup> As with the trope of blackness, these allegations were not entirely unrelated to the realities of Islam—a willful misreading of the practice of polygamy lay at their core. But their primary purpose was not to convey information about Islam. Rather, since medieval gender ideology vested masculinity in the exercise of self-control, and saw excessive sexuality as typical of 'morally feeble' and 'unrestrained' womankind, they help assuage Christian fear by tarring Muslims as 'effeminate'. The many romances featuring Saracen kings who fall in love with female Christian captives likewise imaginatively domesticate the Muslim enemy. Muslim women, too, could serve as vehicles for Christian hopes and fears. Beautiful maidens who convert for love enact Christian conquest; poisoners and sorceresses, such as the Muslim women said by William of Tyre to have bewitched a Frankish catapult during a siege, express the Christian sense of vulnerability.<sup>54</sup> This latter theme draws on the trope of Muslim magic and deceit, but, again, it also reflects certain inescapable realities: Muslim females were the majority of domestic slaves in the Mediterranean region, and many Christians ate the food they prepared and lived with them in intimate proximity.

In many Christian texts and images Muslims are no more 'Other' than Jews. For all the fantasy and caricature of Muslim society in the *Chanson de Roland*, the range of virtues and vices displayed by both Muslim and Christian characters effectively collapses all difference, and in the process underscores the less-than-unified nature of Christian society. The historical romance *Richard Coeur de Lion* constructs Muslims as different from English Christians, but as similar to and allied with French Christians (both 'Saracens' and the French being characterized by deceit and materialism).<sup>55</sup> The illuminated Luttrell Psalter shows Saracens in elaborate headdresses to signify luxury and vice, but by dressing overtly

Christian men and women in identical attire the psalter acknowledges and critiques the same sins within Christian society.<sup>56</sup> In these works and many others identity is shown to be complex, boundaries to be blurred, and appearance to be unreliable. In fact, the starting points for the intensified missionary push of the later thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were, first, deep awareness of and concern about Christian sin; and, second, an emphasis on the commonalities of Christian and Muslim doctrine and character.

Moreover, powerful as polemic and representation might be, they were not all-dominating. Our fourteenth-century English pilgrim to the Holy Land may have viewed the longshoremen at Acre through the lens of anti-Muslim imagery, but this did not prevent him from relying on Muslims for protection, permission, and guidance, or from approaching them as individuals. An attempt by the crusading preacher Eudes of Chateauroux to counter possible resistance to his call provides a tantalizing glimpse of the limits of rhetoric: ‘But someone will say, “The Saracens have not done me any harm. Why should I take the cross against them?”’<sup>57</sup> And, of course, in many regions Christian-Muslim relations were not dominated by representation but by the pragmatic demands of mundane existence. Hungary was a perfectly orthodox Catholic country that accepted church doctrine regarding Jews, Muslims, and pagans, yet its unique situation on the frontier dictated an idiosyncratic approach, dubbed by Nora Berend neither tolerant nor persecuting, but ‘cellular’.<sup>58</sup> In Sicily and Iberia Muslims and Christians worked, dined, played, quarrelled, stole, and slept together; and many Christian cities and courts maintained regular trade and diplomatic ties with Muslims. Such contacts certainly did not eradicate hostility, suspicion, stereotyping and violence. But neither did hostility, suspicion, stereotyping, and violence preclude ties of business or even friendship. Ironically, in the Christian polities established by the crusaders Muslim-Christian relations seem to have been governed almost entirely by necessity rather than by the requirements of faith.

## PAGANS

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Unlike ‘Jew’ or ‘Muslim’, the term ‘pagan’ has no single, obvious referent. Medieval Christians applied the word to a wide and heterogeneous range of peoples: Old Testament gentiles; ancient Greeks and Romans; unconverted Celts, Germans, Magyars, Scandinavians, and Slavs; Muslims (in spite of their rigorous monotheism); ‘Tartars’ (Mongols); sub-Saharan Africans; Asian Buddhists and Hindus. Their representation drew on several strands, including biblical and early Christian anti-pagan rhetoric, Greco-Roman ethnography, Christian reverence for the classical tradition, medieval fascination with exotica, and actual lived experience. Images of pagans contained both hostile and admiring elements: depending on subject, context and need, pagans might be described as barbaric or cosmopolitan, artless or deceitful, avaricious or unworldly. As we shall see, certain historical moments invested paganism with greater conceptual urgency: in late antiquity and the early middle ages, missionizing Christians had to confront, both intellectually and militarily, a range of ‘real’ pagans, while in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries an expanding Latin Christianity again encountered unconverted peoples, first as targets for Christian aggression and then, fearfully, in the form of the highly threatening Mongols (the Mongol khan and court converted to Islam in 1295). For most of the high middle ages, however, ‘pagan’ was less a descriptive label than a metaphor for a range of condemned values and behaviours. Given how broadly the term was applied, it is impossible to offer here a comprehensive overview of its use. Instead, we shall survey the various and often

contradictory qualities assigned to pagans and the different contexts in which they were evoked.

To the apostles, evangelists, and Fathers, the polytheists amongst whom they lived—and by whom they were scorned or persecuted—were unremittingly evil idolaters, in thrall to the devil: ‘The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons’ (I Cor. 10). Lurid accounts of bloody sacrificial rites, such as Prudentius’s description of a devotee bathing in and drinking the ‘black blood’ of a bull, constructed pagans as violent, brutal, lacking human feeling.<sup>59</sup> Christian apologists rebutted allegations that their own faith was naïve and un-philosophical by subjecting pagan cults to biting satire: ‘Do you not see ... that swallows full of filth, flying within the very domes of the temples ... bedaub now the very faces, now the mouths of the deities, the beard, eyes, noses, and all the other parts on which their excrements fall?’<sup>60</sup> A particularly popular subject was the alleged obscenity of pagan practices: ‘I am ashamed to mention those ... *mysteria* in which Greece erects phalluses in honour of father Bacchus, and the whole district is covered with images of men’s *fascina* [sexual members]’.<sup>61</sup>

This early Christian heritage powerfully influenced subsequent medieval writings on contemporary pagans, whether semi-converted locals or never-converted alien nations. The seventh-century *Life of Eligius* describes the rural inhabitants of the saint’s first parish as ‘still snared in the error of the gentiles and given over to vain superstitions... wild rustics who could in no way receive the word of salvation’. In another sermon Eligius instructs his flock to abandon ‘demonic games and nefarious leapings and all inane superstitions’ and condemns ‘sacrilegious pagan customs’ in terms that seem drawn as much from ancient texts as from personal observation: ‘let no Christian presume to invoke the name of a demon, or Neptune or Orcus or Diana or Minerva... let no one observe the day of Jove in idleness’.<sup>62</sup> The biographer of St Boniface (d. 754) portrays a recalcitrant band of Saxons as barbarous, drunken, violent murderers propelled by devilish frenzy.<sup>63</sup> This language proved remarkably durable and almost infinitely transferable. Hundreds of years later, as Latin Christians pushed into eastern Europe, their descriptions of its pagan inhabitants reprise themes from early medieval texts. In 1172 Pope Alexander III characterized the Slavs of Estonia in almost identical terms to Boniface’s Saxons, calling them wild, violent, savage, and raging.<sup>64</sup> The *Chronicle* of Henry of Livonia (c.1227), somewhat inconsistently, highlights the deceit *and* the incredulity of the ‘tricky Livonians’, and accuses them of human sacrifice.<sup>65</sup> (It also implicitly links Slavs to Jews in likening them to Judas and quoting them as using the term Rabbi.) A thirteenth-century poem describing a Cistercian mission among the Slavs praises the monks for ‘throwing the statues of Mars and Julius into sewers’.<sup>66</sup> It was presumably on the basis of deep reading rather than extensive travel that Matthew Paris (c.1230) confidently declared that far-distant Mongols were ‘houndish cannibals’, savage and ferocious, barbarous and crude, raging beyond control.<sup>67</sup>

We must bear in mind, however, that the primary function of such texts is to underscore the courage of the saints who died at pagan hands or to rouse Christians to combat pagan enemies; they do not comprise the sum of Christian knowledge about or attitudes towards pagan peoples. Missionizing would never have been attempted had pagans been considered irremediably savage, and missionaries would not have succeeded had they been unable to see past such stereotyping. Gregory the Great, faced with the failure of his initial coercive conversionary approach, changed course, instructing his envoys to respect Anglo-Saxon habits and feelings: ‘seeing that their places of worship are not destroyed, the people will banish error from their hearts and come to places familiar and dear to them in acknowledgement and worship of the true God’.<sup>68</sup> The biographer of St Willibrord (d. 739),

while intensely hostile to paganism, was able to appreciate the virtues of even an intractable Frisian king: '[he] received the man of God kindly and with a humble spirit, though the Word [*fromentis*] of Life could not soften his stony heart'.<sup>69</sup> Merchants such as Marco Polo (d. 1324) and missionaries such as the Dominican Friar Julian (fl. c.1237), no less devout than Matthew Paris or Cistercian contemporaries, observed and reported Mongol customs with considerable accuracy.<sup>70</sup> Nor were attitudes carved in stone: the same pagan nation might be characterized in radically different ways in a short space of time. Depending upon political circumstances, for example, Hungarian representations of Cumans could be either negative (emphasizing their demonic ties, barbarism, or violence) or positive, highlighting their role in Hungarian history.<sup>71</sup> Temporal distance (and subsequent conversion) softened the sting of infidelity—pagan Anglo-Saxons feature in English literature as honoured forebears; the same holds true for the mythical pagan ancestors of the Danes.

Christians gazed at paganism with fascination as well as disapproval. Multiple medieval works use pagan characters to express nostalgia for an idealized classical past or attraction to a seductive, exoticized East. Texts such as Boccaccio's *Teseida*, in which ancient Athenian wars provide the backdrop for an epic love story; Chaucer's *Squire's Tale*, which sets a magical romance in the court of a Tartar king; or the *Travels of John Mandeville*, which portrays Asian peoples as marvellous hybrids, to be enjoyed and wondered at, convey the pleasure to be savoured in imagining the 'Other'.<sup>72</sup> In art pagan peoples might be depicted as wild men, deformed monsters, dark-skinned foreigners, or elegantly attired gentlefolk. The function of such texts and images cannot be reduced to simple 'Othering': Michael Camille has persuasively argued that even as they highlight alterity they simultaneously reduce and tame it, by domesticating and appropriating antique and alien forms.<sup>73</sup> And for all their fantasy, many apparently 'fabulous' depictions of the pagan East reveal real awareness of Asia—its vast size, its cultural diversity and material wealth, the antiquity of its civilizations.

Neither national pride, scholarly attraction, conversionary optimism, nor ethnographical curiosity should be mistaken for tolerance, however. High medieval Christians, long used to religious hegemony, did not show the patience exhibited by their early medieval missionizing counterparts. Bernard of Clairvaux, who worked hard to protect Jews in spite of his contempt for their 'perfidy', offered no such quarter for the pagan Wends: '[the devil] has raised up evil seed, wicked pagan sons, whom, if I may say so, the might of Christendom has endured too long... without crushing their poisoned heads under its heel... We utterly forbid that for any reason whatsoever a truce should be made with these peoples... until such a time as, by God's help, they shall be either converted or wiped out'.<sup>74</sup> When King Bela of Hungary began to suspect that the Cuman converts who settled in his lands clung to their former practices, he passed harsh regulations demanding cultural as well as religious conformity.<sup>75</sup>

Sometimes paganism displays no 'difference' at all: Christians also mirrored themselves in their imagined pagans. Antique pagan heroes often display paradigmatic Christian virtues, simultaneously embodying both the perfection and the remoteness of the idealized Self. Bernardus Sylvestris (fl. 1140s), for example, portrayed Aeneas as a model of *tolerantia* (endurance), *pietas* (dutiful conduct), and even *religio* (religious or moral obligation).<sup>76</sup> Alexander the Great stars in epics and romance cycles as the perfect chivalrous prince and/or instrument of God (prompting the *Roman d'Alexandre* to lament: 'if only he believed in God!'). The inclusion of three pagans in the Nine Heroes cycle recognizes that virtues can be shared across a range of peoples and faiths. Not all the pagans in *The Travels of John Mandeville* are monstrous. Some are paragons of human reason,



such as the idol-worshippers who ‘say that it is the God of Nature that made all things and is in the heavens, and they know well that [their images] could not have performed the miracles they did, if it were not by special grace of God, and for this reason they worship them’.<sup>77</sup> The point of such passages, of course, is to critique Christian error, not praise paganism: many a Catholic preacher would wish his flock were so sophisticated about image-worship.

The most common role of ‘pagan’ in medieval literature and art is to signify the Christian sinner. A commentary in the *Bible moralisée* glosses the Israelites who fell into idolatry (Judges 2:13) as ‘those who adore cupidity and lust and scorn God’.<sup>78</sup> The same manuscript illustrates another text criticizing ‘those who abandon the Church’ with an image of a man offering a moneybag to an idol.<sup>79</sup> Peter the Chanter (d. 1205) illuminates the logic underlying such imagery: ‘just as idolatry renders to an idol the worship and service owed to God, an avaricious man ... tenders to money and wealth the veneration owed to God’.<sup>80</sup> The exaltation of romantic love and sexual desire in later medieval courtly culture struck many moralists as idolatry: a man who contemplates the beauty of women, wrote the Dominican Robert Holcot (c.1335), ‘makes idols for himself, [and] ... prepares for his own fall’.<sup>81</sup> Even at the height of the Age of Faith, pagans were not safely relegated to the distant past or the Far East. To the conscientious Christian, the threat of paganism lurked in his own shop, his own parish, his own heart.

## CONCLUSION

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It is commonly asserted that the ‘Other’ is constituted as ‘that which I am not’ (or even ‘that which is opposite to me’), and that, consequently, its assigned features reveal more about the constructing Self than about the group represented. Many of the texts and images surveyed above amply support this claim. Because Christianity saw itself as the only pure and ‘spiritual’ faith Jews, Muslims, and pagans alike were depicted as carnal, materialistic, and corrupt. All three groups were labelled covetous, brutal, even bestial and accused of desecrating sacred vessels, worshipping idols, placating demons, following Antichrist, and murdering Christians. Jewish and Muslim men were effeminized in Christian texts; and the appeal of ‘Jewish materialism’ and ‘Muslim opulence’, as well as Christian hopes for conversion, were embodied in Jewish and Muslim female figures. Moreover, in spite of the contemporary scholastic project of creating distinctions and definitions for every imaginable entity and category, many high medieval authors show a distinct disinterest in distinguishing between and among infidel groups. From Pope Gregory’s lumping together of ‘Jews, Saracens, and pagans’, to the composition of manifold joint polemics against ‘Jews, Saracens, and gentiles’, to Rutebeuf’s assigning the name ‘Salatin’ to the Jewish magician in *Le Miracle de Théophile*, to Henry of Livonia’s ‘Judaizing’ Slavs, non-Christians are repeatedly implied to be akin, identical, or even conspiratorially allied. Such allegations cannot, on their own, unify Christians or strengthen Christian faith. But they can help to achieve the end sought by Pope Gregory VII. By highlighting the religious affiliation of the ‘enemy’, such rhetoric encourages readers/auditors to likewise identify themselves along religious lines, so that ‘Christian’ might replace family, office, rank, or place of origin as the primary marker of identity.

Nonetheless, many of the texts and images examined here argue for a more complex approach to identity and alterity, one that incorporates contingency and change, and acknowledges the extent to which medieval Christians recognized, if only reluctantly, the



interconnections and overlaps between Us and Them. For Christian understandings of Self/Other did not inevitably homogenize the latter category, or see it as utterly estranged from the Self. The representation of Jews, Muslims, and pagans cannot be reduced to a straightforward construction of binary oppositions. We have seen many contradictory qualities imputed to these infidels, many complicating factors, many shades of grey. Although all three groups were accused of similar (un-Christian) crimes and alleged to share the same (un-Christian) qualities, their images and imputed transgressions were not completely interchangeable. Unlike Muslims (and heretics), Jews were rarely accused in the high middle ages of excessive sexual profligacy. Perhaps the high value placed on married domesticity in Jewish culture, which was acknowledged and even praised by Christian moralists, would have undermined any such accusation. The charge of gluttony, a cornerstone of Chrysostom's anti-Jewish invective and a recurring theme in anti-Muslim texts, does not feature prominently in high medieval anti-Jewish polemics. This is presumably because the fourth-century preacher's need to counter the attraction his congregants felt toward Jewish festivals (or simply to defend the relative sedateness of the newer and perhaps more modest Christian festivals) no longer prevailed. Likewise, unlike Muslims and pagans, Jews were rarely accused of overt, public violence; their mercantile activities, general un-militarism, and political subordination would drain such an image of visceral conviction. For similar reasons Jews (and heretics) were more likely than Muslims to be accused of conspiracy or performing evil deeds in secret.

Representations of these out-groups, then, for all their exaggeration and fantasy, are not wholly divorced from each group's actual nature and condition. It would be a serious mistake, of course, to read these more tailored representations as transparent reflections of reality, or even as straightforward records of Christians' perceptions. But it is equally misleading to label them arbitrary: accusations and images that directly contradict experience are less likely to take hold, at least without further foundations being laid. The stereotype of the Jewish usurer would hardly have had the power and prevalence it did had Jews *not* played a prominent role in the new money economy and urban explosion. Caricatures of Muslim opulence would have been drained of meaning had the Islamic world *not* been the source of cherished luxuries. When the biblical commentator Nicholas of Lyra displayed an 'obsession' with Muslim aggression, he was not motivated by some inchoate notion of their 'Otherness', he was reacting to the reality of an invigorated and expanding Ottoman Empire.<sup>82</sup> Christians who lived in close proximity to Jews, Muslims, or pagans (as in Iberia, Sicily, the Crusader States, eastern regions) might replicate the same stereotypes and repeat the same slanders as their more insular or isolated co-religionists (as in the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*), but they received, processed, and mobilized such texts and images in quite different ways.

Even more salient in contouring the representation of the 'Other' are internal, Christian realities. When Peter the Venerable labelled Jews irrational and Muslims immoral, he was revealing certain specific areas of Christian vulnerability, and responding to the differing nature of Jewish and Muslim threats to Christian faith and identity. Jews' interpretation of the scriptures they shared with Christians challenged central doctrinal elements of Christianity and so had to be discounted, while the wealth and worldly success of Islam challenged Christian claims to superiority and so had to be denigrated. Unease about innovative aspects of medieval society inspired Christian moralists to pay new (and newly hostile) attention to groups traditionally held to embody the suspect qualities. Jews had been labelled avaricious and sophisticated, and Jewish communities had been proportionally more commercialized, urbanized, and literate than Christian communities, long before the stereotype of the 'blood-sucking, contract-flourishing usurer' achieved wide circulation. It

was, then, not simply Jews' commercial prosperity or textuality that inspired the intensified anti-Jewish rhetoric of the high middle ages, but the growing commercialism and textuality of Christian society itself. The 'otherness' of the 'Other' repeatedly breaks down upon close examination. Sometimes this truth is quite explicit: in Chaucer's *Monk's Tale*, there are no detectible differences between the pagan, Hebrew, and Christian 'illustrious men'—all are equally laid low by fate. Christians, Jew, Muslims, and pagans are considerably less different from each other than polemic and rhetoric seem to suggest. And though it is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is worth noting the medieval Christians saw differences in places where we do not: Irish and Scots were considered 'black', hairy, savage, and utterly alien. Peasants, too, were distinctly 'Other' to the ruling classes.

Representation must always be read with regard to the realities of power and politics. The two letters of Pope Gregory with which we opened provide vivid confirmation that the most fervent Christian could overcome, suppress, or sideline bias—or alternately, mobilize it—when necessity dictated. The same observation can be made regarding Bernard of Clairvaux's carefully calibrated approaches to Jews and Wends, the oft-changing tactics of Christian missionaries, shifting Hungarian attitudes toward Muslims and Cumans, regional differences in the treatment and depiction of Muslims, the dizzyingly inconsistent Jewish policy of Philip II Augustus, and so on. It would be no less naïve, however, to privilege power relations or economic advantage to the exclusion of cultural discourse. Few people or polities act solely on the basis of hardheaded calculation: policies are as liable to be influenced by ideas and prejudices as ideas are to be shaped by circumstances. Textual and visual polemics do more than merely reflect beliefs: in a dialectical process of back-and-forth, of give and take, they train the Christian gaze on certain highlighted qualities and peoples, force new readings of familiar scenes, and contribute mightily to the formation of new 'truths'. The townspeople of Norwich seem not to have embraced the rumour that Jews martyred the boy William in 1144. It touched on no preconceived notions, confirmed no ingrained fears. But after decades of reading texts and seeing images of rage-filled, bloodthirsty, Christ-killing, children-torturing Jews, many (though never all) Christians proved ready and willing to give credence to such tales, even in the absence of an actual child's body.

Christian thinking about non-Christian peoples, then, worked in manifold and varying ways. Representations of Jews, Muslims, and pagans provided outlets for the expression of fear, suspicion, and hatred; they offered scope for feelings of superiority and pride; they titillated, entertained, and amused. Outsiders were useful to think with, not because they exhibited any obvious 'difference', but precisely because the world was *not* made up of clear or simple oppositions: the boundaries between Self and Other, evil and good were often blurred and barely definable. The singling out and caricaturing of an abstracted 'enemy' helped Christians explore the meaning of symbols and erect signposts with which they might navigate the world. There were limits to the flexibility and efficacy of such imaginings, of course: rhetoric, knowledge, experience, and acceptance live in a complex relationship. Literary and visual representations permeated but rarely rigidly controlled Christian interactions with and attitudes toward Jews, Muslims, and pagans.

It is necessary to close with one final caveat. Much writing on prejudice, racism, and the imposition of 'Otherness' assumes that discourses of alterity serve to construct and assert the superiority of a homogenous and pure 'Self'. However, few things were more alien to medieval ideas of Christian-ness than homogeneity and purity. As a universal religion, Christianity was presupposed to encompass vast difference. And orthodox doctrine assumed that in the post-lapsarian world, Christians would inevitably fall short of perfection. In a letter addressed to the province of Rouen Pope Honorius III lamented the fact that 'the

heretic, misled by error, acts foolishly; the Jew, his heart still covered by a veil, gropes blindly; and...the pagan...walks in darkness'.<sup>83</sup> But he did not do so in order to contrast infidel vice with Christian virtue. Rather, this litany of error opens with the acknowledgement that 'the Catholic, his spirit of charity having grown cold, has become inactive in the exertion of good works'. In the eyes of Pope Honorius, at least, the sins of heretics, Jews, and pagans do not differentiate the Other from the Christian Self. Within Christian society as well as beyond, and as long as this temporal world lasts, all humans are joined in error and imperfection. That which is truly 'Other' to the medieval Christian is not Jew, Muslim, or pagan, but the purged and resurrected heaven-dwelling soul.

# NOTES

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# CHAPTER 25

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# CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCES OF RELIGIOUS NON-CONFORMISM

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CHOOSING 'Christian Experiences of Religious Non-conformism' as a title for this chapter, rather than, say, 'Heretical Christian Experiences', is a result of not being forced to accept, in an uncritical and hasty fashion, the viewpoint imposed by the Roman Catholic Church since the eleventh century. It is obvious that *heresy* and *heretics*, as simple words, have remained unchanged over the years, but it's also obvious that the relative subjects and objects to which these words are applied do change: the signs do not change, but the signifiers do. Given this, it is true that a particularly historical perspective moves discussion of heresy and heretics beyond a theological level. Historians must not judge the coherence or incoherence of theoretical positions and of practical actions of people held to be heterodox in regard to a given system of doctrine (or worse, of dogma). Let us limit ourselves to taking note that a judgment of *orthodoxy* or *heterodoxy* relies on decisions made by an ecclesiastical 'power' that establishes the terms and limits of both. It is clear that, starting in the eleventh century, such power was constituted by the Roman Catholic Church or indeed by its supreme office, the papacy. It is the task of the historian, therefore, to examine critically the realm of ecclesiastical authority in order to ascertain the dynamic of the relationships created between it and those escaping from its control: that is, those who wish not to submit themselves willingly to the authority and command of the Church. This is analysed within specific contexts and in a diachronic dimension, in order to determine continuities, changes, ruptures, and incidences of phenomena deemed 'heretical'. In fact, the historian analyses *only* sources and documents, in relation to which one can raise difficulties and questions of a general as well as a particular nature. What *reality* do sources and documents reproduce? What *reality* do they produce? Do they reproduce the *reality* of heretics and heresies; or do they produce the *reality* of the reading and representation of each party, as produced by the men of the Church? In almost every instance, the sources and documents come from 'orthodox' settings and from a clerical culture which tends to re-present old and rigid models and to refute *novelties*, since it was held that the fullness of the faith received from antiquity already contained *all* that was necessary in order to obtain eternal salvation.

Starting from such a foundation, 'heresiological' research has corrected or qualified earlier historical and historiographical interpretations, which have not held up to a renewed and more careful analysis of the source material. Let us consider, first of all, the heretics and heresies of 'the year 1000'. The heretical period in the European West was held to begin in the first half of the eleventh century, lumping together the 'heterodox' incidents that supposedly took place in areas such as Champagne, Mainz, Aquitaine, Orléans, Arras, Monforte in Piedmont, Burgundy, the diocese of Châlons-sur-Marne, and Goslar. There were several modern interpretations. Some held these to be resurgences of the heresies of the earliest Christian centuries, a view which matches up precisely with the clerical outlook of the eleventh century. Others saw new and independent expressions of an evangelism that,

however distorted and doctrinally confused it may have been, expressed a need for moral consistency in the face of the ‘crisis’ of the institutions and the religiosity of the time ‘after the year One Thousand’. Moreover, some read these ‘heterodox’ episodes as manifestations of ‘popular heresies’, extraneous to the currents of elite thought and pertaining to lower social groups. On the other hand, some saw therein ties with the thought of the Carolingian period (e.g. that of Eriugena) with ‘spiritualistic’ tendencies that spread even into the highest levels of society. Such ideas were held to be centred on the powerful value of *purity*, obtained only by a radical separation from the values of the material world. There was to have derived from this a dualism, the origins of which have been sought by some in eastern culture, and by others in western traditions.

Such positions have now been superseded. Now that scholars have set themselves the task of deepening their analyses of sources and documents, they have found that the presumed contents of ‘the year 1000’ heresies disappear. This is because the documents permit, almost exclusively, only an understanding of the culture and interests of the polemicists and of those who produced the sources and documents, and who shared the need to ‘reform’ ecclesiastical institutions and the ways of life of clerics and monks. Both the ‘conservation’ and the ‘reform’ required polemical targets who were ‘enemies of the faith’.

Notwithstanding all of this, the history of the heretics of the middle ages is usually made to begin with this mythical ‘year 1000’ and is then divided into fifty-year periods that run from about 1000 to 1050 and then from about 1100 to 1150, followed by the period from 1150 to the papacy of Innocent III (1198–1216). Afterward, the divisions become centuries: the 1200s saw the defeat of the heretics, the 1300s witnessed various survivals, and there was in the 1400s the explosion of religious revolt in Bohemia. Moving backward in time, there appears a surprising and meaningful vacuum during the period from 1050 to 1100. This vacuum corresponds roughly to the age of Church reform of the second half of the eleventh century. The question looms as to whether during this fifty-year period heretics really did suddenly disappear—as suddenly as they had appeared around ‘the year 1000’—in order to reappear at the beginning of the twelfth century. Questions like this demand, even before they get answers, precision regarding the context and terminology surrounding the notion of the ‘heretic’, in its broadest sense, in regard to how very differently it is applied and used in the sources of the period.

It is well known that in the ‘Gregorian Church’ anti-heretical struggles were aimed mainly at simony (sale of clerical office and sacred objects) and nicolaitism (clerical marriage), not forgetting the other more generic accusation of heresy during the clashes involving ‘kingdom’ and ‘clergy’ in the propaganda and deeds characterizing the ‘Investiture Crisis’.<sup>1</sup> And it is also known that scholars of heresy hold that these two heresies are considered forms of corruption of Church institutions and clerical customs, with broadly religious qualities, ending up however normally outside of treatments of ‘the history of heresy in the middle ages’. With such an outlook one could say, albeit paradoxically, that simony and nicolaitism belong to the analysis of the history of the Church, while the *other* heresies would be linked to studies of the history of Christian experience. Simoniacs and nicolaites introduced into the workings of the Church an institutional ‘evil’ that required the restoration of the ideal model of the *ecclesiae primitivae forma* (the ‘primitive Church’). Eradicating simoniac and nicolaite practices was linked to processes of reform and to the affirmation of the *libertas ecclesiae*: so much as to incite against them a general mobilization in which there converged both monastic and clerical milieus, as the laity were finally called to the struggle against a clergy (riddled with practices of simony and concubinage), and in support of the reforming faction.



In such a mobilization emerged the so-called *pataria* that took shape in northern Italy, in Milan, from the mid-1050s and lasted about two decades. Without obvious organizational and institutional links, analogous phenomena occurred in Latin Christendom in the second half of the eleventh century and the first decades afterward. The original *patarine* phenomena must be seen as closely related to the same ‘ecclesiastical reform’, that fed radicalism in religious ideas and evangelical experiences, rather than defensive behaviours defending those ideas and experiences. If this is so, why does *patarine* witness a semantic weakening until it becomes, by the twelfth century, a synonym for *heretic*?

A first answer has to do with the matter of compatibility between criticisms of people and of Church institutions and the evolution of ecclesiastical reforming strategies, and thus concerns the realm of relations between ‘Patarines’ and the hierarchies of the Church and of individual churches. One could offer this reflection: the reforming movement of the second half of the eleventh century had bequeathed to the following century not just better defined ecclesiastical institutions and a papacy aiming to affirm a heavily monarchic appearance for itself, but also an overall impetus for reform that was difficult to brake or to subordinate immediately to the construction of pontifical power. Following this, the ideas of reform were diffused in a fairly intense way in clerical and monastic circles as well as lay ones. The possibilities of expansion lay at the crossroad of two tendencies, both produced by ecclesiastical culture and both founded on a common need for rational restoration and reconstruction: one relating to institutions, supported by canon law, and one relating to religious experience, in the effort to be faithful to the example of Christ and his apostles. The common denominator for these tendencies was the mythical exemplarity of the primitive Church.

While on the institutional level the main movement of ecclesiastical reform in the eleventh century gave rise to processes of clarification and formalization, the same cannot be said regarding the religious and moral level. The questions raised by the ‘Patarines’, and by those who claimed a coherent outlook between theoretical formulations and practical actions, remained unsolved. Even at the highest echelons of those hierarchies, the ‘ideal’ dimension of evangelical poverty was perceived as being contradictory in relation to the institutional and economic ‘richness’ of the Church. These doubts were eliminated at the theoretical and normative level when a Roman synod of 1116 took a powerful decision in this regard, reconfirming that the Church, beyond its obvious soteriological charism, possessed an irremovable temporal function—one it had possessed already from the ‘time of the martyrs’ and of the ‘primitive Church’—in the service of its own ‘children’. The power of the ‘priesthood’ was a sign in the world of the power of God: it was inalienable.

It was precisely against these orientations that the testimony of some ‘heretics’ of the beginning of the twelfth century, such as Peter of Bruis and the so-called monk Henry, was directed. Notwithstanding the possible link between the two, each was different from the other. Peter, burnt at the stake most likely in the late 1130s, seems to have acted frenetically, inspired by an extreme radicalism with iconoclastic components and implicitly denying the priestly function of Church bodies and of clerics. Henry’s understanding appears to have been more carefully thought out. An evangelical preacher who travelled widely, he seems to have based his witness on an evangelism implying the affirmation of God’s authority as having supremacy over any earthly claim to obedience (with reference to Acts 5:29: ‘One must obey God more than men’), the duty of the apostolic mission and of love for one’s neighbour: an evangelism that seems also to imply the renunciation, on the part of the men of the Church, of all earthly power.

In a manner that was not always clear or calm, Henry was outlining an innovative Christian outlook, or rather, setting in motion an outlook destined to be taken up and re-

proposed according to various circumstances. The orientation toward a coherent, conscious, and responsible religious life, to be practised by all believers regardless of the conditioning caused by *status* or of membership in an *ordo*, also moved dramatically however in the opposite direction: taken up by clerical culture and reworked through various Church hierarchies, it could be aimed at reserving to the ‘category of the clerics’ all that related to the salvation of souls and the relationship with the divine and the sacred. More precisely, in the dynamic relationship between the two ‘movements’ lies the engine of later conflicts that arise when the needs of ‘mobilization for reform’ run dry, leaving space for trials that were less violent, more controlled and formalized in regard to the organizational and juridical stabilization of Church structures, and in favour of a more orderly and undisputed exercise of control on the part of ecclesiastical hierarchies.

It is good to keep in mind that the commitment to overcoming eventual disorder and the reconstitution of authority was not only juridical and organizational; it also had an emphasis on biblical values, and the redistribution of such values, thus contributing to framing the evangelical awakening of the twelfth century that Marie-Dominique Chenu highlighted more than fifty years ago, taking up Herbert Grundmann’s unforgettable research related to the ‘religiöse Bewegungen’ and giving substance to an intuition of Raffaello Morghen concerning ‘*rationabiliter vivere*’, a phrase we can translate as ‘living coherently’: that is, via the Gospel.<sup>2</sup> The battle for the *libertas ecclesiae* against royal and noble power was based on Christian values and had brought together around the papacy and the reformation party the forces that were the most lively and committed. The biblical inspiration and the co-ordination with the papacy did not diminish over the course of the twelfth century, even if gradually the demands on the ‘holiness’ of priests and the protests against the ecclesiastical hierarchy were perceived by the dominant Church as violations of *order* that was at once religious and civic, from its exalted soteriological end. One then witnesses ‘new heretics’, individuals and groups that do not manage nor want to reach agreement with the top of the Roman Church or with the rulers of local churches, falling into that ‘heresy of disobedience’ —using Othmar Hageneder’s useful definition<sup>3</sup>—whose theoretical-canonistic bases had been established in an irreversible manner, such as for example in the famous Gregorian theological-juridical pronouncement: ‘That he who is not at peace with the Roman Church shall not be considered Catholic’ [*Catholicus non habeatur qui non concordat Romanae Ecclesiae*].<sup>4</sup> Thus the ‘new heretics’ received nothing but misunderstanding, and were set aside more or less hurriedly.

Clerical culture, for the most part incapable of freeing itself or of going beyond conceptual models inherited from patristic (and especially Augustinian) texts, saw in the ‘new heretics’ a repeat of the ancient past, failing to understand their specificity or their evangelical challenge. There begins then a rather irresolvable battle. Early in the twelfth century, clerical culture again took up and reactivated its *own* antiheretical stereotypical discourse and, in this way, *ideologized* the ‘heretics’, placing them on a highly symbolic level insofar as they presented a threat to the ‘salvific order’ and, thus, for collective earthly peace and for the after worldly fate of the faithful. Such a threat, at once religious and political, had to be distanced and defeated. A logical consequence is the clerical recourse to the assistance of the coercive force that could be provided by lay powers. Exemplary in this regard is the decision of the Second Lateran Council in 1139. Under Innocent II, it was decreed that any heretical presence needed to be expelled from the ecclesiastical body and repressed within society, obviously with the support of the holders of public power. In order to better reflect on this provision, let us recall it in its entirety:

We expel from the Church of God and condemn and order that those, insofar as they are heretics, be repressed by the external [*or earthly*] authority those who, simulating a sort of religiosity, refuse the sacrament of the body and blood of the Lord, the priesthood and the other ecclesiastical orders and legitimate matrimonial pacts. We extend this condemnation to those who defend those people.

[*Eos autem qui religiositatis speciem simulant, Domini corporis et sanguinis sacramentum, baptismum puerorum, sacerdotium et ceteros ecclesiasticos ordines, et legitimarum damnant foedera nuptiarum, tamquam haereticos ab ecclesia Dei pellimus et damnamus, et per potestates externas [or terrenas] coerceri praecipimus. Defensores quoque ipsorum eiusdem damnationis vinculo innodamus.*]

Even before the generic and anonymous indication of ‘heretics’—so-called because they might refuse (*damnant*) the Eucharist, the baptism of infants, the ecclesiastical orders and matrimonial contracts—there enters the conciliar canon the imposition of ‘*potestates externas* [*or terrenas*]’ to intervene in a coercive fashion. Heresy and heretics appear to have already—or, better, to have yet again—been projected *in negativo* into the realm of power: power that, as much as it is religious and ecclesiastical, is also political. And this marks out, on the one hand, the destiny of the ‘Patarine’ positions and, on the other, the structural impossibility of affirming ‘heretical’ groups that would arise in the mid-twelfth century whether they be of mendicant-evangelical inspiration or of a dualist theological vision. Moreover, some ‘heretics’ seemed to express a radical critique of the political dimension of priestly power, that they judged to be in contradiction to an ideal of a Christian Church that was constitutionally poor and, thus, evangelical.

Arnold of Brescia above all manifests an awareness of the connections between ecclesiastical-religious reform and political-social context. Such a particularity was noted and discussed by Giovanni Miccoli with penetrating insight: ‘Arnold’s strength was in having noted the weakness, if not the emptiness, of a discourse of renewal which did not face the problems of the organization and of the social role of the hierarchy and the clergy, that did not link the expectation of a personal life, faithful to the evangelical message, to structural situations in which the hierarchy and clergy were called upon to live’.<sup>5</sup> If this is the case, it seems to indicate a line of continuity of Arnoldian action that, perhaps more consciously, moved from Brescia, reaching Paris, passing through Zurich and ending in Rome. The preoccupations of a Bernard of Clairvaux seemed more than justified (from his point of view), when the illustrious monk wrote to the bishop of Constance regarding Arnold of Brescia and of the threat posed, in the ecclesiastical and political realms, by his presence in Zurich:

He was want to attract the rich and powerful to himself through the flattery of his sermons and the simulation of his virtues, according to the verse *He sits in ambush with the rich, in private places, that he may kill the innocent* [Ps 10, 8]. Finally, certain of having won their good will and confidence, you will witness him inveigh against the clergy, full of military vigour, and inveigh against the same bishops and rage at any ecclesiastical order.

[*Solet sibi allicere blandis sermonibus et simulatione virtutum divites et potentes, iuxta illud Sedet in insidiis cum divitibus in occultis, ut interficiat innocentem* [Ps. 10, 8]. *Demum cum fuerit de illorum captata benevolentia et familiaritate securus, videbitis hominem aperte insurgere in clerum, fretum tyrannide militari, insurgere in ipsos episcopos et in omnem passim ecclesiasticum ordinem desaevire.*<sup>6</sup>]

Whether it was the *divites et potentes* of the Swiss city or rather, later, the newborn Senate and the *popolo* of Rome, Arnold of Brescia was always careful to find political support for his reforming goal, without omitting its evangelical foundation. Later on, Arnold’s radicalism would fail to establish itself as the ideology of the dominant groups of the Roman commune, and eventually he would maintain as his final stronghold the support only of the subaltern population; but this does not detract from the fact that in Rome, in the central decade of the twelfth century, there was an important encounter being played out. The process and outcome show how preaching in the knowledge of the Patarine tradition,

there where it found an audience and support, had too many connections with the balance of power to leave unchanged political relations.

The Arnoldian events rightly resounded with some of the greatest minds of the first half of the twelfth century. Arnold was, in many ways, a unique individual: choosing to be a disciple of the great theologian Abelard and to be as well a master of Sacred Scripture, trying to bring his religious ideal to the centre of Roman Christianity, and stimulating the attention and judgment of the most vigilant consciences of his time. The Arnoldian affair is both the high water mark and the end of radicalism of the Patarine kind: the high point that marks the end of its path, not leaving a noticeable trace in the universe of 'heresy' (even if later documents of the Roman curia would refer to a sect of non-existent 'Arnoldists'). After Arnold's execution in Rome in 1155, there would be other manifestations of religious disquiet and those seeking evangelical consistency: the dualism of 'good Christians' or 'good men', and the pauperistic evangelicalism, that was lived out in a variety of forms and relationships with hegemonic ecclesiastical institutions. In both dualism and in pauperistic evangelicalism, the problem of power, as a condition for ecclesiastical and religious 'reform', would be completely absent.

In the above-mentioned decision of the Lateran Council of 1139, there is a concise signal of the early twelfth-century heretics. Heretics were those who simulated the appearance of piety (*religiositas species*), but who really opposed (*damnant*) some belief and practices of the *ecclesia Dei*: the sacrament of the Eucharist, the baptism of infants, the priesthood and other ecclesiastical orders, and the contracts of legitimate marriages. It all appears fairly *heterodoxically* generic, to the point that we can not escape the question: to whom were the conciliar fathers of 1139 making reference? The answer given by many historians seem to leave no doubt: the followers of the monk Henry. But to arrive at this affirmation, a syllogistic reasoning is needed: the Lateran canon copied almost to the letter an earlier canon of the synod of Toulouse (1119) presided over by Callixtus II, that may have condemned the Henricians; and therefore could not later refer to anyone other than the Henricians. This reasoning gives rise to more than one perplexity, since it takes as read deeds and chronologies that in fact should not be taken for granted. It is then necessary to ask what those same historians mean by the word 'Henrician', which seems to be used by them in a manner that seems institutional, implying or (even better) supposing the existence of one or more groups of followers of the so-called monk Henry, in regard to which it is licit to raise certain doubts. With analogous suppositions, one could formulate the hypothesis that the 1119 Toulouse canon referred to the followers of Peter of Bruis, to whom the well-known writings of Peter the Venerable attribute religious positions not different from those of the presumed Henricians, and being held in and around Toulouse. There follows another question: did the Petrobrusians truly exist as a group or in groups identifiable as such?

To escape a vicious circle, analysis will be shifted from the slippery surface of *facts*, of difficult if not impossible verifiability, to one of a methodological character, with references to the hermeneutical level. Information and suggestions that were proposed in the 1998 collection of essays *Inventer l'hérésie? Discours polémiques et pouvoirs avant l'Inquisition* are useful here. 'Inventing' is a term that has been used a lot in late twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century historiography. It raises questions of a documentary, methodological and exegetical nature that can be summarized as such: did the ecclesiastical hierarchies and the clerical culture of the central and later middle ages 'invent' 'heresy' and 'heretics', or rather, were 'heresy' and 'heretics' 'invented' by modern and contemporary historiography on the basis of certain pre-comprehensions and in the absence of a preliminary analytical effort of sufficient depth and vigour? One is not far from the truth in

thinking that there exists a kind of complicity among modern and contemporary historians with later medieval ecclesiastical hierarchies and clerical culture (albeit for reasons that are obviously very different). Thus has the ambiguity intrinsic to the words *invent/invention* been resolved: the words can mean, on the one hand, the creation of things that are either new or without any relation to reality and, on the other hand, the act of finding or discovering something hidden or unknown.

It is important not to fall into a conceptual and interpretative rigidity, that can in the end take one into a theological and dogmatic dimension: as if 'medieval heresy' and 'heretics' could have a certain *objectivity* and a certain *subjectivity*. We must not forget that 'the medieval heretic' did not him/herself claim any 'hereticity' (as it were), and that 'the medieval heretic' was never one in him/herself, but only in contrast to or conflict with the majority and dominant ecclesiastical hierarchies and institutions; which, however, cannot escape attributing an *objective character* to heresy and a *subjective responsibility* to heretics. The Roman Catholic Church's defence of orthodoxy and of the soteriological context occurs on a dominant level, both in the concreteness of its social-political relations and in the symbolism of polemical discourses. Heretics were heretics because the Church defined them as such. Consequently, those who do not recognize their 'heresy' and do not repent of their 'errors' were *coercively* distanced from the community of the faithful and from society itself; they became 'internal enemies' of *christianitas* and, therefore, by juxtaposition, elements *in negativo* of 'orthodox' identity.

After the intense and dramatic human and religious experience of Arnold of Brescia, there was a decrease in the reforming tension in reference to the order of the Church and of society. There would be parallelisms of events, or there would be expectations full of hope. The parallelism concerts the deeds of the dualist (i.e. believing in two Gods) 'good men' or 'good Christians' who would be termed 'Cathars'. Hopeful expectation was directed at groups of 'the poor of Christ' who chose a life inspired by pauperistic evangelism and discovered the right and duty to announce the Word, or that perceive the unveiling of a new age, the age of the Spirit.

The appearance of a dualist Christianity in western Europe has not yet been explained fully by historians (just as, moreover, people of the twelfth century did not explain it). Some hold to eastern innovations and influences as a consequence of closer contact resulting from the first two crusades; others find it sufficient to hold that there existed dualistic traditions, however explicit or hidden they may have been, in the Christian culture of the West. There remains the observation that a 'dualist' Christianity, conscious of an original implied meaning of its own, emerged in western Europe just before the middle of the twelfth century. This is a Christian dualism, with strong characteristics of pauperism and evangelism, that offers answers to the fundamental religious question about the 'problem of evil' through a highly imaginative language and according to a dual scheme: *radical*, with an accent on the diversity and the autonomy of Good and Evil; *moderate*, with the reduction of distance between the two realities and an ultimate prevalence of Good. We will not dwell on theological and doctrinal aspects, whose true content and effective terms are still today not settled or shared with any certainty. We will note, however, that the earliest contexts in which there appear 'good Christians' are identifiable where there is a traceable tie (more or less mythical, more or less concrete) with a *history* that is not that of the Roman Church, built from the moment it has an independent presence that then seeks to send one back to the 'origins' of Christianity.

Thus the 'heretics' of Cologne, denounced by the Premonstratensian Eberwin of Steinfeld in a letter from the 1140s to Bernard of Clairvaux, linked themselves with the 'times of the martyrs' having then survived in 'Greece' and in other unnamed lands, and



saw themselves as following in an authentic apostolic and ecclesiastically structured tradition. About two decades later, it seems that the scattered and multiple 'dualist' groups evolved into religious formations that were more identifiable and defined from the doctrinal and organizational points of view, possibly through the influence of preachers from the Byzantine East, that exported to the West dualist rites and myths, of radical as well as moderate outlooks. Above all there followed the constitution of the churches of the 'good Christians' in the north and the south of France and of central and northern Italy. Our understanding of these churches is not at all helped by documentation in clarifying their characteristics and their dating. The impression to be gleaned is one of a growing presence, thanks also to political and social conditions of some areas of a more developed government and economy, guided by a governing class oriented to withdrawing from the cultural and religious (and not just political) hegemony of the men of the Church: the most prominent such areas are the French Midi and the Po valley. Dualist 'heretics' and pauperistic-evangelical groups grew not so much through instrumentalized protection by holders of political power or by members of leading families, as rather in the spaces of freedom of action and of thought that the fragmented social-political frames opened and permitted.

From the time of the Second Lateran Council of 1139, the situation in the south of France increasingly preoccupied the papacy and the conciliar fathers. Reunited at the Third Lateran Council of 1179, they judged the situation to be dangerous, due to worrisome political-military upheavals and very serious religious deviations, both unified by the same condemnation—or rather, by the link of anathema that affected both the heretics and the soldier-like 'irregulars' or mercenaries who devastated those lands—such as to request the mobilization of 'all the faithful' to take up arms for the defence of the 'Christian people', with the concession of the same spiritual rewards and juridical protection granted to the 'crusaders' of the Holy Land. In the Po valley, on the other hand, the ecclesiastical governors did not foresee an analogous, immediate militant and military effort. Here there was an outlook over a long period, according to which religious non-conformism continued to be interpreted as a sort of violation of *order*, a violation that would later be sanctioned definitively, on ideological and juridical grounds, in the decretal *Vergentis in senium*, promulgated by Innocent III in 1199, in which heresy was equated with 'crimes of lèse-majesté'.

When the conflict in Italy with the emperor Frederick I was resolved, Pope Lucius III did not hesitate to promulgate in Verona, in 1184, the decretal *Ad abolendam*, with which 'Cathars and Patarines and those who, lying, falsely call themselves Humiliati and Poor of Lyon, Passagines, Josephines, [and] Arnoldists' were excommunicated. Not only that: the pontifical decision extended the excommunication—even before it was applied to those spreading doctrines differing from those of the Roman Church—to all who, without authorization or without a mandate from the apostolic see or the local bishop, had dared to preach 'in public or in private': and this was independent of the content of that preaching. This was a surprising disciplinary stretch, that did not however contradict decisions taken, a few years earlier, during the Third Lateran Council of 1179. There, Alexander III had denied requests coming from the early followers of Waldo of Lyon and of the first Humiliati of Lombardy: requests concerning precisely the possibility or, better, the right to preach on the part of 'non clerics' who had made radical evangelical choices and had taken on a state of religious life. The priestly tradition, the canonistic definitions and, perhaps not least, a class elitism had prevented any idea that the Word could be entrusted to 'non clerics' who hailed, from what can be gathered, mainly from new civic classes, with whom the clerical élites found difficulty in living and had not yet found the appropriate means of accommodating.

Waldo was a 'citizen' of Lyon. Toward the middle of the 1170s, he not only converted to evangelical poverty, renouncing his riches, but drew from his adopted condition as 'poor man of Christ' legitimation for his preaching of the 'good news', that which he had learned by having the New Testament and several Old Testament books, along with patristic 'authorities', translated into the vernacular, in order to interpret biblical texts in a non-literal manner, but with the help of aids that were normally associated with 'learned' culture. He was soon followed by other lay people and clerics who in their turn became preachers. One of his followers, the cleric Durand of Osca, would formulate an interesting and serious interpretation of Waldo's apostolic mission, seeing in him, 'illiterate', the new apostle chosen precisely by Christ—in analogy to the initiating call to the first apostles who had been 'fishermen without letters'—to renew the evangelical call in the face of the aphasia of 'wicked' prelates, full of sin and incapable of opposing the 'errors' of heretical 'dualists'. In so many words, early Waldensianism began as a perfectly orthodox platform that, however, did not meet with understanding from the men of the Church, who were neither prepared nor able to accept that Waldo and his followers—the 'poor of Lyon', or the 'poor in Spirit', or Waldensians—could take on a pastoral task without possessing the necessary theological culture; and, then, when clerics entered among them, without submitting to the discipline of ecclesiastical hierarchy. And this would lead parts of the Waldensian movement to radicalize their own positions and to distance themselves even further from the highest echelons of the Church. In this regard, some hold the proposition that the 'poor Lombards' split in 1205 from the 'poor of Lyon', among other reasons, precisely due to a different way of conceiving their relationship with 'orthodox' tradition and with the Roman Catholic outlook.

The matter of the Lombard Humiliati presents some analogies with the situation of the poor of Lyon, especially in regard to relations with the ecclesiastical hierarchies. The Humiliati, despite having gone to Rome during the Third Lateran Council of 1179 and meeting Alexander III, did not receive authorization to preach at that time; moreover, despite this refusal, they persevered in their mission of the Word and became more rooted in their evangelical rigours and, in all probability, in their opposition to the presence of 'good Christian' dualists in the Po valley. The Humiliati started and grew in the heart of this area, not from the efforts of a single 'convert'—they did not have a founding 'saint'—but rather from a number of groups with non-uniform modes of living, in the areas around cities and in the countryside who, in some cases, took on charitable projects and occupations. Some Humiliati followed a 'rule' that brought them together with clerics, others lived in mixed communities, and others yet remained in their own homes and met periodically to pray and to hear the Word of God. Unlike the poor of Lyon, the most authoritative members of this diverse world of the Humiliati, at the end of the twelfth century, acted to obtain approval by the apostolic see: an approval that arrived in 1201 by the far-sighted response of Innocent III and his most faithful collaborators.

With the papacy of Innocent III (1198–1216), there was a decisive shift in the relations between the ecclesiastical apex and religious movements. The latter were faced with an inescapable dilemma: they had either to mend the break with the Roman Church, taking on an institutional appearance that would be accepted by the papacy, with the inevitable changes and the connected limitations of their own original characteristics; or to place themselves forever in the area of heterodoxy or, better, in that of 'heresy of disobedience', and thus be persecuted, even with violence, insofar as they were 'heretics'. This dilemma was dramatically illustrated to the poor of Lyon after the death of Waldo (in 1206 or 1207), and in the lead-up to the crusade against the 'Albigensians'—this served as an umbrella term for the 'good Christian' dualists, the Cathars of the south of France—outlawed by

Innocent III in 1208. Note that in the same year, Durand of Osca and his companions, after the death of Waldo, took on the ambitious task of aiming to reconcile the Waldensian movement with the Church of Rome, obtaining from the pope, as a first step, pontifical recognition and official organization of the religious education of the 'poor Catholics'. The project seemed to have become successful with the creation, in 1210, of another religious body of ex-Waldensians, the 'poor Catholics' (or 'poor reconciled ones'), established by Bernard Prim and his followers; however this group did not have other meaningful developments or success. While the Humiliati, except for the odd fringe group, entered into communion with Rome, many of the poor of Lyon, the poor Lombards, and other smaller aggregations of Waldensians did not follow the lead of Durand of Osca and Bernard Prim, instead giving life, in their clandestine habits, to groups of 'the poor of Christ' spread throughout all of Europe and endowed with an extraordinary capacity for survival in situations of growing repression by the ecclesiastical hierarchies.

In turn, the consistent presence of dualist 'good men' or 'good Christians' comes from many factors. First is the concern felt by the men of the Church who, between the 1140s and 1160s, seemed uncertain and alarmed by the multiplication of heretical episodes that could not be clearly linked to a particular 'initiator'. Second, at the end of the 1160s there was a move from a period of 'revolutionary spontaneity' to an undertaking that gathered in the area of Toulouse the leading members of the dualist 'churches' of northern Italy and the north and south of France, before Nicheta or Niquinta, dualist bishop of a radical church of Byzantium or the Balkans. These people helped give a more precise appearance to the scattered 'dualist' groups, conferring the *consolamentum* and order, through the imposition of hands, to those who would become *episcopi*: seven 'bishops' for seven 'churches' seem to duplicate the 'seven churches of Asia' of the Apocalypse, as if to commence the refoundation of the church of Christ in western Europe. What were the consequences?

If things did indeed go like this—the authenticity of the document is from time to time put into question—from this moment onward 'Catharism' could offer itself as 'another' Christianity, distinct from Roman Catholic Christianity. The links, however loose, with eastern churches furnished part of the theological and spiritual trappings, and the ritual and hierarchical models superseded the previous phase which had been characterized by the simple teaching of a morality that was apostolic, rigorous, and detached from the 'false values of the world'. The ethical-religious horizon became complicated on the intellectual level, as debate produced division and eventually disjointed processes of independent elaboration and re-elaboration of the cultural patrimony of the faith. In central-northern Italy the contrasts appeared early on, with a period of growth that can be assigned to the turn of the thirteenth century. The original community would have been divided first into two parts, and after a short while, a good six churches, separate from one another, would take shape, each with its own hierarchy and with a special reference to an 'order' of the Balkan peninsula and its own doctrinal specificities. It could be that conflicts and subdivisions did not depend solely on regional theologies and religions as much as rather their mirroring the more general characteristics of an Italian society that was very fractured and buffeted, even in comparison with what was happening at the same time in the south of France, where 'Catharism' followed a very different path.

There, divisions were obvious. The four dioceses, defined in the 'Toulousan' council of 1167, endured. The independence of each bishop was maintained. Radical dualism was never up for debate. Schisms were not witnessed. Indeed, there was no shortage of attempts to unify the four 'churches' into a larger 'metropolitan' circumscription, largely corresponding to the territory of the 'principality' that the counts of Toulouse were constructing. The same rites and ceremonies of eastern origin were translated into the

Occitan language. It seems there were many possibilities, therefore, to reach an accommodation between the 'dualist' Christianity of the 'good men' with the social groups and the power centres of both the French and the Italian areas. A 'dualist' Christianity? There exists an age-old debate, still raging today, about the question of the 'Christianity or 'non-Christianity' of the 'good Christians'. Despite its being very difficult to propose neat solutions to the problems relative to phenomena characterized by the free use of the imagination and of the attraction of variety and novelty, among the many interpretations there is one that seems the most satisfactory. The so-called 'Cathars' described themselves as 'Christians' and thus it is not contradictory to consider them as 'gnostics', placed at the crossroad between forms of thought and of life that are not too distant yet heterogeneous and contrasting, who tried to seek a synthesis that would satisfy the two-fold need for a more authentic Christian religiosity and a rational response to the fundamental questions concerning human existence.

'Gnostic' dualism, with its myths, provided an overall conceptual framework for the understanding and explanation of the Gospel texts, in the face of 'global' religious needs of the people of the West. Catharism did not seem to spring from obsession with the problem of evil, nor did it produce pessimistic visions. It led to a separation from the 'illusions' of the earthly world and of its worthlessness in regard to the reintegration of the heavenly and light-filled world of a totally different nature. The 'good Christians' announced a message of 'liberation' of the divine part of each person from the prison of matter. The following of Christ, with appropriate choices of penitential asceticism and even martyrdom, was the path that would remove the chains of this material world (and its logic) from the soul of the pure man, that is, the *Cathar* ('katharoi' being the Greek word for 'the pure'). Catharism was the true conscience of the cosmic battle between God and Satan; it was a matter of choosing one or the other. The earthly world and material reality, along with the social and political dimensions of humans living together, did not matter to the 'good men'. What did matter was to maintain and to fuel knowledge acquired for the purpose of freeing the soul from its bodily covering. From such knowledge they gave witness to the extreme consequences thereof, defying prelates, monks, and clerics with its coherence. Catharism proposed its religious coherence in the face of the men of the Roman Catholic Church, who saw it as a 'danger' to be eliminated at all costs and by all means.

In 1208 Innocent III called the crusade against the 'good Christian' dualists of the French Midi. What were the precedents that motivated this? The progressive equating of the armed intervention against the heretics with that of the crusaders in the Holy Land against the 'infidels' came through the canon *Sicut ait beatus Leo* of the Third Lateran Council of 1179. The faithful were called to mobilize against the heretics of certain areas of the south of France and, at the same time, against the warriors of various origins who were present in the same areas 'according to the custom of the pagans', using unheard-of violence 'against Christians', not sparing the weak and defenceless (making no distinction between people's ages and sexes) as well as ecclesiastical and monastic centres: this attests to how from the beginning of the question of the 'good Christian' dualists of the Midi was a *negotium pacis et fidei*, a question regarding order that was civil and political as well as ecclesiastical and religious.

From then on, the papacy would perfect the image and the ideology of the *militia Christi* as an antiheretical obligation, and of the *milites Christi* who dedicated themselves to the struggle against the heretics. The definitive and perfect equating of the 'crusade' against the infidels with the 'crusade' against the heretics would be sanctioned by the canon *Excommunicamus* of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. In this way, the antiheretical crusade received a sanction of universal worth, becoming an institution of Roman

catholicity. The novelty of the crusade within Christendom was very remarkable and constituted one of the possible practical translations of the hierocracy: wheresoever any of the holders of political and judicial power may neglect one's own institutional duty to repress the heretics, the papacy would intervene in order to guarantee the correct exercise of *power*, since one of its constituent characteristics was the dutiful repression of heterodoxy.

For crusaders, death during a military enterprise would guarantee otherworldly salvation: for heretics and their supporters, eternal damnation. The facile nature of this solution seemed to provoke and guarantee emotional distance from the drama of cruelly repressive attacks, even for men of the Church and of the cloister. Indisputable witness to this is found in the letter that the papal legates Milo and Arnold (abbot of Cîteaux) sent in 1209 to Innocent III after the crusading conquest of Béziers. On 22 July, the crusaders conquered the city and, 'without concern for order, sex and age, put to the sword almost twenty thousand men': a devastating massacre with related devastation and fires within the city.<sup>7</sup> The slaughter of Béziers *was* the project of the vengeful justice of God. In the antiheretical struggle, as in the wars against the 'infidels' and the 'pagans', the ends—although implying violence and death not only to enemies who were armed, but also ones who were not—completely justified the means. In the crusade of the French Midi, coercion to orthodoxy saw a lengthy phase of military effort lasting—albeit not unbroken—for about twenty years, until the 1229 peace of Paris. The crusaders, hailing mainly from the north of France, procured *manu armata* the defeat not only of many dualist 'good Christians' but also of many members of the Occitan population and especially those who held power in those areas.

Meanwhile, the men of the Church prepared themselves for an authentic re-catholicization of those same populations and for control of those same regions. The successors of Innocent III, namely Honorius III and Gregory IX (popes from 1216 to 1241), brought to an end the initiatives of their illustrious predecessor and developed, in other ways, various lines of intervention in central and northern Italy and in other areas with a 'heterodox' presence. From the needs of the Catholic restoration in the French Midi and of a more intensive antiheretical initiative in other European lands were born the figures of papal delegates specifically created in order to repress heretics: the so-called 'inquisitors of heretical depravity, delegated by the apostolic see'. We have now reached the beginning of the 1230s. The inquisitors will have a fairly enduring destiny. The Inquisition, as a 'tribunal of the faith' conceived and instituted by the apostolic see, became operative however when the earthly fate of the 'heretics' was already sealed. The Inquisition certainly did not give birth to antiheretical repression: rather it regulated that repression, it controlled it within the framework of increasingly developed and precise regulations, it made it ever-present, it legitimized it in its police and judicial methods, even violent ones, and in its 'soteriological' goals.

The Inquisition framed and crystallized the figure of the 'heretics' in predetermined schemes aimed at establishing and singling out those who did not conform to models of religious behaviour formally imposed on the faithful and who disobeyed the *mandata ecclesiae*, the whole and the parts of the normative frame and of the decisions of the Roman Catholic Church. On the other hand, already in the decretal *Ad abolendam* of 1184, a criterion for singling out heretics was given by the fact that there existed people who 'through their lives and habits' made themselves different (*dissidentes*) from the 'common manner of behaviour of the faithful'. Later, the same expression, in manuals and in inquisitorial acts, was clarified in the sense that the *dissident* was one 'who on Sunday does not go to church, nor on the prescribed feast days receives the body of Christ, nor at least once a year confesses one's sins to the priests of the Roman Church'. Whosoever removed



themselves from the formal duties of the 'faithful' by this very situation was suspected of heresy. With the elementary but basic duties of each of the faithful having been stipulated, it would have been easy to point out whoever would place oneself in the uncertain area of religious and social 'non-conformism'.

Throughout the thirteenth century, space for spontaneous religious gatherings was drastically shut down, while there opened a period characterized by dreams of 'spiritual' palingenesis and the interiorization of the 'desire for God'. It is not surprising that such a dual direction would start quite often in the world of the Franciscans and Dominicans (or their milieus), who expressed a tormented and very sincere conscience to represent *the* sign of the imminent coming of the 'fullness of time'. At the dawn of the fourteenth century, while myths of the 'model of the primitive church' and of the 'apostolic life' seemed to lose appeal and possibility, pauperistic evangelism underwent an evolution in the spiritual and eschatological sense. The expectation of a new age was quite often put across in an open criticism of the present-day Church that was identified with the *ecclesia carnalis*, clearly averse and opposed to the *ecclesia spiritualis* that many wanted and expected. Not unrelated to these expectations were religious positions that were generally inspired by the visions of Joachim of Fiore, or at least a notable number of treatises and shorter works, often apocryphal, of direct or indirect Joachimite inspiration. From this vantage point, reality had to be *read*, to seek the information and symbols that permitted the singling out of 'signs' announcing the age of the Spirit and the protagonists of the decisive deeds of the last days of 'history': the last days in which the Church would no longer be 'carnal' but 'spiritual'.

Eschatological and apocalyptic ideas and positions moved in circles of various cultural levels and could converge in great designs of the 'theology of history', or in improvised collective manifestations of the 'waiting for the end', or in 'heroic' episodes of Christian extremism. Thus among the friars of the 'mendicant' orders could arise fairly daring interpretations on the 'final' role of the very presence of the 'history of salvation'. Thus there could suddenly appear (and equally rapidly fade away) people like flagellants with their processions and exercises, more or less fanatical and more or less authorized prophets and witnesses of the 'last days', of the imminent return of Christ. Thus the simple evangelism of a Gerard Segarelli could become complicated through the personality of a Fra Dolcino of Novara and, in the very beginning of the fourteenth century, become the declaration of the imminent arrival of the 'fourth state' of the 'history of salvation', or the 'state of the saints', in which the Holy Spirit would descend again on the true followers of Christ—the 'spiritual men'—and open an era that would last until the end of time. Thus the simple evangelism of a woman named Guglielma, coming in the second half of the thirteenth century to Milan, could be interpreted, surprisingly, as a *feminine* manifestation of the Holy Spirit: a 'woman Christ' who would presage the advent of the last days. Dreams and illusions: in 1300 Gerard Segarelli was burnt at the stake in Parma and Guglielma's remains were exhumed and thrown on the flames. In 1307 'brother' Dolcino was also burnt alive, against whom, having taken refuge with many followers in the mountain valleys of northern Piedmont to await the apocalyptic opening of the 'fourth state' of the 'history of salvation', a 'crusade' had been proclaimed and effected, one that had forced the Dolcinians to try a desperate and eventually hopeless armed resistance.

In a similar manner, in the core of 'Franciscan' dissidence, among those who were said to be in an undifferentiated manner *fraticelli*, there was a radicalization of criticism against the ecclesiastical hierarchy in an eschatological perspective. Up to the mid-fifteenth century, scattered about but especially on the Italian peninsula, there were pyres on which were executed those people who continued to hold that the Roman Church was the 'church of the evil ones', the synagogue of Satan, Babylon drunk with martyrs' blood, the great whore of

the Apocalypse. They were small minorities who nonetheless survived in semi-clandestine and underground forms and who still managed to bear witness to the unresolved tenacity of extremely varied and divergent battles and tensions, outlooks and conceptions. They were generally religious convictions and ideas that were incapable of uniting with any constructive force and thus not able to look even partially institutional. And yet they endured and returned within the great religious 'non-conformist' movements of the last centuries of the middle ages, which present relative novelties in regard to the preceding centuries especially in the relations of heresy to high culture, and of the place of heresy within the struggles that ultimately led to definitions of European nationality. These latter characterizations clearly distinguish phenomena like Hussitism or Lollardy from the heresies and heretics of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and pose questions about how licit it is to see a 'heretical history' of the middle ages that gathers and understands it as a unified, continuous, and coherent discourse. The change of spatial-temporal context goes hand in hand with the importance that the heterodox manifestations of the 1400s took on in a Christianity that, whilst still Roman Catholic, was subdividing into 'nations', structured on a political scale and defined on a cultural one.

Above all one's attention is drawn to the exceptional situation of Bohemia, when following the strengthening of royal power in the second half of the 1300s and of the emergence of a more precise cultural identity—thanks to the foundation of the University of Prague—the ideas of theologian John Hus became part of anti-German and nationalistic tendencies. The conciliar fathers of Constance, notwithstanding their guarantees of protection, condemned Hus to the stake in 1415. Then there erupted the revolt of the lands of Bohemia and that 'kingdom' demonstrated its own religious, ecclesial, and ecclesiastical autonomy through actions and positions of not minor importance. They were mediated and synthesized in the so-called 'four articles of Prague' in 1419: complete freedom of the Word preached anywhere as the gospel of Christ; the reporting and elimination of public sins against the divine law, starting from the holders of power; eucharistic communion under the two species of bread and wine (*utraquism*); expropriation of ecclesiastical goods and the abolition of the secular power of the clergy. The Bohemian religious scene became complicated when Hussite ideas were exaggerated by the Taborites who, believing in the imminent return of Christ, gave life to a millenarist movement that was engaged on the social, political and military front. Opposing 'heretical' Bohemia, crusades were led against them and the Taborites were overthrown; but the 'four articles of Prague', even in an attenuated form, remained to identify the Bohemian national Church.

Hussitism was born as a critique of the juridical and political developments of the Church of Rome, taking inspiration in part from the theological and ecclesiological reflections of John Wyclif (c.1320–84). The Oxford master was initially granted prestige in the schools and in the English court; this prestige was diminished when, in the early 1380s, his ideas began to undergo heavy criticism for reasons that were primarily political, both local and general. His theories came to be summarized in a text of 'thirty-three theses' and each revolved around the theme of Christ's poverty. The Oxford master criticized papal hierarchy and reconsidered the role of lay power in Church matters, with the purpose of defending and observing the evangelical law regarding clerical abuses. Criticisms of the 'carnality' of the hierarchical Church seemed to result in revaluing the secular 'kingdom' as protector of the right functioning of ecclesiastical and religious life. This was not a new thing, not only because it referred to early medieval traditions, but also because analogous positions were held by Frederick II of Swabia in the first half of the 1200s, or by the civil lawyers of Phillip IV of France and by the theologians and masters who took refuge in the

court of Ludwig the Bavarian in the first decades of the 1300s. The novelty consisted in that Wyclif's ideas were welcomed beyond the universities.

Once, people discussed if and in what measure Wyclif influenced the Lollards, who from the end of the 1300s spread throughout England. Now it is commonly accepted that Lollardy originated in exalted areas of culture and of politics, not any differently from Hussitism, moving from the reflections of the Oxford master and, above all, from his conviction of the primacy of the Bible as Word of God. It is not an accident that an anthology of his writings led to a notable production of books, including among other things an English version of the Bible: a 'library' that maybe was meant to constitute a cultural aid in support of an attempt to reform the English Church. The great cost of this editorial project attests that early Lollardy involved high circles of society and politics: so much so that in 1410 Parliament met to consider proposed legislation of Lollard inspiration that called for the confiscation of episcopal and monastic properties. Yet, simultaneously opposition to Lollardy grew among the clergy. A 1401 law stipulated the death penalty for heresy, in a kingdom that had not known heretical phenomena of any great significance: there followed trials and death sentences for Lollards. Moreover, the accusation of Lollardy was spread widely, expanding to take in the anti-royal revolt of Sir John Oldcastle in 1414 as well as other episodes connected with the political and military disorders of the early reign of Henry V.

At any rate, Anne Hudson's research has allowed us to outline a more precise picture of a Lollardy capable of enduring over time, notwithstanding the episcopal and regal repression to which the Lollards were submitted. Lollard ideas and practices, on the one hand, continued to be linked with Wyclif's writings and to be nourished by contact with the Bible in English as well as with Latin texts. They put forth once more, without our being able to draw a definite link, old and scattered affirmations and positions of 'heretics' of earlier centuries: the Eucharist was above all a memorial; Purgatory's existence was negated; pilgrimages, the cult of images and prayers for the dead were refused; it was not licit to swear an oath. There was also an emphasis on criticisms of the papacy and of ecclesiastical institutions. In regard to their content and doctrine, the affirmations and positions of Lollard 'groups' and of individual Lollards presented more than a mere affinity with those surviving fifteenth-century Waldensians of the Italian and French sides of the western Alps. It is not a coincidence that Lollards and Waldensians were highlighted and named in Protestant historiography as 'pre-Reformers', precursors of the sixteenth-century Reformation. Such a conception today does not hold water in light of documented and rigorous research. Lollards and Waldensians, in fact, did not foretell future times of 'reform'. They gave witness to their Christian faith, simple yet not simplistic, in the hunt for an evangelical authenticity that the Roman Catholic Church and its men seemed to have lost for good. Like the 'heretics' who preceded them over the three previous centuries, they gave witness to the right of each person of faith to live an evangelical experience that is conscious and not conformist.

## NOTES

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1. See chapter by [Miller](#), this volume.
2. See H. Grundmann, *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter* (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1961) [trans. S. Rowan, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1995)]; M.-D. Chenu, *Nature, Man and Society in the Twelfth Century* (1957. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), particularly 239–269; Raffaello Morghen, *Medioevo cristiano* (Bari: Laterza, 1951; 2nd edn, 1958).
3. Othmar Hageneder, ‘Der Häresie begriff bei den Juristen des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts’, in W. Loudaux and D. Verhelst, eds, *The Concept of Heresy in the Middle Ages (11th–13th C.)* (Louvain and the Hague: Louvain University Press and Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 104–43.
4. Gregory VII, *Dictatus papae* (1075), canon 26.
5. G. Miccoli, *La storia religiosa*, in *Storia d’Italia II. Dalla caduta dell’Impero romano al secolo XVIII* (Torini: Einaudi, 1974), 431–1079, at 630.
6. *Opere di San Bernardo*, Vol. 6,1: *Lettere, Parte Prima 1–210*, ed. F. Gastaldelli (Rome: Città Nuova Editrice 1986), 854.
7. PL 216, 137–41.

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## PART VI

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# POWER

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# CHAPTER 26

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# THE CHURCH AS LORD

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## GEORGE DAMERON

IN Florence in January 1331—usually a time in Tuscany when the weather is cold, sunless, and wet—the bishop of Florence joined other Tuscan bishops and the archbishop of Pisa to exhume from underneath the altar of the cathedral the body of the fifth-century patron saint and first bishop of the city, St Zenobius. After finding the body in a marble sarcophagus, they removed the head and placed it in a head-shaped silver reliquary. They left the body where they found it, but they took the head for use in processions on feast days. The bishops and archbishop of Tuscany had timed this recovery of the body of St Zenobius to occur just as the city and the prelate were about to begin a new and significant phase in the construction of the new cathedral. It also came just over a year after one of the most serious grain shortages in the past century. The ‘discovery’ of the physical remains of the dead bishop served therefore to re-energize the veneration of his cult, connect the current prelate with the former saint, invoke the aid of Zenobius, and inspire significant donations for the new and glorious cathedral planned to rise over the shell of the original Romanesque structure.<sup>1</sup> The participation of the Florentine bishop in this orchestrated drama brought together in sumptuous display at least two major dimensions of episcopal power. On the one hand he was the spiritual leader of the diocese, entrusted with the care of souls. On the other hand, as a principal partner in the cathedral project and major landlord in both city and countryside, he wielded some temporal authority as well. The temporal and secular powers exercised by ecclesiastical leaders like the bishop of Florence were therefore inextricably intertwined with their spiritual authority. These two dimensions of ecclesiastical power formed a complex continuum, one in which material interests and resources were closely linked to the religious and sacramental mission.

Although we know much more about the economic and secular dimension of ecclesiastical power than we did a generation ago (particularly for the early middle ages; see the chapter in this volume by [Wendy Davies](#)), we still have much to learn about church property, ecclesiastical lordship, and the roles of each in the economic and political development of Europe. In the past few decades scholars have primarily focussed on the cultural, social, and institutional dimensions of the medieval Church, often to the neglect of its economic and material history. The questions and historical problems associated with church property and lordship however remain essential for a proper understanding of how ecclesiastical institutions operated in the temporal, as well as the religious, realm. Ecclesiastical lordship, the management and administration of church property and ecclesiastical political authority, was a necessary fact of religious life, and church lords were among the most important economic (and in some places, political) actors in Europe. These lordships were far more complex, forward-looking, diverse, and constructive than they might have appeared to an earlier generation of scholars. Indeed, there was a common set of strategies adopted by many bishops, abbots, or cathedral chapters on their estates, and the period between 1100 and 1400 witnessed a number of major transformations in management and administration. They included the abandonment of direct cultivation (serfdom), the consolidation of estates by way of purchase, exchange, and donation; and the shift to indirect cultivation (leasing in exchange for rents in money or kind or both). Yet, church lords were not always able to manage their estates and temporal interests simply as they wished. Indeed, in many areas of Europe, they often encountered resistance from those

most affected by their policies: peasants in late fourteenth-century England, rural and urban communes in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Italy, monarchies seeking access to revenue, and serfs in fifteenth-century Catalonia, among others. This interplay between ecclesiastical authorities and their challengers helped to shape the contours and development of church lordship as it evolved in the later middle ages. The place of property in an institution dedicated to the salvation of souls and to the imitation of Christ also remained a contentious focus of debate and discussion among churchmen and the laity throughout the middle ages. Not only did many contemporaries understand that church property had a social and cultural significance, binding donors and ecclesiastical institutions in ways that were beneficial to both, but they also acknowledged that these real, material economic assets connected ecclesiastical institutions inextricably to the material world. The unresolved but continuous tension between these two strains—the material demands of the institutional Church, rooted in its temporal interests on one hand, and its religious mission to care for souls on the other—formed a key dynamic in the development of ecclesiastical history. Perhaps in no other instances was this clash more evident than in the emergence of dissident groups deemed ‘heretical’ by official circles in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and in the contentious split within the Franciscan Order in the fourteenth.

Throughout the middle ages, the economic assets of the Church were essential to support the clergy as they fulfilled their religious mission, and for ancient and medieval people as well as modern historians the concept of church property had always been connected to ownership. After all, the meaning of *dominium* (lordship) in classical Roman law was ownership, and this remained a relevant definition from antiquity through the middle ages.<sup>2</sup> When Augustine wrote to the very wealthy Albina in the fifth century about the jealousy between Christian congregations, he criticized bishops ‘who are thought to use and enjoy church property as if they owned it themselves’.<sup>3</sup> Corporate ownership by the Church was acceptable; individual ownership by members of the clergy was not. The success of Christianity and the Christian Church in the fourth and fifth centuries would however have been inconceivable without the patronage of the imperial family and the donations of vast economic resources to ecclesiastical communities, particularly landed property, by members of the Roman ruling elite. Most favoured as recipients of these gifts and donations were the bishops of the Empire. They benefited in particular from their roles as guardians and promoters of the principal pilgrimage sites which were centred on the cults of local saints. As these centres for the veneration of saints and pilgrimage proliferated throughout the Empire in the West, they brought Roman Christianity to the far reaches of the Empire and encouraged even more donations of property from the local Roman and Germanic aristocracies. By the first quarter of the eighth century, church property probably constituted 10 to 15 per cent of all property on the continent. In the early middle ages in Italy, for example, labour services and rents not only brought material benefits to ecclesiastical institutions, but they also facilitated social and political control of a subject rural population.<sup>4</sup> From the Carolingian period to the fifteenth century, the amount of land owned by the Church seems to have fluctuated between a quarter and a third of available land in Europe. By the twelfth century, according to David Herlihy, church holdings were stable. However, as economic expansion quickened in that century, the percentage of property held by the Church relative to that of the laity began to fall and continued to decline for the remainder of the middle ages.<sup>5</sup>

Given the multi-layered meaning of church property to medieval Europeans, it is not surprising that the subject generated many divisive arguments and disagreements. Two sets of controversies from the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries are emblematic. The first focussed on proprietary churches, and the second concerned the appropriate



relationship of church property to the ideal of apostolic poverty. In 1894 the German historian, Ulrich Stutz, argued that a proprietary church system (*Eigenkirchenwesen*), based on Germanic rather than Roman law, developed in the early middle ages and facilitated the acquisition and ownership of ecclesiastical institutions (large and small) and their properties by laymen. His argument elicited significant criticism. Although historians acknowledge the existence of proprietary churches in the middle ages, most now discount the presence of a proprietary church *system*. The notion of property as it developed in the middle ages, including property held by ecclesiastical institutions, essentially incorporated a range of ideas that included ownership, possession, or use by a proprietor or owner of a particular material asset; possession of a legally defensible and secure title to that property, and the legal right to alienate that possession by sale, gift, or transfer. Ecclesiastical institutions could acquire and dispose of property as well as be property themselves.<sup>6</sup> The persistence of proprietary churches in Europe was not in and of itself a problem for ecclesiastical leaders, but by the second half of the eleventh century it had become one. As church reformers increasingly sought to construct a separate clerical culture that was truly distinct from the laity, this issue became a major focus of concern.<sup>7</sup> To limit the rights of lay lordship over major ecclesiastical institutions and to end the ownership of small churches by laymen, canonists in the twelfth century began to develop in the canon law a tradition of church patronage (*ius patronatus*) that ultimately did become systematic. Building on the work of Gratian's *Decretum* (c.1141), canonists in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries developed a law of patronage that both defined and restricted the rights of lay founders, benefactors, and heirs to churches and monasteries. By the 1160s canonists accepted that patrons (lay and ecclesiastical) of churches had responsibilities to care for the welfare of the church, but they also enjoyed the privilege of being able to appoint clergy and to receive financial support if needed (*onus, honour, emolumentum*).<sup>8</sup> Patrons of large and small ecclesiastical institutions therefore continued to enjoy significant (if not restricted) benefits. The developing legal tradition of ecclesiastical patronage from the twelfth century, the growing power of the papal court and papal judges delegate, and the social, religious, and political bonds created between patrons and their ecclesiastical institutions made the patronage of churches a vital part of ecclesiastical (as well as lay) lordship after the twelfth century. For example, by way of their patronage rights exercised in hospitals and churches, the bishopric and cathedral chapter of Florence were able in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries to control clerical appointments, influence the disposal of parish endowments, and shape the contours of the parish economy.<sup>9</sup> The legal tradition of ecclesiastical patronage therefore helped to provide a stable basis for church lordship after the twelfth century.

A second major issue rumbling through the Christian community in the later middle ages centred on the tension between the ideal of apostolic poverty and the reality of a property-owning church. Challenges to ecclesiastical property by dissident groups deemed heretical by church authorities extended back at least to the eleventh century. For the Patarines in Lombardy, the followers of Henry of Le Mans (c. 1135) and Arnold of Brescia (d. 1155), or the thirteenth-century Cathars, devotion to the apostolic ideal was incompatible with the ownership of property by the clergy. It was not just among the heterodox however that we find resistance to the material demands of the church hierarchy. For example, between 1280 and 1282 the secular leadership of two Italian communes (Reggio Emilia and Pistoia) protested and took measures against the oppressive and de-stabilizing collection of the ecclesiastical tithe in the countryside.<sup>10</sup> One of the longest and most significant conflicts over church property however involved the Franciscans. For most friars in the thirteenth

century, the ownership of the property of their Order was in the hands of the papacy. The papacy had confirmed these very views in the papal bull, *Ordinem vestrem* (1245). Furthermore, at least since *Quo elongati* (1230), Franciscans had accepted the official papal view that ownership and use of property were separate. In 1269 however Gerard of Abbeville attacked the Franciscan position by arguing that the distinction between use and ownership of property was simply a legal fiction and that in fact, Christ and his apostles did have property in common. Ultimately, the papacy (John XXII in 1323) sided with the position articulated by Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) that ‘a moderate amount of private possessions, serving the higher end of using them well, was both natural and just’. On a separate track, after 1279 conflicts also erupted within the Franciscan Order itself over whether or not ‘poor use’ should be part of their vow. These divisions over church property ultimately led to schism within the Order, with a minority of Franciscans known as Spirituals maintaining their adherence to the apostolic ideal regarding poverty. The split led to the papal condemnation of the Italian Spirituals, the *Fraticelli*, in 1317 and to the burning of four Spirituals in Marseille in 1318. Ecclesiastical property and its place in the Church continued to generate unresolved controversies for the remainder of the middle ages. For example, the critique of church property by Franciscan Spirituals also profoundly influenced John Wyclif (d. 1384). He argued that the Church should be completely purged of any property ownership so that it could return to the apostolic ideal. Such wealth, he argued, should go to the poor in the form of alms.<sup>11</sup>

The critics of a property-owning Church understood that the ownership and management of church property were closely connected to ecclesiastical lordship. Indeed, church lords remained among the most powerful proprietors of urban and rural property for centuries to come. Defined as the exercise of power or rule by an ecclesiastical lord over a specific community (peasants, cities, tenants, or subjects) in which it held authority, ecclesiastical lordship usually entailed the exploitation of land and other economic resources.<sup>12</sup> The roots of ecclesiastical economic governance stem back to late antiquity. As early as the fifth century, bishops shared with the Roman elite (the *curiales*) the responsibilities of governing Roman cities.<sup>13</sup> In the early eighth century Frankish bishops were already among the wealthiest landowners in Francia, particularly in the Rhineland. In the Carolingian period, donations, the compulsory tithe, and the continued patronage of local aristocracies made ecclesiastical institutions even wealthier. The fact that monasteries were frequent targets for Viking raiders in the ninth century underscores just how wealthy they actually were. Many ecclesiastical lords were also at the centre of significant economic activity in their regions. The abbey of Saint-Denis, for example, was the location of a fair, and a significant market in slaves was located just outside the bishop’s palace at Verdun.<sup>14</sup> After 1000 however not all ecclesiastical lordships involved the traditional mix of fiefs, vassals, and labour services. And not all ecclesiastical lordships depended only on the exploitation of their landed properties. Indeed, the more economically robust the region was (as in Italy) and the more an urban market affected the local economy, the more diversified their economic interests could become.

From 1000 to 1300 church lords in many of the areas of Europe followed active strategies to consolidate their properties and to exploit their resources in ways that allowed them to extract as much surplus as possible. This often elicited resistance on the part of those affected by these policies. A few examples from Burgundy, Germany, England, Catalonia, and Italy will illustrate. Burgundy is one of the best documented regions of Europe with regards to the history of ecclesiastical property. Here, as elsewhere, principal church lords followed discernible economic strategies. Cluny pursued an active policy of consolidation through exchanges of property and purchases in the tenth century and the first

half of the eleventh century. This process was virtually complete by 1050. Property exchanges account for most activity until the early eleventh century. Purchases became more frequent after then, as abbots sought to shape their holdings into consolidated estates. By the middle of the eleventh century its abbots had successfully established a banal lordship, which meant that it had the power to require payments in the form of taxes, dues, or labour services (or any combination of them) from all those living within the territory subject to its lordship. Concerted attempts to reclaim church property in the eleventh century did not really get underway until the second half of that century (as was true in Europe as a whole). In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries scores of monasteries and six bishoprics in Burgundy were also actively acquiring property to build up, consolidate, and effectively manage their holdings. For the Cistercian monasteries, this included the creation of a network of granges. In some locations (as in Cuelas, Gascony) the establishment of Cistercian granges led to significant, and even violent, resistance by local peasants. Most properties were located close to the abbeys (probably intentionally), acquired usually by purchase from or donations by members of the local aristocracies—castellans and knights in particular—in exchange for prayers.

By the end of the twelfth century Cistercian estates were providing income from a variety of sources, including land, tithes, mills, ovens, and pasture rights. The economic position of the white monks was strong enough for them to serve as virtual ‘bankers’ to the local nobility. In exchange for mortgaged and pawned property, local nobles were able to secure access to cash from the monasteries. One example was an 1118 receipt given to a certain Jean de Moulin and his family for eight *livres* from the abbey of Pontigny for property between the Serein River and the road from Sainte-Procaire to Venouse. In the early fourteenth century, the abbey of Pontigny was still a major lender of money to members of the local nobility. Like its sister establishments, Pontigny benefited from effective management policies pursued by its abbots. The commitment on the part of the major Cistercian abbots to preserve the integrity of the estates is apparent from the career of Jacques de Thérines in the early fourteenth century. He served as abbot of Chaalis before assuming the post at Pontigny. At the former abbey he shifted from direct cultivation to perpetual leases. At Pontigny he faithfully followed his predecessor’s policies by continuing the repurchase of any royal claim over lands donated to the abbey by the local nobility.<sup>15</sup>

A variety of economic strategies were also common elsewhere, particularly in Germany, England, and Italy. In Germany the vast economic resources controlled by church lords derived largely from their political importance to the royal house, particularly from the tenth century. Indeed, the political collaboration between the king in Germany and his bishops was even stronger than it had been for the Carolingians. In the course of the tenth century the kings of Germany, particularly Otto III, relied increasingly on bishops and abbots to rule the realm, often to the exclusion of an unreliable nobility. The Ottonian kings therefore granted landed property and the rights to charge tolls, mint coinage, and preside over markets to monasteries, bishoprics, and imperial churches. They regularly elevated loyal chaplains of their royal chapels to the office of bishop, thereby cementing a personal bond between prelate and king. In exchange, the kings expected their bishops to serve the needs of the state. As Gerd Althoff has argued, church lords were simple ‘tools’ of the royal house. Indeed, they often acted autonomously of the king when and if they believed the interests of their ecclesiastical institutions required it.<sup>16</sup>

We find in Germany some of the same patterns of economic governance we encountered in Burgundy. For example, the imperial abbey of Essen (a female monastery founded in 845/850) benefited from noble patronage (as in Burgundy) and royal (Ottonian) immunities to become one of the wealthiest monasteries in the kingdom. It is unique in that it organized



its estates into villas according to a 'socage system'. The abbey provided peasants with land tenure in exchange for certain non-military services and goods. As we have seen in Burgundy, most of the holdings of the convent of Essen were located near the convent itself. Its two largest estates in close proximity to the monastery were its cattle estate (*Viehhof*) and its consolidated properties at Eichenscheidt. In addition to the bailiff, the legal administrator of all the estates, there was an agricultural manager who oversaw twenty-seven farms worked by serfs and indentured peasants. Craftsmen and indentured servants lived on the cattle farm and paid tithes to the convent from the proceeds of their dependent holdings. It was quite a sophisticated and complicated organization of estate management structured to ensure that the convent received both a high level of income and a significant amount of labour services from its dependents. It was different from the methods of organization and management developed by Burgundian (especially Cistercian) monasteries, but just as complex. By no means was Essen unique. Its economic organization was very similar to those of older convents in Saxony (Gandersheim and Liesborn) and southern Germany (Burchau).

German bishops assumed a unique role in the governance of the kingdom. As Caesarius of Heisterbach wrote in the early thirteenth century, 'Nearly all the bishops of Germany wielded a double sword' (that is to say, temporal as well as spiritual power).<sup>17</sup> What distinguished the bishops of Germany from prelates elsewhere in medieval Europe was that they were actual 'princes of the empire' (*principes imperii*), made vassals of the crown in exchange for many of the temporal possessions they received. By the end of the thirteenth century, for example, the bishop of Eichstätt oversaw a territorial lordship based on the control of numerous manors, towns, and castles. He was also a lord of servile knights (*ministeriales*) living in fortified towns and on episcopal fiefs that had been conferred on them since at least the twelfth century. Having absorbed in 1305 the lands of its principal noble rivals, the counts of Hirschberg, the bishopric was at the apex of its economic fortunes in the middle of the fourteenth century.<sup>18</sup> Apparently, the early fourteenth century was not a period of crisis for this particular episcopal lordship.

In the kingdom of England the twelfth century was also a period of significant property acquisition and consolidation. For the most part, before the thirteenth century, English ecclesiastical lords, as one would expect in a predominately rural economy, were primarily dependent on a variety of traditional exactions, including customary rents on land, seigneurial dues like the death-tax (*heriot*), entry fines, tithes, and labour services (primarily by serfs). The Cistercian monastery of Fountains Abbey, founded in 1132, like its continental counterparts, underwent its most rapid period of property acquisition in the twelfth century, especially in the 1140s and between 1174 and 1185. By 1146 most of its properties were located on consolidated estates, constructed to make best use of an economy dependent on sheep farming. Its estates were located either close to the monastery itself or to one of its many granges. Policies of acquisition and consolidation from the eleventh through thirteenth centuries led, in one estimate, to the control of 20 to 30 per cent of all the land in the kingdom. Some English church lords, like those in Catalonia, could be very oppressive. When the Premonstratensians acquired the former royal manor of Halesowen in the early thirteenth century, for example, they doubled the entry fines and probably also the rents, created new tolls, maintained the same level of labour services as before, and obligated their tenants to use their newly built mill. Nevertheless, overall, the English Church in the countryside was generally slower than its lay counterparts to adjust to the economic challenges of the later middle ages. It was far more dependent on labour services for far longer than was the case in more urbanized areas of Europe like Italy. After the arrival of the plague in the middle of the fourteenth century, income declined as rents

plummeted, wages rose, and the remaining labour services associated with serfdom continued to erode at a faster pace. Unable to enforce traditional labour services and ill equipped financially to engage wage labourers on its properties, many of the wealthiest English ecclesiastical institutions were increasingly leasing out their demesnes for rents in kind or money. In 1327, for example, Halesowen commuted all the labour services on its estates to a money rent. Commutations like this accelerated after the Black Death. Urban investment might have constituted only a small fraction of their total ecclesiastical income, but ecclesiastical lords, especially the monasteries, were among the most important urban landlords in England in the later middle ages. Even after the initial blow of the Black Death and the subsequent decline in rents and land values, they seem to have viewed their urban properties as safer and more reliable sources of income than their rural assets.<sup>19</sup>

The great diversity of ecclesiastical lordships is especially evident in southern Europe, particularly in Catalonia and Italy. Here also the thirteenth century was a watershed, and here local peasant resistance also played a role in the shaping of ecclesiastical lordship. In thirteenth-century Catalonia the burdens of lordship were especially harsh. The church councils between 1027 and 1055 associated with the Peace and the Truce of God attempted in Catalonia, as elsewhere in northern Europe, to protect church property from the depredations of private warfare. But here the similarities with other regions of Europe stopped. Indeed, Catalonia was an outlier in many other ways with regard to the nature of its ecclesiastical lordships. We do not for example encounter here monasteries that followed rational and systematic policies of land management. Indeed, as Paul Freedman has stated, there seems to have been no ‘well-planned concentration of land or expansion’, even among the military orders. Instead, ecclesiastical institutions of all types seem to have possessed scattered parcels of property, relying exclusively on a variety of harsh obligations imposed on the peasants associated with its estates. Typical of the many ‘bad customs’ (*mals usos*) forced on peasants were redemptions, significant fines required of anyone wishing to leave a particular property. The economic pressure on the peasantry by ecclesiastical lords such as monasteries, cathedral chapters, bishoprics was as onerous as that of the lay lords, according to Freedman. The bishopric of Vic, for example, was no more hesitant to require payment of ‘bad customs’ in the form of redemptions or rents than were lay lords in the area. The only difference, apparently, was that ecclesiastical lordships were less likely to rely on violence than their lay counterparts to enforce collections. Only in the mid-fifteenth century, aided by alliances with kings in the *Remença* wars of 1462–86, were Catalanian peasants able to shake off the burdens of serfdom.<sup>20</sup>

The nature of lordship and the history of church property took a very different course in Italy, primarily because the urban market, commerce, and trade dominated the economy here more than elsewhere. In addition, the economic pressures exerted by ecclesiastical lords on peasants were far less severe in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries than elsewhere. Furthermore, many of the trends we have encountered in northern Europe occurred earlier in Italy. Church lords could speculate on the urban real estate market and direct their estates to market grain for urban populations. What must always be kept in mind, however, is that ecclesiastical lordships in Italy also differed markedly from one region to another. For that reason, it might be useful to examine the North and the South separately. Serfdom disappeared far earlier in northern Italy than elsewhere in Europe, and by the late thirteenth century most peasants on ecclesiastical estates in north Italy were rent-paying tenants (usually in kind). By the end of the thirteenth century in highly urbanized regions, leases were increasingly for fixed-terms. From the end of the thirteenth century the *mezzadria*, a share-cropping arrangement in which the landlord provided the land and tools



and the peasant paid half what he produced, became common in many parts of Tuscany, especially in the Florentine countryside.

Italian bishops, including (perhaps especially) the papacy in Rome, played a crucial role in the civic governance of north and central Italian cities and their surrounding territories (*contadi*) from at least the fourth through the eleventh centuries. Italian bishops possessed some degree of civil authority in Roman city governance from at least the time of Constantine, and their importance as temporal leaders increased as the structures of the Roman state declined on the peninsula. By the eighth century, according to Chris Wickham, they were the richest landowners in the cities (and their surrounding territories) for which we have evidence. Except for setbacks suffered in the second half of the sixth century from the effects of the Lombard invasion in 568, bishops continued to play key roles in urban civic governance in the kingdom of Italy (568–875), especially after its conquest by the Carolingians in 774. Indeed, the Carolingians relied more heavily on bishops for local governance than had the Lombard kings (whose primary partners were the dukes). Coming primarily from local (non-Frankish) families, the bishops, along with the Carolingian counts, were the major local authorities in the ninth century. Counts and bishops were indeed uneasy partners.<sup>21</sup> When the Italian kingdom was collapsing in the ninth century, the political power and economic holdings of many bishops in their city-territories increased to fill the vacuum left by weak kings. Eager to strengthen a faltering kingdom and to fend off invading Hungarians in the early tenth century, Berengar I alienated and granted many public powers, immunities, rights, castles (*castelli*), and royal properties to locally powerful men, hoping thereby to gain political support and loyalty. Berengar favoured the bishops over the counts as recipients of these lands and public rights. As the German king and later emperor, Otto I, looked south after 962 to strengthen his hold over what was left of the kingdom of Italy, he continued the traditional policy of favouring the bishops, especially in Emilia, Lombardy, and the Veneto. He sought to balance their strength with that of local aristocracies. Some bishops in the Po plain even became counts (Como in early eleventh, Reggio in 962). The bishop of Pistoia (from late tenth to 1006) acquired significant public and economic rights, including immunities on its lands and market dues. By 1000 prelates were dominating most major north Italian cities politically, socially, and economically. In the late tenth and early eleventh century, many bishops like the prelate of Florence continued to build up their estates around *castelli* (fortified villages) and pursued policies to protect their properties from local elites, establishing proprietary monasteries endowed with many of the lands and *castelli* they claimed. It was also at this time that some bishops were transferring the principal urban churches from the basilicas outside the walls to the episcopal (intramural) cathedrals. Usually the translation of the relics of the late ancient patron saints from the basilicas to the cathedrals accompanied this shift. By the middle of the eleventh century however a new political institution had begun to appear in the cities in the North, the commune, and by 1150 communes had largely brought episcopal control of many of the city-territories of north Italy to an end.<sup>22</sup>

Even during the heyday of the commune many prelates throughout northern and central Italy continued to be major players in the governance of their city-states. In fact, many of the new leaders of the young communes emerged out of episcopal courts, even receiving some of their earliest training in urban rule through their service in episcopal households. In cities where the bishops had been counts—Modena, Reggio, Brescia—the political collaboration between bishops and communal leadership lasted a long while. In those cities, only one civil and religious centre tended to develop. In cities where bishops had not been made counts by kings or emperors—as in Bologna, Florence, and Verona—they were politically weaker than the lay counts and local aristocracies in the pre-communal period.

Here the commune emerged more rapidly to fill the vacuum after the disintegration of the Italian kingdom, and civic and ecclesiastical centres developed separately in different areas of the city.<sup>23</sup> Episcopal participation in the governance of north Italian cities after the emergence of the commune did not however mean that conflicts between ecclesiastical leaders (bishops, cathedral chapters, abbots) and urban authorities became few or insignificant. In fact, as was the case in Florence in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, clashes over jurisdiction in criminal cases involving clergy, disagreements over taxation to help pay for the costs of walls and war, and legal tussles between episcopal and public authorities over so-called fictitious priests, continued to set communal against ecclesiastical interests. Nevertheless, as had been true for the pre-communal period, lay elites and bishoprics in many locations in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries continued to co-operate on many levels. The bishop of Orvieto for example was a central player in the ongoing institutional governance of the commune. Bishops and their circles here often functioned to mitigate divisive tensions and resolve factional disputes.

Ecclesiastical lords often served to promote rather than disrupt the processes by which the communes in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries came to dominate their *contadi*. In Pistoia, for example, the commune inherited from its bishops a functioning system of road communications and economic connections in the *contado* that greatly aided its drive to dominate its surrounding countryside. In fact, north Italian communes tended to identify their *contadi* as coterminous with the diocese. This was especially important in cities like Florence, where the bishop, cathedral chapter, and the major urban monasteries were among the only city-dwelling owners of rural property. When rural communes emerged in the early thirteenth century in the Florentine countryside to challenge territorial lordships established by the bishops just a generation earlier, the commune stepped in to help negotiate compromises that preserved a modicum of episcopal authority and at the same time preserved some degree of local autonomy. In this way, Florentine urban hegemony expanded while episcopal temporal interests (now restricted) persisted. In another example, the ability of the Florentines to dominate the Mugello, the lush and strategically important river valley directly north of the city, would have been impossible if the bishopric and cathedral chapter had not already controlled and possessed important estates there since at least the tenth century.<sup>24</sup>

The major source of power for ecclesiastical leaders in the Italy of the communes however was primarily economic in nature, and it was closely tied to the control and exploitation of property and the people associated with it. In Tuscany we find both similarities and differences with ecclesiastical lordships in northern Europe. At Lucca and at Florence the acquisition of *castelli* through donation or purchase was a crucial part of the build-up of the episcopal estate. At Lucca it took place from the tenth through twelfth centuries. At both Lucca and Florence, the *castelli* as well as properties and public rights bequeathed by the kings of Italy, the emperors, and the marquis of Canossa before the early twelfth century, constituted the bases on which the two bishoprics were later to construct their territorial lordships. For example, the bishopric of Lucca made many large purchases in the thirteenth century to round out its holdings in the low hills and major river valleys of the diocese (the Serchio and the Arno in particular). Another centre emerged near Montecatini. In many of these areas the bishop continued to exercise some temporal jurisdiction at least until the early eighteenth century. Regarding income, the shift from direct (demesne farming) to indirect cultivation (leases) is evident in the eleventh century, much earlier than in northern Europe. Similarly, rents in kind appeared on the properties of the cathedral chapter from about 1150, which was when it was beginning to let out its demesne. Lucca was indeed very early a vibrant centre of economic activity. Reflecting the

strength of the urban market, rents in kind—primarily grain—began in the eleventh century. However, the transition to short-term leases (less than the transitional twenty-nine-year lease, which was effectively perpetual) never really took off on the lands of the Lucchese bishopric. Furthermore, the bishop of Lucca never became an urban landlord. He focussed instead, almost entirely, on his rural properties. This ultimately was a costly decision, if indeed he had any choice in the matter. By the close of the thirteenth century the income of the estate of the bishopric was in decline, most likely reflecting the general weakening of the economic conditions of the Lucchese countryside and city.<sup>25</sup>

The histories of the bishopric of Florence and several monastic lords in Tuscany were both similar to and different from the Lucchese example. The bishopric of Florence focussed its attention as well on the major river valleys of the diocese, expanding upon the original royal and imperial grants it had received in the early middle ages and upon its acquisition of numerous *castelli* in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. By the late twelfth and early thirteenth century it was intentionally constructing several territorial lordships in the countryside, located in and around towns in the major river valleys such as the Val di Pesa and the Val di Sieve. Commutations from monetary rents to rents in kind (mainly grain) occurred in the early thirteenth century (much later than they had at Lucca), and these changes elicited significant opposition from many episcopal tenants and local merchants affected by them. The outcome of these struggles contributed to the emergence of several rural communes where the bishops had first developed ecclesiastical lordships. Unlike the bishopric of Lucca, the Florentine bishop had also acquired extensive interests in urban properties, especially after the middle of the thirteenth century when the Florentine population was growing exponentially. He became a major urban landlord and developer of lots and houses on the peripheries of the city, exactly as his peers in England were doing as well. Also, unlike the bishopric of Lucca, the prelate of Florence was able successfully by the end of the thirteenth century to shift from perpetual to short-term leases requiring grain rents on virtually all his rural and urban holdings.<sup>26</sup>

To demonstrate further the wide diversity of ecclesiastical lordships in the later middle ages, their similarities and their differences, it is appropriate to examine briefly three more cases in chronological order, all from central and southern Italy. The first is the abbey of Cava near Salerno, the second is the papacy, and the third a set of three urban monasteries from Naples. Far earlier than either the bishoprics of Lucca or Florence, the archbishop of Salerno and the abbey of Cava created territorial lordships that conferred on them significant economic and political power over their local rural populations. By the middle of the twelfth century, for example, the abbey of Cava (founded *c.* 1020) in the Principality of Salerno had managed to build up significant rights and properties in two locations (Cilento and Metiliano), place one hundred houses in southern Italy under its jurisdiction, and acquire control of eight ports in the province. Its economic interests were diverse and tied to both agriculture and commerce. The ecclesiastical lord with the largest temporal claims in Italy however (indeed, in Europe) was the pope. As Brenda Bolton has written, the bases of those claims were the imperial and royal grants given the papacy from the eighth through thirteenth centuries. The establishment of forts (*castra*) as administrative centres to insure the allegiance of the local population began in the late eleventh century in the Sabina and expanded throughout the Patrimony in the following century.

By the pontificate of Innocent III (d. 1216) the lands of the patrimony of St Peter extended from northeastern Italy through the central portions of the peninsula to the lands south of Rome. As was true for ecclesiastical lordships throughout Europe, the early thirteenth century was a period of major transformation for the Patrimony. During his pontificate, Innocent III set about creating an effectively administered papal state, a

territorial lordship writ large, organized around provinces governed by rectors. (Similar innovations, but at a much smaller scale, were occurring at the same time on the estates of Tuscan bishops and elsewhere.) The provinces subject to papal lordship included Campania and Marittima (one province), the March of Ancona, Tuscia Romana (including the Sabina), and the duchy of Spoleto. Not until 1278 did the Romagna become part of this extensive lordship. Papal governance did not go uncontested however. From the early thirteenth century, for example, there were many challenges by rural residents over pasture and forest rights, previously granted by the popes to monasteries to secure their support and loyalty. To supervise the vast bureaucracy needed to govern the Patrimony, the popes spent most of their time in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries travelling outside Rome, residing in palaces they had established for themselves in towns like Anagni, Segni, or Alatri. To regularize and reform the governance by rectors of three provinces—Tuscia Romana, Campania and Marittima, and the March—Boniface VIII (d. 1303) published three constitutions. Echoing statutes issued by northern communes in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the export of grain and other food items outside the Patrimony was banned. It was at this time, the early fourteenth century, that the Patrimony (like the bishopric of Eichstätt) reached its fullest territorial extent in the middle ages. It was a period of growth, not retrenchment.

For lay and ecclesiastical landholders alike, the fourteenth century was a period of economic crisis. In the rural parishes in the Italian diocese of Cortona, for example, as elsewhere in Europe in the decade after the Black Death, severe poverty led to the deterioration of church fabric and the pawning of vestments and liturgical books.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, for many ecclesiastical lordships, as we have seen for the papal Patrimony and for English ecclesiastical lords, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries also offered new and diverse opportunities for economic growth and development. In the countryside English ecclesiastical lords might indeed have been slower to adapt to the fourteenth-century crisis than lay lords, but they still were set on the path that abandoned serfdom (direct cultivation) and embraced lease-holding (indirect cultivation). The consequences of the Peasants' Revolt in the southern counties in 1381 contributed to the final demise of serfdom. In Catalonia the administration of ecclesiastical properties changed dramatically and the plight of most peasants improved as the resistance of the *Remençes* helped to bring serfdom to an end. On Tuscan ecclesiastical estates both perpetual leases requiring grain rents and share-cropping arrangements (*mezzadria*) on consolidated holdings (*poderi*) prevailed in an environment dominated by an urban market. The economic management of three urban Neapolitan convents at the end of the middle ages—of Santa Chiara, Chartreux (San Martino), and Santa Maria Maddalena—demonstrate also quite well how some ecclesiastical institutions were able to re-make and re-structure their estates during the crisis of the fourteenth century to ensure their survival into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. These institutions wisely developed abandoned lands to produce significant sources of revenue (Santa Chiara was intensively reliant on its vineyards), recuperated dispersed properties, and drew on diverse sources of rental income (in both money and kind). Money rents were especially useful on lands that required significant clearing (like swamps) and preparation for sowing.<sup>28</sup>

Even in the fifteenth century therefore many ecclesiastical lords remained resilient and innovative. Although church property continued to be a subject evoking much controversy and division both within and without religious communities in the later middle ages, ecclesiastical lordships remained vital contributors to the social, economic, cultural, and political development of medieval Europe. Church lordship however still remains far too neglected by modern scholars. There is still much work to be done if we are to understand fully the complicated nexus between religious culture and the church economy. Future lines



of research may for example focus on the material and economic benefits of the cults of saints, the possible impact of church teaching on the mitigation of perceived abuses of ecclesiastical lordship, and the ways by which the complex economic and social relationships linking peasants and urban residents to church lords might have shaped liturgical traditions and the spiritual practices of the laity. There already exists significant yet relatively distinct scholarship on the economy and culture of the medieval Church. What we need to do now is to bring these areas of research closer together.



# NOTES

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7. See further chapter by Miller, this collection.
8. Wood, *Proprietary Church*, 883–924; George Dameron, 'Appealing to Rome (and Avignon) before the Black Death: Ecclesiastical Disputes and Church Patronage in Medieval Tuscany', in Claudia Bolgia, Rosamond McKitterick, and John Osborne, eds, *Rome Across Time and Space: Cultural Transmission and Exchange of Ideas, c. 500–1400* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 323–337; Peter Landau, *Ius Patronatus* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1975). Rufinus (between 1157–59) was first to use phrase, 'ius patronatus' (Wood, *Proprietary Church*, 892).
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# CHAPTER 27

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# CHRISTIANIZING POLITICAL DISCOURSES

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GEOFFREY KOZIOL

‘RENDER to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s’ (Matt. 22:21). ‘Let every soul be subject to higher powers: for there is no power but from God; and those that are, are ordained of God’ (Rom. 13:1). ‘Be subject to every human creature for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as preeminent or to governors sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of the good’ (I Peter 2:13–14). With such admonitions the New Testament urged obedience to earthly rulers, endorsing their authority, but not ringingly. Over the next century, as Roman imperial authority established itself, Christians—like everyone else in the Empire—began to regard it more positively. They may not have offered sacrifices to emperors, but they did remember them in their prayers. A number of apologists even made the rise of the Empire an essential stage in God’s providential plan for the Church: Christ only came once the Roman Empire had united the civilized world so that the gospel could spread throughout its extent. Nevertheless, these remain paltry antecedents for Eusebius’ vaunting of Constantine’s authority, which still strikes one as surprising, as when he states that the emperor entered the council in the imperial palace at Nicaea ‘like some heavenly angel of God, his bright mantle shedding lustre like beams of light’.<sup>1</sup>

Eusebius’ precedent was immensely powerful, for especially in his widely influential *Ecclesiastical History*, the bishop of Caesarea established the model for any number of early medieval historians whose works gave pride of place to emperors and kings at the turning points of Christian history. Not least, their histories repeatedly pin the conversion of peoples to the conversion of their kings. At least twice the conversion occurs, like Constantine’s, on the eve of a decisive battle: it happens with Clovis in the *Histories* of Gregory of Tours and with Oswald in Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History*. Indeed, Gregory of Tours actually says that Clovis emerged from his baptism as ‘a new Constantine’, while Gregory the Great offered Constantine as a model for the rule of Æthelbeht of Kent, the first Anglo-Saxon king to convert. Even when early medieval histories are not describing conversions, they still usually frame their narratives around the deeds of kings and therefore end up narrating ecclesiastical events in relation to kings. Given our dependence on these narratives, it is not surprising that modern historians have also tended to write the history of early medieval Christianization in terms of royal conversions and royal support. In recent years, however, we have come to understand more about the agendas of these historians and the way their models (including the Eusebian model) shaped their depictions. Extensive and systematic study of non-narrative sources has also taught us more about the complexity of the societies these kings ruled. As a result, one can no longer write about early medieval Christianity simply as ‘a royal religion’, as an ideology supportive of kingship, or even as an ideology at all. We should speak rather of Christian political discourses.

Even so, it is obvious that kings were important in the formation of early medieval Christianity, so one might begin with the obvious questions: why did kings convert? What did they see in Christianity?<sup>2</sup> Eighth- and ninth-century sources that relate the arguments made by missionaries are not as helpful in answering these questions as they might seem, for few of them record arguments made to convert kings. They record arguments made to Frisians, Thuringians, and continental Saxons, whose societies not only lacked kings but



insistently rejected kings, just as they rejected Christianity because it was seen as a religion of kings, whether foreign or indigenous. One might suspect, then, that missionaries to kingship-resistant peoples studiously avoided the kinds of arguments that had been made earlier to convert, for example, the kings of the Angles and Saxons. Those earlier arguments are best glimpsed in two passages from Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. The first is a letter from Pope Boniface V to Edwin, king of Deira (619–625):

The clemency of the Divine Majesty, who by His Word alone created and established the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, has ordained the laws by which they subsist; and by the counsel of His co-eternal Word in the unity of the Holy Spirit, He has formed man after His own image and likeness from the dust of the earth. He has further granted him a most excellent prerogative, placing him above all other creatures in order that he may inherit eternal life by obedience to His commandments. This God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is adored and worshipped by the human race from east to west...To him are subject all imperial power and authority; for it is by him that kingship is conferred...<sup>3</sup>

The second records the 'talking-points' allegedly used by the Northumbrian king Oswy when trying to convince the East Saxon king Sigibert to convert:

He showed him how God is rather to be understood as a being of boundless majesty, invisible to human eyes, almighty, everlasting, creator of heaven and earth and of the human race. He told him that he rules and will judge the world in justice, abiding in eternity, not in base and perishable metal; and that it should be rightly understood that all who know and do the will of their Creator will receive an eternal reward from him.<sup>4</sup>

Both passages sound the same themes: the Christian God is a great king—indeed a king of kings, an emperor—majestic, almighty, everlasting, not just the creator of the world but its ruler, who as legislator ordains laws that must be obeyed, who as judge metes out reward for obedience, punishment for disobedience.

It used to be commonly held that early Germanic kings were sacral figures and that Christianity recreated their pagan sacralty on different terms. The current tendency is to see much less continuity in kingship, royal sacralty, or even the ethnic identity of the peoples kings ruled. This revisionism holds true of all sub-Roman Germanic societies, but its validity is particularly visible in England, where kings and kingdoms alike were quite recent at the time of the conversion. Thus, we are completely unable to trace back the 'dynasties' of these 'kings' much before the very first generation of them to convert (as shown by royal genealogies, which lapse into legend and euhemerism before the last quarter of the sixth century). We can still find traces of political organization before real kings in the marvellous document known as the Tribal Hidage. No one knows exactly what it is or when it was compiled, but some core part of it must go back to Mercian pretensions to over-kingship in the late seventh or eighth century. And even at that quite late date we find, like shards, the names of peoples the kings of Mercia subjected: Wrekin dwellers, Peak dwellers, Elmet dwellers, Chiltern dwellers, Lindsey people, Sword Point people, Westerners, Spalda, North and South Gyrwe ... Not long before, all would have had their own leaders, whom contemporaries would have spoken of as *dryhtnas* or *cyningas*. But to translate these words as 'kings' presumes a model of authority the society did not yet have, which is why Bede and others speak of such leaders not as *reges* but as *regales* and *reguli*, and why the best English word for them is 'chieftain'.

But by 600, a few chieftains in England were becoming more powerful, some by controlling important trade emporia (Kent, East Anglia), others by leading successful campaigns against British tribes (Mercia, Northumbria, the West Saxons). Bringing smaller surrounding chieftaincies under their leadership, they were ready for a way to conceptualize a new authority. And this is what Christianity gave them: an idea of kingship in a Christian

mode, informed by a Roman language of command but simultaneously infused with Old Testament models suitable to tribal realities: kings who ruled provinces or peoples; kings who issued laws; kings who rewarded obedience and punished rebels. This is why the very first leader to establish himself as a true over-king in England—Æthelbeht of Kent—was also the first to convert and the first to issue a law code. And where the code's opening article protects the Church and churchmen, the next eleven articles (2 to 12) define the prerogatives of a new kind of kingship, making a claim to a new kind of power by decreeing special compensation for attacks on the king's person and those people and places under the king's protection. The God that Pope Boniface described to Edwin of Deira was the kind of God kings like Edwin and Æthelbeht needed.

The homology between earthly and heavenly kingship remained the bedrock assumption of all early medieval monarchy. If we see it so clearly in seventh-century England, that is not just because of Bede's intellectual clarity. England was unusual in the complete collapse of Roman infrastructure and the relative simultaneity of conversion and the evolution of kingship. The continent was much different. To be sure, here, too, a new kind of kingship began to emerge from warrior confederations of smaller peoples, both appearing later than historians once thought. But they developed under the aegis of a Roman Empire that was still powerful, still a powerfully attractive force, and in which Christianity was not the essential element. The difference—and the importance of the difference—can be gauged by examining the political rhetoric of Theoderic, the great Ostrogothic king in Italy (d. 526). Having spent ten years of his youth in Constantinople, Theoderic both understood and appreciated Roman ways (especially eastern Roman), and his rule in Italy entirely conformed to Roman standards and expectations. He remitted taxes for communities in hardship, rebuilt walls and aqueducts, facilitated the draining of marshes, and requisitioned supplies of marble to repair monuments. With the condescending largesse of the superiorly civilized, he sent a water-clock to the king of the Burgundians, a harpist to the king of the Franks. He appointed prefects as *illustres*, senators as *clarissimi*, secretaries and vicars as *spectabiles*. He rebuilt and ruled from the great Roman capitals at Pavia, Verona, and especially Ravenna, where his palace church with its splendid mosaics still stands (S. Apollinare Nuovo). Yet God and Christianity barely enter into Theoderic's official correspondence, as composed by Cassiodorus, its language classically Roman to a fault. A possible reason is that like most Goths, Theoderic was not Catholic but 'semi-Arian' (his people having converted when *homoian* formulations of Christology—that Christ was of similar but not identical substance to God—had imperial approval), so he could not adopt strongly Christian poses without inviting conflict with the Catholic majority in Italy. However, other considerations make this unlikely. The bulk of Sidonius Apollinaris' letters also gives little clue that their author was a Christian, much less a future bishop, so pervasive is their secular classicism. As a fervent Christian, the praetorian prefect Cynegius closed pagan temples in Egypt and Syria; yet the dining room of his Spanish villa was decorated with mosaics depicting scenes from classical, non-Christian literature. For that matter, the language of ordinary western provincial administration long remained untouched by Christianity. Thus, as revealed by the earliest surviving charters and charter-formularies (whether from Vandal Africa, Visigothic Spain, or Frankish Gaul), the language of vulgar Roman law—that is, the Roman law actually practised in the provinces—had nothing Christian about it, save what might be added at the personal discretion of the agents or what might be necessary for a transaction involving churches and churchmen. To that extent, the language of Theoderic's letters and edicts is simply the language of Roman *imperium*, commanding, august, and ethically upright, legitimate because carrying the weight of an 800-year-old legal tradition. Theoderic's edicts did not need Christianity to be authoritative.

In the late fifth and early sixth centuries, the touchstone for the authority of the first great Germanic kings was not Christianity but Rome. They ruled in imitation of Theodosius, not in anticipation of Charlemagne. In Spain, they founded and named cities on the model of Roman emperors, as did Leovigild at Victoriacum and Reccopolis. They established capitals (*sedes regiae, cathedrae regiae*) in major Roman cities where they cultivated *une architecture aulique* on a late Roman model, maintaining or rebuilding aqueducts, baths, arenas, and palaces.<sup>5</sup> They issued coins—*tremisses* and *solidi*—bearing the images of Roman emperors and Roman Victory. They put on circuses to celebrate their victories and trod on the necks of defeated enemies (the *calcatio colli*) after parading them on asses or camels. The most famous political ceremony of Clovis' reign illustrates this predominantly Roman understanding of rulership. In 508, immediately following his victory over the Visigoths at Vouillé, Clovis returned to Tours to offer thanks (and a share of the booty) to St Martin, to whom he publicly credited his success. While there, he also celebrated the honorary consulate just awarded him by the Roman emperor Anastasius in an official letter of appointment (*codecillos*) by making a formal procession from St. Martin's basilica to the cathedral while wearing a diadem, a purple tunic, and the *chlamys* (cloak) of high imperial office and casting gold and silver coins to the people. It was the victory ceremony of a late Roman or early Byzantine general.

Interpreted in this context, Pope Gelasius I's famous dictum addressed to Emperor Anastasius was perfectly attuned to late Roman understandings of Christianity and the *saeculum*: 'Two there are, august emperor, by which this world is chiefly ruled: the sacred authority of the pontiffs and royal power'. Gelasius was not asserting a 'two swords' model of government, much less the superiority of papal 'authority' over imperial 'power'. Descriptive rather than prescriptive, his formulation was faithfully late Roman, to the point that the best analogue to Gelasius' 'sacred authority of the pontiffs' would have been the Senate, an assembly of 'fathers' possessing no executive authority but an unsurpassed collective wisdom and prestige accumulated over centuries.<sup>6</sup> In light of later developments, however, the most important consideration is that Gelasius' bishops rule a Church that exists in the world without fully being one of the world's governing political institutions. Conversely, though kings might be Christians and as such subject to a bishop's spiritual authority, kingship itself was an institution of the world, not of the Church. Significantly, Spanish and Gallic bishops knew Gelasius' formulation and applied its terms when dealing with the new kings with whom they had to work. Thus, in acts of the earliest Visigothic and Frankish councils, the bishops recognize the power of their new kings but insist on the essential autonomy of their 'college'. When the Visigoth (and *homoian*) Alaric II authorized Catholic bishops to meet at Agde in 506, the bishops began and ended the council with thanks to the 'most glorious and magnificent king' and knelt to offer prayers for his long life and successful reign. Yet everything in between they did on their own, as governors of the Church.<sup>7</sup> This was even true for the important Third Council of Toledo in 589, at which Reccard formally established his and his people's adherence to Catholic creeds. The king is said to have ordered (*mandasset*) the bishops to gather 'in order to establish the correct form of ecclesiastical discipline'. He admonished them (*admoneo, exhortor*) to prepare with fasts, vigils, and prayers. And he presented them with a statement of faith (a *tomus*) to be read aloud in their midst. But his 'tome' did not set the council's agenda; it was rather Reccard's statement of faith that concentrated on those points of Trinitarian dogma where *homoians* and Catholics diverged, and the bulk was a recapitulation of the acts of Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon. It was up to the bishops to approve it. Only when they had did they offer their acclamations: 'To whom does God grant eternal reward if not

to Reccared the Catholic king? To whom does God grant an eternal crown if not to Reccard the orthodox king?’<sup>8</sup>

In both the Visigothic and the Frankish kingdoms, as late as the 570s the ‘Church’ was something quite separate and distinct from the ‘kingdom’. To be sure, many councils of the period were said to have been summoned by the ruler (a prerogative of Roman emperors since Constantine), and the bishops made sure to pay due honour to the reigning king; but the earliest surviving conciliar *acta* often do not mention kings at all, even in the protocol. And the decrees themselves usually had little to do with kings or kingdoms, save at those very few points where royal power directly affected churches. Instead, the overwhelming majority of conciliar canons regulate the internal affairs of the Church and the behaviour of clergy, implicitly defining a relationship between royal power and episcopal authority that was entirely consistent with Gelasius’ formulation. More important, it was consistent with the historical and political realities of the period: a largely Gallo-Roman episcopate dominated by aristocrats who thought themselves by language, education, and heritage distinct from and superior to Visigothic and Frankish kings, whose power they nevertheless needed to respect. Accordingly, what changed the situation was less any theoretical innovation than the slow alteration of historical and political realities. First, there was simply the growing cultural convergence of later generations of kings and bishops: they saw themselves as less different in education and culture and were more sympathetic with each other’s claims and political needs. Second, kings increasingly not only appointed bishops (Clovis and his sons had already done so) but appointed them from their own courts and retinues. Indeed, appointment to an episcopal see came to be the endpoint of a *cursus honorum* for important courtiers, who as bishops remained in contact with their erstwhile friends at court and did the king’s bidding in their provincial postings as his trusted agents. Third, the foundation and endowment of new churches, especially monasteries, transformed everything. Kings, queens, and important aristocratic families began to establish monasteries on their estates, endowing them with integrated clusters of lands. Monasteries came to act as ‘holding companies’ for the lands of prominent families and their clients: control the monastery through appointment of its abbot or abbess and the heads of the family could prevent the fragmentation of patrimonies across generations and control the distribution of lands to favoured clients. An incidental result was that churches and church offices became integral elements of aristocratic power, while bishops, abbots, and abbesses became key figures in aristocratic coalitions and power struggles.

These three developments did not occur at once. Rather, they evolved seriatim over the course of a century and more, beginning roughly in the later sixth century and diffusing from the core Frankish territories to Bavaria and Alamannia. But the long-term evolution was towards the greater interpenetration of secular and ecclesiastical spheres in a way that transformed a late Roman constitution into something entirely different, something distinctly ‘medieval’.

The transformation was not limited to the Merovingian kingdom, for one sees it already in Visigothic Spain, in the differences between the Fourth Council of Toledo (633) and the Third (589). In 633, the bishops gathered not to rule on a king’s orthodoxy but to discuss his ‘orders and commands’, and they praised Sisenand precisely because his devotion to God led him to be solicitous for divine affairs as well as human. When the king entered the council with his leading men, he fell to the ground, begging the bishops with tears and sighs to intervene before God on his behalf, but he then exhorted them to restore observance of ecclesiastical laws that had fallen into disuse or abuse. In response, the bishops worked to establish congruence between church and kingdom by establishing liturgical uniformity throughout the kingdom in masses and offices, because one faith and one kingdom should



have one ecclesiastical custom. At the same time, the bishops tried to halt the cycle of depositions and assassinations by condemning those who violated their oaths to kings, basing their decision on scriptural authority: 'Do not touch my anointed' (Ps. 105:15); 'Who shall lay his hand on the Lord's anointed and remain innocent?' (I Sam. 26:9). In this way, in Spain, the collegial unity of the episcopacy provided a liturgical template for the unity of the kingdom, and faith to God came to underwrite faith to kings who, if they were not already anointed soon would be. Anointed or not, kings are already compared to *christi*, making any violation of faith sworn to kings literally a 'sacrilege'.<sup>9</sup>

In the Merovingian realms, though kings were not anointed, bishops and kings went even farther in co-ordinating church and kingdom. One of the first signs of the change, and certainly the one most familiar to historians, is Gregory of Tours' praise of Guntram, the king of Frankish Burgundy. According to Gregory, not only did snippets of Guntram's cloak heal a sick boy of fever, he also showed such care for his Christian people that he could be regarded as 'not just a king but even a bishop of the Lord'.<sup>10</sup> Nor is this just Gregory's idiosyncratic representation. In the acts of a council at Mâcon (585), the bishops begin by beseeching God for the health of the king but then ask God to grant them the knowledge of 'what shall be properly pleasing to his serenity and majesty'. They also issued canons that enforced respect for Christian teachings on secular officials (specifically counts) who mistreated widows, orphans, and the poor. A version of the acts was then published by Guntram as a royal edict. In 614, Clothar II summoned a council at Paris to mark his reunification of the Frankish realms. The largest council ever held in the Merovingian kingdoms, its decrees were also promulgated in a royal edict. A decade later, Clothar summoned a council at Clichy, again confirming and publishing its decrees in a royal edict. But Clichy also produced the boldest statement yet of royal ecclesial responsibility. For addressing the bishops at the opening of the council, Clothar ordered them 'to discuss the rules of the canons and take whatever decisions are necessary for the good order of the Church'. And so, the bishops continue:

We have rendered countless thanks to the grace of all powerful God who inspired your glory with the intent to watch over the peace of the church as well as your own good fortune. No less do we rejoice in the Lord that you not only formulated precepts as divine voices revealed them to you but also revealed what we ourselves should respond. Like David himself, you at once govern the realm with a happy foresight and fulfill a prophetic ministry.<sup>11</sup>

It is fully in keeping with this growing integration of Church and kingdom that our first evidence of Frankish monks and clerics regularly offering liturgical prayers for the success and salvation of their kings comes from the reigns of Clothar II and his son Dagobert I.

Following Dagobert's death, Frankish politics grew increasingly chaotic. The steady sequence of Frankish councils ends, and with it, the reform programmes that had reached such a surprising climax under Clothar II. Councils then reappear with dramatic suddenness in the 740s, but now with an even more ambitious agenda that was partly the result of a rigorist impulse favoured by the Anglo-Saxon missionary bishop, Boniface. That a will to reform reappeared on the very eve of the coup that ended the Merovingian dynasty is not a coincidence.

In 751, the mayor of the palace, Pippin, engineered the deposition of Childeric III and was made king in a ceremony that included an anointing by bishops. The event's importance has made it the subject of constant historical inquiry. Precedent for the anointing itself has often been sought among the Visigoths, who had anointed their kings at least since 672. Some have thought that it was a way to christianize a former Germanic royal sacrality. A variant holds that it was an attempt to provide the new dynasty with a source of authority



alternative and superior to the charisma possessed by the old dynasty, with its kings' distinctive long hair and reputed descent from a sea monster. More often it has been seen as the explicit application of Old Testament models to the new kings, who were now anointed by bishops as David and Solomon had been anointed by Samuel. A pendant to this interpretation maintains that the anointing was part of a systematic programme to represent the Franks as a new 'Chosen People'. Few historians would now make any of these arguments, at least not so boldly. As we have seen, 'Germanic sacrality' had no role in Merovingian kingship. (The dynasty's supposed descent from a sea monster results largely from a seventh-century attempt to use a false etymology to explain the dynastic name, *Mero*—from *mare*). And although there may have been knowledge of the Visigothic precedent, extant near-contemporary accounts of the first Carolingian anointings do not overlap at all with Visigothic exegeses for anointing kings. Pippin's anointing seems to have been merely an ad hoc adaptation of existing post-baptismal anointings, which were used to solicit God's blessing in a variety of circumstances. Such a context also leaves little room for an Old Testament precedent (though it would later be insisted on). But if there is no Old Testament model, then there is even less room for the idea that the Franks had replaced the Jews as the 'Chosen People', especially when sources most contemporary to the anointing do not allude to any of its necessary accompaniments, such as the idea of a special covenant. Yet in downgrading the significance of the anointing as a liturgical act, one should not downgrade the importance of the event. It was a breach with the past and a new beginning, and contemporaries were conscious of it as such.

One might put the matter this way. Pippin and his sons had no right to be kings. On the contrary, in deposing the dynasty that had ruled for over 250 years, they became oath-breakers. Not only had they proved faithless to their kings, they now claimed to rule as kings over Frankish magnates who had been their peers and over Bavarian, Aquitanian, and Alamannian princes who had gained effective autonomy during the preceding century and whose ducal offices were justified as perpetual appointments by the very dynasty Pippin had overthrown. To justify their coup and their claims, the first Carolingian kings needed more than an ounce of chrism poured onto their heads. They needed a judgment of God that would prove the rightness of their actions—meaning that they needed to defeat the enemies who opposed them. And they needed to stand for an absolutely undeniable good. That good was a Christian mission.

From the very beginning, therefore, Carolingian vehicles of ideology do not so much exalt the new kings as they do the Frankish people under their leadership. Certainly this is the message conveyed with Pippin's reissuance of the law code of the Salian Franks, complete with a new prologue:

The famous race of the Franks, whose founder is God, strong in arms, true to its alliances, deep in counsel, noble in body, untouched in sincerity, beautiful in form, daring, swift, and fierce, now converted to the Catholic faith and free from heresy... Long live Christ who loves the Franks! May He guard their kingdom, fill their leaders with the light of His grace, protect their army, accord them the defense of the faith! May the Lord of lords concede them, of His mercy, the joys of peace and days full of happiness!<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, in the litanies known as the *laudes regiae* that were developed around the same time, appeals were made to the saints for 'life and victory' on behalf of the king, his children, and 'all the judges and the entire army of the Franks'. Then there is the evidence of histories. For it would ultimately be history that judged the legitimacy of a dynasty originating in usurpation, and so the Carolingians cultivated historical writing to an unprecedented degree. And all near-contemporary historical accounts of 751 mention that the act that actually made Pippin king was his election by 'all the Franks', 'according to the

custom of the Franks'. Similarly, in all these histories and especially in the most important of them (the *Royal Frankish Annals*), the Franks are never represented as the subjects of the kings. They are their partners. The Lombards 'marched against King Pippin and the Franks'. Pippin and Charlemagne 'deliberated with the Franks'. Prosecuting a campaign against the Saxons, 'the Lord King Charles and the Franks assailed them vigorously... With the help of God the Franks had the victory'.<sup>13</sup> Small wonder that the last continuator of the Chronicle of Fredegar described the chronicle's previous section extolling the victories of Charles Martel not as a *gesta Karoli* but as a *gesta Francorum*.<sup>14</sup>

The fact that these histories insist on Carolingian kingship as a kingship of Franks who successively defeat Aquitainians, Lombards, Bavarians, Saxons, and Avars leads a number of historians to speak of this stage of Carolingian kingship as 'gentilic', meaning that it was imagined as a kingship over 'peoples' (*gentes*). The same conclusion results from the title Charlemagne adopted after his imperial coronation in 800: 'Charles, most serene augustus, crowned by God, great and pacific emperor, governing the Roman Empire and by the mercy of God king of the Franks and Lombards'. Yet no sooner had the Franks built an empire than its Frankishness had to be disowned. The move is especially pronounced in narratives of the most fraught political events, as when Charlemagne prepared the fall of Tassilo, the last duke of Bavaria, in 787. According to the *Royal Frankish Annals*, Charlemagne sent three armies towards the duchy, one consisting of Franks but a second coming from Italy and a third comprised of 'Austrian Franks, Thuringians, and Saxons'. When the next year Tassilo confessed his treason in what can only be called a 'show trial', he was condemned to death by an assembly that included not only Franks but also Lombards, Saxons, and Bavarians, their pointed inclusion necessary to demonstrate that the abolition of the duchy had not been an act of Frankish aggression, that the empire was ruled by a multi-ethnic consensus.<sup>15</sup> Such concerns provide another reason that the Carolingians could not really foster a notion of the Franks as a 'Chosen People'. For an empire of many peoples, it would have been indefensible. It would also have been heretical, for God's covenant with the Jews had passed not to any single ethnic people but to all peoples, that is, to Christians. Hence, when in a famous letter Alcuin speaks of Charlemagne's 'pious and prudent' rule over a 'blessed people' (*beata gens*), he is referring not to the Franks but to Christians.<sup>16</sup>

Alcuin's formulation introduces the most revolutionary effect of the Carolingian regime: it justified itself according to a programme of reform that made contact with Merovingian (and Visigothic) conciliar legislation while going far beyond its principles. One sees the difference even before 751, in the small run of councils convened by Pippin or his brother Carloman as *dux et princeps*. The innovation can be characterized simply: the councils systematically eroded the previous distinction between secular and spiritual spheres. Both sets of conciliar *acta* begin with explicit statements that the prince had convened the councils, which is traditional. What is not traditional is that the acts are consistently presented not as decrees of bishops subsequently approved by rulers but as injunctions announced in the voice of the *princeps* himself. Moreover, the prince acts not only with his bishops but also with his *optimates* or his counts and prefects, leading laymen therefore acting alongside bishops for the reform of the Church. Indeed, counts were explicitly stated to be the *defensor ecclesiae* and were called on to aid bishops in suppressing remnants of paganism in dioceses. On the eve of Pippin's anointing, councils had become an assembly of the Church represented not as a college of bishops but as a body of both clergy and laity, and the goal was not simply to reform the Church as an institution of clergy but to further the salvation of what is explicitly stated to be the *populus christianus*. Therefore, in reforming the Church the conciliar *acta* do not just reform the clergy. Their purview extends to the laity also, as when Pippin's council at Soissons in 744 decreed that laymen were to

avoid fornication, perjury, and false witness and to live according to the dictates of the Church.<sup>17</sup>

The ideal of an ecclesial society became the most important and durable creation of the Carolingian reform, seen in sermons, prayers, mirrors for kings and nobles, and above all in episcopal and royal capitularies.<sup>18</sup> Over and over, royal and imperial capitularies prohibit homicide, theft, fraud, usury, perjury, false witness, sorcery, and augury. They not only prohibit crimes, they prohibit vices as if they were crimes and demand virtuous action from both rulers and ruled, always on the explicit basis of Christian law and morality. Thus, homicide violates the Lord's prohibition of hatred, and if we are in enmity with men we cannot be at peace with God. Hatred and envy must be avoided, for 'everyone who hates his brother is a homicide' (I John 3:15) and 'avarice is slavery to idols' (Col. 3:5). Judges must judge justly, taking no gifts and without regard for status or power, 'as it is written, "Judge justly, sons of men"' (Ps. 57:2). Parents shall be honoured by their children. Pilgrims shall receive hospitality. Everyone should avoid drunkenness. Bishops, abbots, *missi*, and counts shall protect widows, orphans, and the poor, particularly against the oppression of the powerful, and when presiding over courts counts shall hear the cases of orphans first. Inspiring all such mandates, at once the goal and the means to the goal, is a vision of a society united in peace because its members are bound to each other in love: 'Let there be peace, concord, and unanimity among all the Christian people, between bishops, abbots, counts, judges, and all everywhere whether greater or lesser, for nothing is pleasing to God without peace'.<sup>19</sup>

In effect, the Carolingian reform tended to collapse the distinction between Church and society. The most telling indication is a paraphrase of Gelasius' dictum by Bishop Jonas of Orléans, near the beginning of his official record of the decisions of the council of Paris in 829: 'The entire body of the holy Church of God is principally divided into two outstanding persons, that is, into the priestly and the royal'.<sup>20</sup> For Gelasius, pontifical authority and royal power had shared rule of the *world*. For Jonas, they shared rule of the *Church*, because the world and the Church had become co-extensive. Another trend makes the same point: the growing use of the term 'Christendom' (*Christianitas*), appealing to contemporaries precisely because it referred to a world that has become Christian.

Much of what is most important about Carolingian political discourses can be seen as both illustration and application of the principle that 'empire' and 'Church' were different aspects of a single indivisible Body of Christ. Thus, the tendency of the pre-751 councils held under Carloman and Pippin continues: though general assemblies often divided into separate meetings for bishops, monks, and laity, and though enactments were sometimes issued separately for each order, more often the resulting capitularies recorded enactments of mixed purview, and the same assembly could be referred to indifferently as a *placitum* or a *synodum*. This is not sloppy usage but signifying synonymy, as shown by a discussion in Hincmar of Reims' treatise on the ordering of the palace (the passage going back to an earlier programmatic treatise by Adalhard of Corbie, one of Charlemagne's principal advisers): each year in the spring a general assembly was to be held attended by both clerical and lay elites, and the purpose of this assembly was to make decisions concerning 'the state of the entire realm', which was to conform 'always and everywhere with the judgment of almighty God'.<sup>21</sup> From this perspective, the greater emphasis on political liturgy that all historians have noticed beginning in the 770s and accelerating in the 790s was almost a logical necessity, for the congruence of Church and empire required church law and liturgy and imperial law and ceremonial to be brought into mutual agreement—not perfect identity but clearly recognizable analogy. Litanies, masses, psalms, and fasting were



increasingly organized by the palace itself for celebration throughout the empire at times of military crisis and after military victories, during natural disasters that seemed to portend God's anger and to prepare major reform initiatives designed to appease it. Alliances with pagan rulers were accompanied by baptisms made into high ceremonial. The humiliation of enemies was increasingly assimilated to an act of public penance, as the vanquished begged the emperor's mercy for forgiveness of acts construed as public sins. If monasteries with close ties to the Merovingians had been obligated to offer prayers for the rulers, after 800 the obligation was increasingly made incumbent on all monasteries (and cathedral chapters) as a function of the protection (*tuitio*) they received from the emperor, and a new daily mass was added to sacramentaries expressly for the benefit of the ruler, his family and the health of the empire. The palace itself became 'the sacred palace', a term derived from Roman public discourse but now infused with distinctively ninth-century associations: the sacred palace included a chapel and an *aula*, both of which were made into sacred spaces set off by liturgical or quasi-liturgical actions and taboos on behaviour that could be construed as polluting. In 814, when Louis the Pious succeeded to his father as emperor, he had good political reasons to remove his sisters from the palace; but the public justification was to cleanse the palace of a 'blemish' (*nevus*).<sup>22</sup>

The congruence of Church and empire led to a second necessary conclusion: if the empire and the Church were one and both together were the Body of Christ, then neither could be divided without sacrilege. Whatever his other motivations, this surely was among the reasons that Louis the Pious broke with Frankish tradition in 817, at the height of his reform efforts. At the 'sacred palace' of Aachen he summoned a 'sacred convent', which after three days of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving determined to maintain the unity of the empire by immediately crowning Louis' eldest son Lothar emperor, with the intention that he rule as sole emperor after Louis' death, his brothers relegated to manifestly subordinate kingships. As Louis himself stated, to do otherwise would be to cause 'scandal to the holy Church and offense to Him in whose power lie the laws of all kingdoms'—'scandal' being a technical term for the kind of public sin that polluted a sacred space, whether church, empire, or monastery.<sup>23</sup> Although we have few writings from his camp, the same logic must have informed Lothar's justification for his campaign against his brothers after their father's death, when he sought to make good his imperial authority. Yet his brothers did not deny that the congruent unity of Church and empire was a good in itself. On the contrary, one sign of how important unity had become is the fact that Louis the German and Charles the Bald, allied with each other against Lothar, devoted so much care to publicizing an alternative vision of unity: brotherhood. The most famous illustration is the oaths they and their leading men swore at Strasbourg in 842: each king swore the same oath, their leading men then swearing equivalent oaths, the reciprocity inherent in the brotherhood manifested by each side's swearing in the other side's language. This was a unity of concord, Paul's 'unity of the spirit in the bond of peace' (Eph. 4:1–3). It arose from the harmony of distinct wills agreeing as one, and Nithard drew out its benefits in his description of what were probably choreographed demonstrative acts meant to publicize the two kings' brotherhood: the rulers ate their feasts together, shared one house and one 'sleep', gave each other even their most valued possessions, and decided both 'common' and 'private' affairs 'with each other's consent'. Yet the most convincing demonstration of the principle came in Nithard's description of the war-games staged after the oaths. Saxons, Gascons, Austrasians, and Bretons gathered 'in teams of equal numbers', one side rushing against the other as if to attack, then wheeling in mock flight to allow the others to attack, until everyone, including the kings and their followers, engaged in a great *melée*. 'It was a spectacle worth seeing, for its great nobility as well as its moderation; not one in such a large crowd and among such

different peoples dared to hurt or abuse another, as often happens'.<sup>24</sup> Nithard's reference to the teams' *moderatio* was calculated: in contemporary political ethics, this was the virtue that described a king's ability to rule himself, the prerequisite to his being able to rule others. In this vision of unity, an ecclesial society did not need an emperor to keep good order. Love would do even better.

The best proof of how important these Christian political discourses had become is how widely they were used to criticize. For example, in 833, Louis the Pious was deposed, forced to divest himself of his regalia and consign himself to effective imprisonment under the guise of perpetual penance in a monastery. We still do not fully understand what lay behind the turmoil. Bitterness among his sons at his changing views of the succession had much to do with it, as did rancour arising from the public scapegoating of important leaders who had fallen from favour in 828. But as scholars have begun to realize, focussing on the disarray and attributing motivations of pure self-interest to the factions misses an important point: everyone, rebels and loyalists alike, claimed to stand for the ideals of a Christian polity. Everyone was for the unity of the empire. Everyone was for an ecclesial empire. Everyone assumed that bishops, counts, and the ruler himself held public offices that constituted a 'ministry' (*ministerium*), meaning that the office-holder's power was conditional on his using his power to advance a Christian public good in which justice and salvation were essential goals. The rebels of 833 rebelled in the name of an ideal of rulership as Christian ministry; Louis' loyalists supported him in the name of the same ideal. That alone is an indication of how much the Carolingian reform had changed the very terms of political debate, as is the explosion of polemical writings (*vitae*, visions, open letters, forged letters, and conciliar reports), all of them making direct or indirect criticisms of existing policy and opposing camps, all of them making suggestions for reform out of the conviction that Christian leadership and a Christian society mattered.

One might make a similar argument about the aftermath. On one level, the empire's fragmentation represents the Carolingians' failure, but one might more charitably say that the Empire had 'gone to seed', for the result of its dissolution was that Carolingian political discourses diffused throughout the European subcontinent, adapting to the needs of different political niches. Through a complex chain of transmissions, by 971 Edgar was ruling in a newly unified England according to a model of empire descending from that of Louis the Pious. Under his ill-fated successor Æthelred, the response to political crisis echoed Carolingian calls to penance and reform. On the continent, tenth- and eleventh-century kings regularly performed acts of public penance to demonstrate their humility before God, as Louis the Pious had done in 822 at Attigny, and the act of *deditio* by defeated enemies remained fundamentally penitential. In the West Frankish kingdom, tenth-century territorial princes justified their power by adapting tropes and practices that were distinctly Carolingian. For example, in 789 Charlemagne had announced a reform capitulary by appealing to the example of Josiah, who had restored proper observance in the Temple; in 941, when undertaking the reform of monasteries in his county, Arnulf of Flanders likened himself to Judas Maccabeus, who had rebuilt the Temple itself, and variant *laudes* were sung for him and his successors. Liturgy was not simply a practice for exalting kings; almost as often it provided an arena for calling them to account, as when Hermann Billung, margrave of Saxony, was greeted at Magdeburg with a formal royal *occursus* and led into the cathedral as part of a liturgical procession; or when a jester mocked the pretensions of William the Conqueror by calling out sarcastically at a crown-wearing, 'Behold, I see God!' It is often said that Ottonian and especially Salian rulers developed a markedly Christomimetic kingship that the Carolingians had lacked; but a number of recent studies have shown that essential elements of Christomimesis were already pronounced



under Louis the Pious, Lothar I, and Louis the German. If the Salians differed, it was because they tended to assert an unusually exalted royal authority that insisted on the ruler's ability to command, ordain, and punish. Yet those very claims were consistently resisted, at least partly on the grounds of a Carolingian notion of ministry. For this is how Hermann of Reichenau described the grievances of the lay magnates against Henry III, after he had unjustly deprived Conrad of Bavaria of his duchy:

At this time both the foremost men and the lesser men of the kingdom began more and more to murmur against the emperor and complained that he had long since departed from his original conduct of justice, peace, piety, fear of God and the manifold virtues in which he ought to have made progress from day to day...<sup>25</sup>

The Carolingian discourse of peace proved equally robust. Aristocratic alliances were accompanied by an assemblage of acts defining the allies as spiritual kin: consecrated marriages uniting their families, the exchange of solemn oaths sworn on relics, co-ordinated monastic reforms, and the inscription of the allies' names in the commemorative books of monasteries and convents client to the parties. Increasingly, local self-help groups mobilized against robbers and invaders, first on their own in desperation, then with royal support and co-ordination, but always on the basis of sworn oaths creating fictive brotherhoods with attendant obligations of mutual aid. Sanctified, such pacts were at the heart of the movement known as the Peace of God, which tried to fill the vacuum in royal power by reverting to the Carolingian belief that God would only show His favour when there was 'peace and love' (*pax et dilectio*) among His Christian people. No less were sanctified pacts at the heart of the first urban communes, whether in Italy, France, or Flanders; for in the beginning, a 'commune' was, by definition, a set of oaths by which individuals swore to uphold and protect the rights of each and all in the name of peace. For that reason, an early commune was sometimes called 'a peace'.

In such ways the Carolingians did what Romans, Visigoths, and Merovingians had not: they created the expectation of a godly society.

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# CHAPTER 28

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# RELIGION IN THE AGE OF CHARLEMAGNE

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JANET L. NELSON

## THE CONTEXT

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IN the eighth century, as often before and after, it was the staff of the papal writing office who registered the dangers and the potentialities of power-shifts north of the Alps and in the Mediterranean. Between 711 and 714 nearly all Spain had been conquered by armies from North Africa whom contemporary Latin authors called ‘Saracens’ or ‘Hagarenes’, with raids across the Pyrenees soon following. Pope Gregory II (715–731) in 722 sent Duke Eudo of Aquitaine a gift of three sponges that had been used to wipe papal altars: according to Gregory’s biographer, Eudo divided the sponges into tiny fragments which, ingested by his warriors, made them invincible.<sup>1</sup> The Frankish mayor of the palace Charles Martel, in 739, during an inter-regnum between, as it turned out, the penultimate king and the last king of the old Merovingian dynasty, received from Pope Gregory III (731–741) a letter seeking military aid against enemies in Italy, and setting out a view of the world into which the Franks could fit themselves.<sup>2</sup> In 747, Pope Zacharias (741–751) received a letter from ‘the most excellent and most Christian mayor of the palace Pippin (Martel’s son)’ about the ‘good conduct [*bona conversatio*] of the bishops, abbots and leading laymen [*principes*] of the Franks’. To those thus commended the pope wrote directly, encouraging their military efforts ‘against pagans’ (continental Saxons, in this particular context):

It is right for *principes* and secular men and warriors to have responsibility...for the defence of the province, and it is right for bishops and priests and the servants of God [i.e. monks] to devote themselves to salvation-bringing counsels and prayers, so that with us praying and them fighting, and God in command, the province may remain in safety, and this may be for you a way to salvation, praise and perpetual reward.<sup>3</sup>

In 750 Pippin, now in a position to remove the last representatives of the Merovingian dynasty and take the kingship of the Franks for himself, wrote to Zacharias to seek approval for a coup. In or soon after 751, Count Hildebrand, an uncle of Pippin, recorded a consecration in Francia that involved Frankish churchmen and *principes* legitimizing a new king and a new dynasty.<sup>4</sup> Pippin (751–768) thereafter titled himself *rex Dei gratia*, king by the grace of God. In contemporaries’ eyes, he demonstrated that divine support by winning military victories against Saxons and Aquitanians.

In the next two decades, as successive popes learned how to exploit Frankish power and as Pippin learned how to elicit further ideological ballast, new political realities took shape. Pippin, at the request of Pope Stephen II (751–757) led armies into Italy in 755 and 757. Existing monarchies, the eastern Roman empire and the caliphate, with capitals in Constantinople and Baghdad, began warily to acknowledge the new power’s existence. Pippin himself took the initiative. It was he who sent envoys to Constantinople in 754 or 755, ‘for friendship alliance and the well-being of the fatherland’.<sup>5</sup> In 757 ‘the Emperor Constantine V sent to King Pippin, with other gifts, an organ, which came all the way to



Francia': presumably to demonstrate the superior technology of East Rome.<sup>6</sup> Among the 'other gifts' may have been the sandals of Christ. Their existence is first documented in 762 when Pippin and his queen confirmed the endowments of their monastic foundation at Prüm and mentioned the *scandala* [sic!] *Christi*.<sup>7</sup> These relics, which are still to be seen at Prüm, are strikingly reminiscent of the sandal of Mohammed, of which a number of exemplars acquired relic-like significance in Mesopotamia at dates too doubtful to resolve the question of whether Christian or Muslim holy sandals had priority.<sup>8</sup> In 766, Pippin sent envoys to Constantinople with papal envoys in tow, to negotiate over a Byzantine proposal of marriage between his daughter Gisela and the emperor's son Leo. Late in the year, Pippin's envoys returned to Francia, with the pope's envoys and also envoys from Constantinople, and early in 767, Pippin held a council at Gentilly near Paris where 'the images of holy personages' were also discussed.<sup>9</sup> Later in 767, again in response to an invitation from Pippin (in 764), an embassy from Baghdad arrived in Francia.<sup>10</sup> On every agenda were arguments about the religious meaning of graven images, forbidden in the Old Testament and increasingly rejected in Islam, but revered objects, icons, for many in both eastern and western Christendom.<sup>11</sup> A marriage-alliance could entail religious as well as political arguments, for and against. Where did politics end and religion begin? Which monarchy, and which religion, influenced which? There are no clear answers. What *is* clear is that the age of Charlemagne dawned on a world where three regimes—and the papacy—were at work on fresh triangulations.

## EPIPHANY AT AACHEN

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'In our presence...blushing deeply', at the palace of Aachen on the Feast of Epiphany in a year between 802 and 805, a group of would-be godparents, questioned individually by Charlemagne as to whether they knew by heart the Lord's Prayer and the Creed, admitted they 'could not remember them at all'. Reporting this episode in a letter to the diocesan bishop, Charlemagne continued: 'We ordered them not to proceed, therefore, and not to presume to raise any infant from the baptismal font until they could recite [these texts]. We understood that for the present this was impossible, but we had discretion to allow this task...to be postponed until the period between Easter and Whitsun.'<sup>12</sup> The church at Aachen was not just a chapel for the use of courtiers, but a religious focus for inhabitants of the locality. That explains why Charlemagne reported the incident in a letter to the local bishop, Ghaerbald of Liège (785/787–809), with instructions to 'summon your priests to a meeting and diligently investigate this matter so that the Lord's work should not be set aside'. The bishop in turn wrote to 'his' priests, telling them:

the emperor thinks that it is through our negligence that we have not been serious enough about teaching the Lord's Prayer and the Creed...and he has been told that this is through our laxness, and...I think that it is in part due to your negligence. I therefore order...each one of you in his church, or in whatever churches mass is celebrated, to preach and teach that the Lord's Prayer and the Creed must be memorized...If you neglect these orders, we shall have to punish you harshly and clearly.<sup>13</sup>

Thanks to Ghaerbald's archive-keeping, these letters survived (in later copies).<sup>14</sup> They offer invaluable testimony not just to close contacts at this time between the bishop and the new emperor, but to a chain of communication that reached from the palace, to bishops, then to groups of priests in mother-churches also known as baptismal churches (such as the Aachen church, perhaps, though it would never be an ordinary example), to the grass-roots, to farms

and villages managed by officials of the king/emperor or lay lords.<sup>15</sup> At each level were laymen and laywomen keen to make and keep social bonds within generations by becoming godparents to the offspring of kin or friends, clients or dependents. Though neither letter specifies the language in which such people were expected to know the relevant texts, there is evidence that vernacular versions of them existed at this time. The Council of Frankfurt (794) had decreed that prayer could be said not only in the three holy languages (Hebrew, Greek and Latin) but in ‘every person’s own language’.<sup>16</sup>

From the mid-790s, when Charlemagne was more or less permanently based at Aachen, he showed increasing concern over the practice of religion. His monitoring of a particular group of godparents showed characteristic attention to detail, as in specifying the window of opportunity between Easter and Whitsun; and his instructions to Ghaerbald can be linked with the burst of legislative action in and just after 802.<sup>17</sup> Alcuin, the scholar lured from York by Charlemagne into his service as jack-of-all-teaching-trades, had been dismayed in the late 790s at the forced conversion of Saxons, and he had written to Charlemagne and others in 798 explaining the meaning of baptism.<sup>18</sup> But that Epiphany at Aachen was an epiphany in its own right, when there dawned upon Charlemagne the enormity of the task he confronted and the scale, therefore, of what would be required. His efforts to ensure that baptism was standardized and done correctly across his empire culminated in 811 with the sending out of letters to archbishops, enquiring how they enacted, interpreted, and taught baptismal rites. Responses to these produced further responses, many of them drawing on Alcuin’s writings. Susan Keefe has identified and published no fewer than sixty-one treatises on baptism arising directly or indirectly from Charlemagne’s sustained, and growing, concern with this subject.<sup>19</sup>

Baptism was performed by priests, and in his clearest exposition of baptism’s meaning, Alcuin responded to the enquiries of a particular priest. Baptism in Alcuin’s mind was the battle-site between Satan and the Holy Spirit for the souls of new Christians. The three main phases of the ritual were exorcism, immersion, and anointing. In exorcism, the priest blew on the initiate to expel the Devil, and touched his/her eyes and ears with spittle, to signify opening the way in for the Holy Spirit. Immersion effected the transfer from the Devil’s death-bringing service to God’s life-giving one. Anointing with oil signified the initiate’s self-offering as a holy sacrifice to the Lord and conferred stalwartness of faith and steadfastness of good works to fulfil the demands of service.<sup>20</sup> In the early Church, the baptized had been adults. On the fringes of early medieval Christendom, adult baptism persisted, and acquired a new currency in Charlemagne’s reign, because the conquest of pagan Saxons and Avars entailed conversion. Charlemagne, his advisors, and, ultimately, in intent at least, the subjects of his empire, conceived themselves as a *populus christianus*, a Christian people. The great majority of the baptized, though, were infants born into peoples (*gentes*) long since christianized—the Franks, the Aquitainians, the Goths of Septimania (the lands bordering the Mediterranean between the Pyrenees and the Rhone), the Burgundians, Alamans, Thuringians and Bavarians, and the Lombards. Baptism, a personal initiation, was now also a rite of membership within Charlemagne’s empire. He had a sense of personal responsibility for ‘those committed to him by God to rule’.<sup>21</sup> For him, then, a new spelling-out of the obligations of godparents was necessary, as well as changes to the rite of baptism itself. It was the godparents of the baptized child who, on the little one’s behalf, made his or her transfer-contract, in the form of the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer, from the Devil’s service to God’s. It was expected that godparents’ relationships with their godchildren would endure through the lives of those involved. Godparents were the godchildren’s *fideiussores*, analogous to pledges, sureties, advocates in secular law.<sup>22</sup>

Successive popes addressed successive Carolingian rulers as ‘spiritual co-fathers’ (no mere formality, but rather signifying the mutually dutiful relationship formed when a pope baptized or confirmed a king’s son).<sup>23</sup> Conscientious bishops like Ghaerbald issued ‘statutes’ to their priests giving the relevant instructions, sometimes adding that priests were absolutely not to be paid for performing baptisms because the gifts of the Spirit were gratuitous.<sup>24</sup>

## RELIGION ACROSS DIVIDES

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Bishops have been prominent in the historiography of religion in the age of Charlemagne. Older generations of ecclesiastical historians (in the case of France and the Low Countries often Catholic clergy or monks, in Germany often Protestant pastors) tended to focus on institutional, doctrinal, and ideological topics.<sup>25</sup> Their successors have done much to widen and enhance the picture.<sup>26</sup> But the focus on bishops’ co-option by Charlemagne can be widened to include the social and cultural impacts of that professional collaboration. Aachen has been termed ‘a new type of religious centre, the theatre for the rites of rulership’.<sup>27</sup> But the theatre metaphor is only partly apt. Rites covered many more religious occasions than those directly involving the ruler, and many more agents than Charlemagne, his bishops, and chaplains. More important, the persons present were not a passive audience but active participants. *Sancta ecclesia vel populus christianus*, ‘the Holy Church or the Christian people’, existed in the flesh and in the imagination of Charlemagne’s contemporaries, not just as complementing each other but actually as coterminous: translating *vel* here as ‘or, which means the same thing’, the Church *was* the Christian people.<sup>28</sup> The rhetoric borrowed by Italian bishops from late antique eulogies of Christian Roman emperors, extolling ‘the treasure-box of your [Charlemagne’s] most sacred breast’, or hailing him as ‘king and priest’, or calling the palace ‘sacred’ is just that: rhetoric.<sup>29</sup> Charlemagne, ‘king by the grace of God’, was no theocrat, in the sense of being answerable only to God. His rule rested, visibly, on consensus, made and maintained chiefly through assemblies, regnal, regional, and local, at which men of all ranks from magnates down to rural notables or squires and more prosperous peasants were enlisted and kept committed to the regime by the lived experience of reaching agreement and the evocation of sentiments of loyalty, religious and political.

The people for whom Charlemagne and his advisors used the biblical term *pauperes* (‘poor’, but also ‘vulnerable’ or ‘lacking power’) are much less well documented than are those termed, not *divites* (rich), but *potentes* (powerful) or *potentiores* (more powerful). That divide has loomed large in the institutional historiography of Charlemagne’s world.<sup>30</sup> Historians who write of a two-class society don’t always hear the stray voices which echo the Virgin Mary’s praise of a God who ‘put down the mighty from their seat and exalted the humble and meek’, or recall that Christ’s first followers were poor men, shepherds, and workmen.<sup>31</sup> Other divides have been diagnosed in religion itself. Jacques Le Goff differentiated between ‘clerical’ and ‘folkloric’ religions.<sup>32</sup> Arnold Angenendt, taking a longer view, contrasted early medieval ‘archaic’ religion, a formalistic matter of externals and magic and transgressions punishable by fines, a collective going-through of the motions, with an individualistic and spiritual religion in which, later in the middle ages, sanctions were internalized, and a shame culture was replaced by a guilt culture.<sup>33</sup> Yet shame and guilt, though distinct, were not in contradiction: the same individuals could

harbour both.<sup>34</sup> Such theoretical disconnects need to be somehow connected, then much more nuanced, and finally re-examined and re-thought in terms of relationships that were negotiated and potentially associative. Just as, for instance, *minus docti* ('less learned') existed as a category between learned and unlearned, and *minus potentes* and *mediocres*, that is, persons of middling rank (sometimes translated by the English word 'gentry') between high and low, so the prescriptive texts themselves turn out to differentiate more finely. The institutional Church itself, often depicted as split between exploitative patron-prelates and exploited client-priests, was composed of much more layered and complicated relationships, and hard edges were smoothed in social reality.<sup>35</sup> Some prelates took magic seriously, condemning what could be presented as pagan survivals in some cases but willing to christianize spells. Religion and magic appear cheek by jowl in prescriptive texts as aspects of a single cluster, and in narratives of the discoveries and removals of relics, with attendant miracles, as a single repertoire of belief and practice.<sup>36</sup> Valerie Flint proclaimed, with anything but derogatory intent, an early medieval 'rise of magic' harboured in religion; and many non-Catholic historians would now accept a version of her thesis as a matter of historical sociology rather than an article of faith.<sup>37</sup>

The blushing godparents brought together in Charlemagne's presence probably occupied a diversity of positions, as *pauperes*, *mediocres*, *potentiores*, in this differentiated world; and some might well have moved up in that world from whatever status they had been born into. How many of these men and women were in the habit of regular church attendance, how often they heard sermons or prayed, how affected they were by priestly injunctions to follow Christianity's ethical commands, can only be guessed. Bishop Ghaerbald himself repeatedly issued orders to priests to convey injunctions on all those points, as did Bishop Theodulf of Orleans (before 797–817).<sup>38</sup> Their statutes are prescriptive; nevertheless they assume a degree of lay compliance already in being. Charlemagne cared, increasingly, not just about right performance but about right belief.<sup>39</sup> Here the ethics embodied in the Lord's Prayer, and the teachings set out in the Creed, were fundamental. These were what godparents were to understand by listening to the priest's expositions; these were what they were to transmit *across* generations, not just by promises publicly made at baptism but by undertaking responsibility for the child's religious growth. The lay blushes which made such an impression on the mind of Charlemagne were signs of shame, and very public losses of face. But these Christian godparents acknowledged personal responsibility for their sinful omission, hence, felt guilt as well. Humiliation could inspire a will to do better. Charlemagne gave them a second chance.

Virtually all the evidence amassed in the standard work on early medieval godparenthood is either prescriptive or belongs earlier or later than the reign of Charlemagne.<sup>40</sup> But three actual cases of affective godfather/godson relationships are recorded, one predating, the other two only slightly postdating, 814. All relate to men of royal or magnate status. Bernard of Septimania (probably born before 802) was the godson of Louis the Pious and beneficiary of his generous godfatherly patronage for a while.<sup>41</sup> William (born 826), son of Bernard and his wife Dhuoda, had property bequeathed to him by his godfather, his paternal uncle, Theoderic, whom he remembered in prayer after his death.<sup>42</sup> The emperor Lothar was asked by his father Louis the Pious to stand godfather to Louis' newborn son (and Lothar's half-brother) Charles in 823, thereby reassuring the anxious parents that Lothar would protect the child in later years. After Louis's death, Lothar sent assurances to Charles 'that he would be kindly disposed towards him as it behoved him to be towards his godson'.<sup>43</sup> The aligning of kin ties with spiritual ones may well have been (to argue by



analogy with the fuller records of later periods) a form of social support created by humbler people too.

## EXPIATING SIN AND PRAYING FOR VICTORY

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The practice of penance, like the social consequences of godparenthood, is not easy to document in the age of Charlemagne. Recent research is nevertheless showing, alongside prescription, something of social reality. Evidence for the practice of penance, which involves fasting, is hard to conceal in face-to-face communities; and there are clear continuities between penitentials in the time of Charlemagne and the Handbooks of penance that proliferated from c.1200 onwards enabling people, individually and collectively, to 'handle sin'.<sup>44</sup>

Expiation could be achieved through asceticism, almsgiving, penance, and recourse to the intercessory power of the saints. *Solo virtuosi* of the eremitical sort were uncommon, but a more or less moderated rigour was associated with the practice of monastic communities recruited, from different milieux including *mediocres* (if very seldom *pauperes*) as well as elites, largely through the offering (oblation) of young boys by their parents or kin. In the early ninth century, excluding numbers of oblates and lay servants, Fulda housed 600 monks, St-Riquier 300, St-Gall perhaps 100.<sup>45</sup> Adult converts to the monastic life included two former warriors in the royal retinue, Charlemagne's cousin Adalard, who had served as a '*tiro* [trainee warrior] of the palace' before joining the community at Corbie in 772, and Witiza, son of the count of Maguelonne, who left royal service, took the monastic name of Benedict and founded a community on inherited lands at Aniane in Gothic Septimania.<sup>46</sup> At the other end of the male lifecycle, seasoned elders could withdraw, after lives in secular warfare, to the spiritual equivalent, as when another of Charlemagne's kinsmen, William count of Toulouse, after a career as a war-leader retired in 806 to his monastic foundation at Gellone, not far from Aniane.<sup>47</sup>

Those who withdrew from the world still worked for the world, however, by praying not just for the souls of their kin but also for the well-being of the realm and the royal family.<sup>48</sup> This work entailed sexual purity, for, whatever multifarious ties monasteries maintained with those outside them, only full-time virgin ascetics were believed capable of delivering effective intercession with the Almighty. Rumours of homosexuality in certain monasteries caused Charlemagne acute anxiety 'since what people believe to be the basis of the greatest hope of safety (*maxima spes salutis*) for all Christians, that is the life and chastity of monks, has become a cause of ruin'. Reports that nuns living in 'little convents without a rule' were writing and sending out *winileodas* ('men-songs') evoked from Charlemagne a sharp command to bishops to impose on these women strict enclosure and a proper rule.<sup>49</sup>

In thinking about peace produced by war, Charlemagne connected prayer and 'safety' in the sense of salvation. For those fighting with earthly weapons, religious aids to victory were of pre-Carolingian vintage.<sup>50</sup> The division of labour between those who fought and those who prayed was already blurred when Charles Martel and Pippin required monasteries and episcopal churches to fund troops for Frankish armies by making them temporary grants of church land.<sup>51</sup> But it was Charlemagne who put the production of military support on an institutional and realm-wide basis when he standardized the requirement of military contingents from tenants of church property, at the same time establishing his royal lordship over the best-endowed churches.<sup>52</sup> In time of war he



enjoined the fasting of warriors before battle and general fasting and prayer for victory.<sup>53</sup> Whether against pagan Saxons, Slavs or Saracens, or against Christian enemies, warfare could be understood as God's work: all Charlemagne's campaigns were presented as divinely authorized in annalistic narratives, and prayers were sought for them all. In the sacramentary that count William may well have brought south with him from Francia to Gellone, the Mass for 'those going out to war' envisaged every campaign as a struggle of light against dark, every army 'now' a re-embodiment of Israel's 'then', every military advance of God's 'predestined people' illuminated by an angel, and 'the king of the Franks' as a David and a Gideon.<sup>54</sup>

Gellone was typical of elite families' foundations whose monks specialized in intercessory prayer. Across the Frankish world, monasteries dominated their surroundings in ways sometimes discernible through patterns of lay giving and gift-attesting (acting as witness to another's gift). A few large monastic churches acquired visibility thanks to the large number of surviving records of endowments made to them almost entirely by lay people, and, in a precious few cases, thanks also to the memorial books listing the names of those prayed for, which include many persons identifiable as lay patrons along with their kin, friends, and retinues.<sup>55</sup> Endowment was a matter of personnel as well as land. Seldom explicit, but to be inferred, are gifts of property that went with little boys offered as future monks—oblate means 'an offered one'.<sup>56</sup> The archive of the monastery of St-Gall is a good example; but it is at the same time exceptional in that the original documents, rather than just later copies, have been preserved in the present-day monastery. St-Gall received many oblates, identifiable as such in lists of inmates not yet labelled deacons or priests. Networks of donors and clients can be reconstructed in localities and in the region.<sup>57</sup> Churches existed in social landscapes, their economic support overwhelmingly local and lay. The monastery of St-Gall in Alamannia, and that of Redon on the Breton-Frankish border, both provided homes where people of middling rank (*mediocres*) were supplied with food and clothing, soap and blankets, in return for alms and bequests. These private arrangements with religious institutions were not only, or even primarily, for old-age care, but rather for the religious solace conferred by monastic prayer.<sup>58</sup>

Early Carolingian regulations reinforced the ancient obligation on lay people to make regular offerings in the mass of bread and wine (sometimes other perishable foodstuffs as well), and such offerings could be translated into alms for the poor.<sup>59</sup> Pippin and especially Charlemagne legislated for the universal payment of tithes, and extended this requirement to such conquered regions as Saxony. That such demands were imposed in practice can be inferred from Alcuin's heartfelt regrets about the resistance of some Saxons to the imposing of tithe-payments by force.<sup>60</sup> For lay persons as well as clergy, a combination of temporary asceticism with almsgiving became a relatively frequent, even obligatory, phenomenon during Charlemagne's reign. Provision for the poor in time of famine was bundled with general fasting both as a practical way to make supplies go further and as an act of expiation and intercession.<sup>61</sup> Collective prayer for God's forgiveness for the sins that had caused famine was linked with prayer that God would grant victory in war. The first time this social experiment was tried was apparently in 778/779, when Charlemagne, as a sequel to his first major piece of administrative law, officially promulgated regulations to cope with both famine and military pressure. From bishops and priests, and from monks and nuns and canons, were required, in differential quantities according to means (each bishop, abbot and abbess was ranked 'capable' (*qui hoc facere potest*), 'medium' (*mediocris*) or 'lesser' (*minor*)), the recital of masses and psalters, 'for the king, for the army of the Franks, and for the present tribulation', together with two-day fasting and almsgiving (values for the three

ranks given in silver bullion) and ‘the feeding of poor starving people *in casatu*’, that is, within the accommodation supplied by the relevant church community. Likewise, counts (ranked ‘stronger’, ‘middling’, with a gap in the manuscripts where ‘lesser’ could be expected),<sup>62</sup> and royal vassals (ranked into three categories by scale of peasant-holdings under their lordship), together with their own households, were to fast for two days, or make payments (values again given in silver bullion) in lieu. Collective sharing of the pain may well have boosted morale. Were ‘the poor starving people’ actually helped? It might be tempting to dismiss such detailed plans for charitable activities as mere aspiration, impossible for Charlemagne’s government to implement on the ground; but evidence from a much later age—the similar regulations imposed in sixteenth-century England, and accompanying church-wardens’ accounts—demonstrates that such policies could in fact command a high rate of compliance from the subjects of a pre-modern regime.<sup>63</sup> Like Queen Elizabeth I in 1596–7, Charlemagne could command preachers to stir consciences, and, at least in some parts of the empire, he perhaps had local officials capable of monitoring outcomes and imposing sanctions.

When Charlemagne himself urged Pope Hadrian ‘most strongly’ in 786 to offer prayers and one or two days of litanies for Frankish victory, the pope sent out instructions for three litanies to be said on three major saints’ days in June (the campaigning season) through ‘all the lands under the dominion of the Holy Roman Church’, but he *also* made a return request that Charlemagne himself should command three days of litanies ‘throughout his territories’ and ‘regions across the sea where there were Christians to be found’, to cast out sickness and pestilence.<sup>64</sup> Litanies, accompanied by fasts, were public and very visible acts of propitiation. Fasting and the chanting of litanies, and almsgiving in time of war, famine or pestilence were repeatedly employed again by the regime, notably in 791/792, 794, and 805/806, when natural and man-made crises coincided.<sup>65</sup>

There were more churches at all levels than before, and they were performing more religious functions. Probably by far the most numerous were the small family foundations, with compact properties under local lordship, most evident in the fact that lords chose priests and/or that priests and monks and nuns were often members of the founding families.<sup>66</sup> The stratification of the ecclesiastical scene, like that of the laity, nowadays seems more variegated than it did to earlier generations of scholars. Though this was an age before parishes in the later medieval or modern sense, there were cathedral clergy—those whom a bishop like Ghaerbald could call ‘his’ priests—who maintained the regular daily liturgical round of prayer and praise in the bishop’s *civitas* as well as helping provide pastoral care in surrounding area. A congenial form of religious life for clergy who served cathedrals was that of canons whose rule prescribed regular but individually negotiated almsgiving from personally owned property.<sup>67</sup> Groups of priests in better-endowed churches out in the countryside apparently functioned rather as did those who manned Anglo-Saxon minsters or Italian mother-churches, that is, intermittently monitored by bishops, they supported small proprietary churches ad hoc, for instance performing baptisms and preaching in rural areas.<sup>68</sup> Priests serving the exceptionally large monastery of Fulda were deployed to serve in the monastery’s own proprietary churches on a rota system.<sup>69</sup> Priests who belonged to St-Gall also offered notarial as well as religious services (the two linked, more often than not) to people in the regional hinterland.<sup>70</sup> Archaeologically untraceable in association with small local churches are burial-grounds.<sup>71</sup> Lords of proprietary churches could make their own burial arrangements; whatever lesser folk did can only be guessed. This mix of public and private responsibilities distributed

between different types and levels of church was distinctive. It was workable, and it worked, in the circumstances of the age of Charlemagne.

## OATHS ON RELICS

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Amongst those circumstances, one area of social life in which religion authorized people's shaping and remoulding of their social relations was oath-swearing. Oaths constructed vertical relationships: good examples are the oaths sworn by men to their lords, and, in the vernacular, by Bavarian priests to bishops.<sup>72</sup> The associative form of mutual oaths was stressed by Marxist scholars ideologically prepared to find horizontal relationships in a world which other historiography had almost univocally construed as vertically bonded by royal and lordly power.<sup>73</sup> Swearing mutual oaths in gilds (*de sacramentis per gildonia invicem coniurantibus*) was the subject of a clause in Charlemagne's earliest capitulary: those conjurations were strictly forbidden, but agreements (*convenientiae*) for mutual help and insurance against mundane disasters like fires and shipwrecks were allowed, provided they were not made with oaths.<sup>74</sup> This section of this particular capitulary seems to belong in a region, the lower Meuse/Low Countries, where the everyday use of boats was envisaged, which need not mean that it was aimed specifically at merchants. Charlemagne's advisors regarded festive occasions like St Stephen's Day (26 December) as dangerous opportunities for the activities of the wrong kind of gilds—those involving the wrong kind of oaths sworn amid celebrations characterized as drunken. Immediately following in this same *capitulum* is a prohibition again bishops and abbots 'going and mixing with laypeople in their homes'; and there is mid-ninth century evidence for episcopal anxiety about priests attending gild-meetings because of the risk of excessive drinking.<sup>75</sup> If prohibition was back-handed attestation to what actually went on, it could be inferred that oath-swearings were particularly likely to have involved the presence of clergy. A further inference, supported by texts long before as well as during Charlemagne's reign, is that mutual oaths, like oaths given by those attesting in legal assemblies, were sworn on relics brought in from shrines for the occasion.<sup>76</sup>

Charlemagne differentiated good oaths from bad. He sought to monopolize the power of oaths by permitting only those sworn to himself and his sons. If religion's greatest gift to the regime of Charlemagne was the means to channel holy power into oaths of fidelity, the regime reinforced religion by endorsing and at least attempting to police the shrines and cults of relics.<sup>77</sup> For criminals or sinners of high status, oath-swearings at select, hallowed Frankish sites, and on relics authoritatively considered authentic, though not new, became special events with a capacity to defuse fraught situations as well as (re)connect Frankish leaders with their constituencies. What made such oaths so compelling was that they enlisted the portable power of the holy, from the sandals of Christ to fragments of the bodies of saints.<sup>78</sup>

## CHURCHES, OATHS, AND POLITICS IN THE REVOLT OF HARDRAD

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'A very extensive *coniuratio* ["sworn association"]', by definition unauthorized, of a group composed of East Franks and Thuringians, 'the work of Count Hardrad', shook

Charlemagne's regime in 785.<sup>79</sup> It was a response to a series of acts on the king's part, involving high-handed interventions in a social area where the extension of royal lordship directly threatened local elites. The overall protection of the Church was a well-recognized royal responsibility carrying with it rights: for instance, the summoning of ecumenical church councils, or the taking of episcopal revenues during a vacancy in the see. Lay rights over local churches, which also in principle entailed responsibility to protect, are rather suddenly in the age of Charlemagne much better documented than earlier, and not only because the charter evidence is vastly more plentiful. Charlemagne became lord of many great churches: 'he did not found monasteries, he acquired them', through the gifts of founders (and their heirs) who sought royal favour.<sup>80</sup> Charters recording such gifts and other transfers of rights over churches, were handed over in public rituals; and it was partly the greater visibility thus given *at the time* to royal interventions that these came to seem like affronts. The agents and agencies chosen by the king were calculated to intensify such negative perceptions on the part of those at the receiving end: the sending out from the palace of royal officers, who did not arrive unaccompanied, to intervene in the decisions of local courts in such a way as to transfer rights over churches from local patrons to the king, combined with the use of the 'soft' power of royally-selected local church dignitaries to embed royal influence, sent clear messages. It took only another form of intervention, a clumsy attempt by Charlemagne to demand the resumption of stalled marriage negotiations between a West Frankish nobleman and an East Frankish noblewoman, to ignite a revolt led by indignant men 'across the Rhine'.<sup>81</sup>

When Charlemagne, 'mightily angered, sent warriors from his personal following (*satellites*) who in wise and trusty fashion devastated the rebels' estates and properties', the plans of Hardrad and his associates began to unravel. They decided on a hasty visit to the abbey of Fulda, which was under Charlemagne's 'defence'. There Abbot Baugulf 'spoke sweet and peaceful words to them', which could imply a response to a request for his mediation with the king on their behalf. Baugulf, a Rhineland Frank whose previous career as a count had been redirected when Charlemagne appointed him to the abbacy, immediately passed on to Charlemagne all he knew. The king sent a high officer (*legatus*) to bring the rebels in. As they stood before him, admitting that they had plotted his death, 'one of them reportedly said, "If my companions had been put to the test that they shared my thinking, you would never again have been seen crossing to this side of the Rhine alive"'. Though Charlemagne bore this 'with extreme moderation', by a few days later he had made plans of his own:

They [the rebels] were split into groups, some sent to Italy to St Peter's, the rest sent into Neustria and Aquitaine to the bodies [i.e. shrines] of saints, in order, that is, to swear fidelity to the king and his children, and this they are attested to have done. As they were returning from these places, some were detained on the road and their eyes are known to have been torn out. But others reached Worms, were arrested, and then sent into exile, where their eyes are known to have been torn out and all their possessions and estates are known to have been taken into the royal fisc.

Oaths on saints' relics, when required of rebels, could be seen as tantamount to ordeals.<sup>82</sup> These rebels had apparently claimed that, never having sworn oaths of loyalty to Charlemagne, they were absolved from guilt in having plotted his death. In making perjury manifest retrospectively, they authorized their own punishment.

Nevertheless, Charlemagne took seriously the point about the absence of oaths of loyalty: vertical oaths could stabilize the regime by maximizing its consensual base. The suppression of Hardrad's revolt was followed in 789 by prohibition of perjury after an oath sworn, while fasting, on saints' relics, and by instructions for *missi* to organize the swearing of oaths of fidelity by large numbers of men of enough substance to equip themselves for



war and participate in local assemblies.<sup>83</sup> In 802 an enhanced version of the oath was produced, by which each oath-swearer committed himself ‘with pure mind and without fraud’ to *justitia* as defined by his ‘lord’. This oath was to be taken to the emperor by ‘all’.<sup>84</sup> This presupposed both relics’ fairly widespread availability (which could be enhanced by allowing dismemberment of holy bodies), and some royal capacity to order their deployment. Notions of royal ‘appropriation’ and ‘tight control’, though, need some qualification. First, Charlemagne depended on bishops and local clergy to implement and police such decrees as ‘no new saints are to be venerated’.<sup>85</sup> Second and more generally, the regime depended on consensus and compromise on the part of aristocrats and local *mediocres* whose action alone could bridge the gap between royal aims and on-the-ground realities.

## BEING CHRISTIANS

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In 811, in what could (and can) be ‘heard’ as a passionate appeal to bishops and abbots, Charlemagne asked:

What is to be said about those who, allegedly for love of God and the saints and the martyrs and the confessors, transfer the bodies of saints from one place to another, and build new churches there and most pressingly encourage whomever they can to hand over their property to those places. Such a one wants to seem to be performing a good action and to represent himself as becoming through that action well-deserving before God, by which deed and its representation he can persuade bishops: clearly such a thing has been done to acquire *potestas* that belongs to someone else.<sup>86</sup>

Reports had evidently reached the emperor of bishops and abbots engaged in relic transfers for the sake of acquiring, through ‘forceful persuasion’, more property and more control of it. This is just one of a small catalogue of vices said here to have been practised by those who purport to have ‘relinquished the world’ yet have violated St Paul’s injunction, ‘let no-one doing service for God involve himself in worldly affairs [II Tim 2:4]’. The question is repeated: ‘how can a man be said to have relinquished the world if...?’, and the oxymoronic gist is that a churchman who seeks to acquire property by perverting the law, defrauding people, rich or poor, who are ‘simpler in nature and less educated and careful’, and keeping an armed following, cannot be said to be a world-relinquisher.<sup>87</sup> Were such senior churchmen just a few bad apples in an otherwise good basketful? Or did the circumstances of the *saeculum* require bishops, like the judge in Book XIX of Augustine’s *City of God*, to perform public service on the judgement bench even when they knew that injustice inhered in the job? Charlemagne knew very well that handling property and power left churchmen, and bishops in particular, with dirty hands.<sup>88</sup>

At about the same time and in similarly demanding mood, Charlemagne asked the question, ‘to whom does that saying [II Tim. 2:4] relate?’, and enlarged its scope in more questions: ‘what does every Christian say in baptism and what does he renounce?’ ‘When he makes renunciation null and void, what is he following or neglecting instead?’ ‘We have to enquire within ourselves: “Are we really Christians?”’<sup>89</sup> Thinking about what’s entailed in baptism led Charlemagne directly to the question of what a Christian way of life is about, and that was a question that everyone had to answer for himself, each in his own *conversatio* (way of life), be that episcopal, or monastic, or the life of a canon, or indeed lay (this last category is not stated, but Charlemagne elsewhere includes it, and counts are part of his audience here). In 802, the emperor had defined the first of several meanings of the oath of fidelity thus: ‘that everyone is personally to strive to the best of their understanding



and ability, to maintain themselves in God's holy service, according to God's command and his own promise [the chosen word is *sponsio*, the term for what was sworn vicariously by godparents at a baptism], for the lord emperor cannot himself provide the necessary care and discipline for everyone individually'.<sup>90</sup>

Charlemagne's question for each to 'ask within yourself' has struck some historians as strange, impractical, and astonishingly intrusive. In fact it was a familiar question for clergy like Ghaerbald, engaged in internal mission to the long Christian population in the Liègeois. As noted, Ghaerbald found his cue in baptism. Contrast the anonymous author of a little treatise written in Bavaria c.800, *Ratio de catechizandis rudibus*. That author, working in Bavaria, on the religious frontier with the pagan Avars, began, 'If you fully desire to be a Christian, then you can escape the darkness of unbelief. If you can keep the precepts of divine law, you will truly be a Christian (*recte christianus eris*)', and he then continued with the Ten Commandments, and a string of 'Thou shalt not's'.<sup>91</sup> Ghaerbald moved, naturally and positively, to the New Testament, to the Lord's Prayer and the Creed, and in this respect, he followed Augustine's *Instructing Beginners in Faith*, where 'the one who is truly Christian' is 'he who desires to become a Christian so that he will not pass into eternal fire with the Devil but enter into the eternal kingdom together with Christ'.<sup>92</sup> At the heart of the discussions in *palatio regis* in and shortly after 802 was how to realize justice in the new empire. For Charlemagne, written law was a means to articulate norms of conduct, 'encouraging judges to turn themselves into preachers'.<sup>93</sup> Ghaerbald urged faithful men to keep faith with Christ, and so with each other, in a *familiaritas* that foreshadowed the fullest kind of fruition (*perfruitio*) in a heavenly peace.<sup>94</sup>

## RELIGION, MAGIC, AND COLLECTIVE DEFENCE

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In the *Admonitio generalis* (March 789), Charlemagne and his bishops, asking what to do to cope with the imponderable and the inexplicable, found in the Old Testament what *not* to do. 'No-one is to inquire of sooth-sayers or to heed dreams or to practise augury. There is to be no magician or enchanter or consulter with familiar spirits... Further, as regards trees and stones and springs where foolish people place candles or carry out other observances, we command absolutely that this most evil practice, hateful to God, wherever it is found, is to be rooted out and destroyed' (Deut. 18:10, 11).<sup>95</sup> In an age of local communities which looked back to dead holy men but had precious few alive in their midst, who better than bishops and, still more, local priests to root out and destroy the wrong forms of religious self-defence and plant the right ones?

Need evoked local resourcefulness. An example, which is exceptional in being well-documented, is Bishop Mamertus of Vienne's invention of Gallican Rogations when the city was threatened by an earthquake in c.470: penitential processions of massed clergy and laity were organized around the territory during the three days before Ascension, all fasting, 'as a city's confession of guilt, a means of escape from divine wrath... in short as a ritual for an emergency'.<sup>96</sup> Rogations caught on quickly and spread into other regions and to grass-roots level, where, as beatings of the bounds and blessings of the crops, they continued to be organized by priests in rural areas.<sup>97</sup> A severe hailstorm could be every bit as damaging to a harvest as an earthquake. In 815/816, Bishop Agobard of Lyons wrote a treatise 'Against the Absurd Belief of the People concerning Hail and Thunder', detailing and mocking popular beliefs about the power of weather magicians to provoke terrible hailstorms.<sup>98</sup> Attached in most of its thirteen manuscripts (eight of them written in the ninth

century) to the *Admonitio generalis*, and probably close to it in date, is another capitulary of thirty-seven capitula. They consist of sixteen, all very brief, dealing with monastic life, followed by twenty-one addressed to counts and lay *missi*, concerned with matters that straddle the ecclesiastical/lay boundary, mostly, again, very brief, but including a form of the oath of fidelity to be sworn to Charlemagne and his sons (c. 18), and a prohibition of *coniurationes* (c. 26): important matters.<sup>99</sup> At capitula 34 is the following: ‘They are not to baptize bells nor to hang writings on poles against hail’.<sup>100</sup> Who would have been busy with this now banned brand of baptizing, if not a priest? But not *only* a priest, for in this context the shepherd was acting on behalf of his flock, meeting their desperate need for defence against natural disaster.

Bells in local churches (as distinct from houses of monks, nuns or canons) are documented in various parts of Charlemagne’s empire c.800.<sup>101</sup> The key piece of evidence connecting bells with defence against hail-storms is Capitulary 23, capitula 34: ‘that they are not to baptize bells nor hang writings on poles on account of hail’ (*ut cloccas non baptizent nec cartas per perticas appendant propter grandinem*).<sup>102</sup> My suggestion is that the context of this prohibition is the practice, perhaps increasingly widely reported, of ‘baptizing’ bells and the hanging on poles of counter-aggressive prayers (the origins of the later liturgical formulae) against hail. It looks to me as if this practice, resisted by Charlemagne in 789, was acculturated into the liturgy, ‘silently’, as far as texts went, but with suitably noisy effects, during and after Charlemagne’s reign, and that the likely agents of such accommodation, or baptizing, of ‘magic’ were local priests, the silent subjects of the verb *baptizent*.

An important link in the evidential chain is the so-called Pontifical of Archbishop Egbert, written in England in the tenth century, but containing much older material of Frankish origin, beginning with Ghaerbald’s first set of episcopal statutes and including litanies and prayers.<sup>103</sup> The second of two prayers in the rite for the blessing of a church-bell evokes the silver trumpets of Moses which summoned the people and prepared them for war, and continues: ‘May the faithful be invited to their battle-plunder by the striking and sounding of this bell so that when its tune resounds in the ears of the peoples devotion to the Faith may grow in them and may all the assaults of the Enemy be driven far off, and the crash of hailstorms, the blast of whirlwinds, the fury of tempests, the dread thunder-roars, may be rendered more temperate’.<sup>104</sup> Note that the first ‘assault’ is the crash of hailstorms (*fragor grandinum*), and that defence is transformed into counter-attack. No wonder that, like Rogations, baptizing bells against hail became embedded in the liturgical repertoire, and the imaginations, of people living in the empire of the Franks, and far beyond it too.

## WHOSE RELIGION?

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Even before Charlemagne, some of the spokesmen of the Franks had articulated a sense of being special, not just as a distinctive *gens* among other *gentes* that had shaped kingdoms for themselves in former Roman territories, but a *gens electa*, a people chosen by God, and loved by God. The author, c.760, of a new prologue to the Franks’ main law-book seized the chance to celebrate the Franks by contrasting them with the pagan Romans: ‘The bodies of the holy martyrs which the Romans burned...and mutilated...and tore apart...these the Franks have found and enclosed in gold and precious stones...Christ lives who loves the Franks!’<sup>105</sup> The Franks’ special status was connected not just with their special law but with their piety, focussed as that was on the cults of saints’ relics. After 751, led by a new

and demonstratively pious ruling family, the Franks were favoured by successive popes. Embedded in the consciousness of the young Charlemagne were personal experiences of saintly help and divine protection.<sup>106</sup>

Out of those grew his sense of public responsibilities to God and to the faithful Franks. Evidence discussed earlier in this chapter has shown that not just Frankish nobles but many humbler people too sought the protection of the saints, both to mitigate punishment for sin and to create close bonds between themselves and saintly intercessors and personal patrons. These motivations were shared by lordly elites and the men who followed them to war, not to mention the peasants who gave saints their dues and priests their tithes.

Powerful and sensitive accounts of Charlemagne's religion have shown its ethical dimensions, connecting the New Testament to the Old, while prioritizing the New.<sup>107</sup> In the later years of Charlemagne's reign, ethical religion was being promoted more insistently than ever, and not only at the elite, nor only at Franks. *Mediocres* and *pauperes*, typified by widows and orphans, enlisted themselves in the quest for justice. The voice that resounded in 'Questions for Examination', addressing the laity, was the interrogative voice put into the mouth of a royal official, a *missus*: 'I am asking you laymen about what you know and understand of your own law'.<sup>108</sup> The voice echoes Charlemagne's. 'The law', Frankish law, and the laws of the other peoples within Charlemagne's realm, however 'secular' their origins, had come to include a whole raft of additions, conspicuously including religious requirements: in a final item of Examination, laymen are asked to set their sons to learn how to read and write, and to persist until they have become 'well-instructed'. As elsewhere in these post-800 capitularies, the regime was seeking social depth and trans-generational reach, and—with a project that presupposed individual self-help and self-discipline on the widest possible scale—was aiming this at 'all'.

Baptism has been the appropriate connective thread of this chapter, because the *populus christianus* was the community of the baptized, for each one of whom the Lord's Prayer and the Creed represented the starting-point of religious belonging. Knowing and understanding these texts formed a potentially universal obligation but also the access point to salvation. Augustine in *Instructing Beginners* yoked one apostolic message with another: 'the objective of precept [I Tim. 1:5] and the fullness of the law [Rom. 13:10] is love'.<sup>109</sup> 'Fullness' meant at once a fulfilment and a transcending. Alcuin had signposted this new direction to Charlemagne in the later 790s. First in the context of baptism, he quoted Augustine's *Instructing Beginners* on the need for mildness in converting pagan Saxons and Avars, and the feeding of a 'new people' with milk, not meat. *Conversio* was a process that could not be forced.<sup>110</sup> In another letter to Charlemagne, Alcuin wrote of the joy produced by news of a layman's 'blossoming', and he inferred, citing Ecclesiastes 3:1 on times and seasons, that 'this is the time of the laity'.<sup>111</sup> Alcuin was urging a *nova conversio*, the taking up of a new *conversatio*, which Charlemagne himself was to urge after Alcuin's death.<sup>112</sup> In the new oath to be sworn by 'all' in 802 were inserted the words *pura mente*, inspired, perhaps, by the *de corde puro* of I Tim. 1:5, and evoking, in context, its *fide non ficta*, but going beyond that to connect with the individual's God-given reason: a critical change to a critical addition.<sup>113</sup> Christ himself responded to the lawyer's question of how to attain eternal life by endorsing what was written in the Law: 'Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart...and with all thy mind' (Luke 10:27). Changing minds on this scale, especially the minds of the elites on whom Charlemagne relied to put justice into practice, was more than a tall order: many historians have judged it impossible.<sup>114</sup> Apparently Charlemagne thought it *was* possible, when he enjoined righteous keeping of the law along with ethical religion, a religion of love. Does this beggar belief? For Charlemagne, and for

those of his contemporaries who had heard his voice, it *depended* on belief—in the feasibility of a collective changing of minds and hearts.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# NOTES

1. *Life of Gregory II*, c. 11, trans. R. Davis, *The Lives of the Eighth-Century Popes* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1992), 8.
2. Codex Carolinus no. 1, ed. W. Gundlach, MGH Epistolae III (Berlin: MGH, 1892), 476–477.
3. Codex Carolinus no. 3, *ibid.* 479–480.
4. Continuator of Fredegar c. 33, ed. J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar with its Continuations* (London: Nelson, 1960), 102. Hildebrand continued the seventh-century Chronicle of Fredegar; see R. Collins, *Fredegar* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1996), 112–117.
5. Continuator of Fredegar c. 40, 109.
6. *Annales regni Francorum* s.a. 757, ed. F. Kurze, MGH SRG (Hannover: Hahn, 1895), 14–15, trans. B.W. Scholz, *Carolingian Chronicles* (Ann Arbor MI: University of Michigan Press, 1972), 42.
7. Pippin charter no. 16 (13 August 762), ed. E. Mühlbacher, MGH DKar I (Hannover: Hahn, 1906), 21–25, at 22; see J. L. Nelson, ‘Bertrada’, in M. Becher and J. Jarnut, eds, *Die Dynastiewechsel von 751* (Münster: Scriptorium, 2004), 95–98, repr. Nelson, *Courts, Elites and Gendered Power* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), ch. IX, and Nelson, ‘The settings of the gift’, in W. Davies and P. Fouracre, eds, *The Languages of Gift in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 116–148 (at 128–129, and n. 40); S. Airlie, ‘Towards a Carolingian aristocracy’, in Airlie, *Power and its Problems in Carolingian Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate/ Variorum, 2012), ch. II.
8. On Christ’s sandals, see J. M. H. Smith, ‘Rulers and Relics’, in A. Walsham, ed., *Relics and Remains* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 73–96 (at 80), and on Mohammed’s sandal, J. W. Meri, ‘Relics of Piety and Power’, in *ibid.* 96–120 (at 106–112).
9. *Annales regni Francorum* s.a. 767, 24–25, trans. 46. cf. M. McCormick, ‘Byzantium and the West’, in R. McKitterick, ed., *The New Cambridge Medieval History II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 349–380 (at 364–366); T. F. X. Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm and the Carolingians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 140–145.
10. Cont. Fredegar cc. 49–51, 118–19; see M. McCormick, ‘Pippin III’, in Becher and Jarnut, eds, *Dynastiewechsel*, 222–223, 228–241.
11. R. Ettinghausen and O. Grabar, *The Art and Architecture of Islam 650–1250* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 2203, 56–66, 106–125; A. Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2009), 130, 138–141.
12. MGH Capit. I, ed. A. Boretius (Hannover: Hahn, 1883), no. 122, 241–242, from Berlin lat. Fol. 626, fols 30va–31ra; see H. Mordek, *Bibliotheca capitularium regum Francorum manuscripta* (Munich: MGH, 1995), 41, dating 802/805?; A. Dierkens, ‘La christianisation des campagnes de l’empire de Louis le Pieux’, in P. Godman and R. Collins, eds, *Charlemagne’s Heir* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 313, considers 802 more likely.
13. MGH Capit. I, no. 122; closely connected with this are Capit. I, nos. 40 (803), 115–116, and 116 (803), 234–235.
14. W. A. Eckhardt, *Die Kapitulariensammlung Bischof Ghaerbalds von Lüttich* (Göttingen: Musterschmidt, 1955), esp. 130; Mordek, *Bibliotheca*, 34–43.
15. S. Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 79–100 (for the roots of the situation after 900); Dierkens, ‘La christianisation’, 316–318; J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 153–181, with cross-references to continental Christendom.
16. Capit. I, no. 28, c. 52, 78. For the Lord’s Prayer and Creed in Germanic vernaculars, and vernacular sermons, see R. McKitterick, *The Frankish Church and the Carolingian Reforms* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977), 37–38, 187, 184–205; C. Edwards, ‘German Vernacular Literature’, in R. McKitterick, ed., *Carolingian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 14–70, at 144–149; J. McCune, ‘An Edition and Study of Select Sermons from the Carolingian Sermonary of Salzburg’, unpubl. London Ph.D. thesis, 2006. See further H. Mayr-Harting, ‘Charlemagne’s Religion’, in P. Godman, J. Jarnut and P. Johanek, eds, *Am Vorabend der Kaiserkrönung* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2002), 113–124 (at 118–119).
17. M. Innes, ‘Charlemagne, Justice and Written Law’, in A. Rio, ed., *Law, Custom and Justice* (London: Centre for Hellenic Studies, King’s College London, 2011), 155–203, esp. 192 on Capit. I, no. 116, 235.
18. Alcuin, Epp. nos. 110, 111, 134, in E. Dümmler ed, MGH Epistolae IV, 156–159, 159–162, 202–203.
19. S.A. Keefe, *Water and the Word*, 2 vols. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002); Keefe, ‘Creed Commentary Collections in Carolingian Manuscripts’, in K. G. Cushing and R. F. Gyug, eds, *Ritual, Text and Law* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2004), 185–204, esp. 196–202.
20. MGH Epistolae IV, no. 134, 202–203.
21. *Opus Caroli regis contra synodum (Libri Carolini)*, praefatio, MGH Concilia 2, Supp. I, ed. A. Freeman (Hannover: MGH, 1998), 98.

22. J. Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 285–339; A. Angenendt, *Das Frühmittelalter* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1990), 329–331; J. M. H. Smith, ‘Religion and Lay Society’, in McKitterick, ed., *New Cambridge Medieval History II*, 654–678 (at 659–60).
23. See the address-clauses in Codex Carolinus no. 6 (755) to no. 43 (767), and no. 66 (781) to 94 (791).
24. MGH Capit. Episc. I, ed. P. Brommer (Hannover: Hahn, 1984), Ghaerbald, Capit. I, c. 12, 19; Capit. II, c. 3, 26; cf. Theodulf, Capit. I, c. 22, 119; cf. MGH Concilia II, ed. A. Werminghoff (Hannover: Hahn, 1906), Conc. Arles (813), c. 19, 252; Conc. Mainz (813), c. 47, 272.
25. A. Hauck, *Kirchengeschichte Deutschlands*, 4th edn., vol. IV (Leipzig: Heinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1912); A. Fliche and V. Martin, eds, *Histoire de l’Église*, vols. 3–4 (Paris: Bloud and Gay, 1936–37).
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27. Quote from Nelson, ‘Aachen as a Place of Power’, in M. de Jong, F. Theuws and C. van Rhijn, eds, *Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 217–241 (at 224–225), repr. Nelson, *Courts*, ch. XIV.
28. *Annales regni Francorum* s.a. 791, 88, trans. 69; see de Jong, ‘*Sacrum palatium et ecclesia*. L’autorité religieuse royale sous les carolingiens (790–840)’, *Annales HSS* 58 (2003), 1243–69 (at 1255–1256).
29. Maxentius of Aquileia, MGH Epistolae IV, ed. E. Dümmler, Epistolae variorum nos. 27, 538, and 30, 542; Paulinus of Aquileia, cf. Leidrad of Lyons, MGH Epistolae IV, no. 30, 542.
30. K. Bosl, ‘*Potens—pauper*’, in his *Frühformen der Gesellschaft* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1964), 106–135.
31. Hincmar of Rheims, letter from Council of Quierzy to Kings Louis the German and Charles the Bald (858), MGH Concilia IV, ed. W. Hartmann (Hannover: Hahn 1998), no. 41, 426.
32. J. Le Goff, ‘Culture clericale et culture folklorique’, in idem, *Time, Work and Culture*, trans. A. Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). See also the chapter by Smoller, this volume.
33. Angenendt, *Frühmittelalter*, 43–50; cf. M. Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. E. Fischhoff (London: Methuen, 1965).
34. J. Elster, *Rationality and the Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 141–149, 157, and on blushing, nn. 27, 44.
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37. V. Flint, *Religion and the Rise of Magic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); H. Mayr-Harting, ‘Charlemagne’s Religion’, in Godman, Jarnut and Johanek, eds, *Am Vorabend*, 113–124; Smith, ‘*Religion and Lay Society*’; J. M. H. Smith, ‘Einhard: the Sinner and the Saints’, *TRHS* 6th ser. 13 (2003), 55–77; and J. M. H. Smith, *Europe after Rome: A New Cultural History 500–1000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 242, 268–277.
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39. Mayr-Harting, ‘*Charlemagne’s Religion*’; Nelson, ‘The Voice of Charlemagne’, in R. Gameson and H. Leyser, eds, *Belief and Culture in the Middle Ages. Studies Presented to Henry Mayr-Harting* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 76–88.
40. Lynch, *Godparents*.
41. Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici Imperatoris* c. 36, ed E. Tremp, MGH SRG 64 (Hannover: Hahn, 1995), 597; the relationship might have qualified Bernard to marry at the palace of Aachen in 824, P. Depreux, *Prosopographie de l’entourage de Louis le Pieux* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1997), 137.
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43. Nithard, *Histoires* II, 1, 46.
44. See S. Hamilton, *The Practice of Penance* (London: Royal Historical Society, 2001); P. Biller and A. Minnis, eds, *Handling Sin in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1998); D.R. Bachrach, ‘Confession in the *Regnum Francorum*’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 54 (2003), 3–22. cf. above, n. 14, and chapter by Meens, this volume.
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  49. MGH Capit. no. 33, c. 17, 94–5; no. 23, c. 19, 63.
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  52. S. Wood, *The Proprietary Church in the Medieval West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), esp. 214–235.
  53. Charlemagne, Ep. to Queen Fastrada, MGH Epistolae IV, Epp. variorum no. 20, 528–529, trans. P. D. King, *Charlemagne: Translated Sources* (Kendal: P. D. King, 1986), 309–310; McCormick, ‘Liturgy’.
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  55. M. Innes, *State and Society in the Middle Ages: The Middle Rhine Valley 400–1000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 13–68; M. Costambeys, M. Innes and S. MacLean, *The Carolingian World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 110–130.
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  59. D. Ganz, ‘Giving to God’, in Davies and Fouracre, eds, *Languages of Gift*, 18–32.
  60. Alcuin, Epp. 110, to Charlemagne, 156–159, 111, to Meginfred, 159–662, partial trans. King, *Charlemagne. Translated Sources*, 315–317.
  61. MGH Capit. no. 21, 51–52, trans. King, *Charlemagne*, 223–224 (accepting the MGH editor’s dating of 793), but now convincingly redated to March 779: see for what follows, H. Mordek, ‘Karls des Großen zweites Kapitular von Herstal und die Hungersnot der Jahre 778/779’, *Deutsches Archiv* 61 (2005), 1–52, with new edition 44–52.
  62. See Mordek, ‘Karls des Großen zweites Kapitular’, 17.
  63. S. Hindle, ‘Dearth, Fasting and Alms: The Campaign for General Hospitality in late Elizabethan England’, *Past & Present* 172 (2000), 44–86.
  64. Codex Carolinus no. 76, 607–608.
  65. A. Verhulst, ‘Karolingische Agrarpolitik’, *Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie* 13 (1965), 175–189, repr. Verhulst, *Rural and Urban Aspects of Early Medieval Northwest Europe* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1992), ch. VI.
  66. Wood, *Proprietary Church*, 33–48, 448, 486–488, 519–521, 556, 789–792.
  67. Rule of Chrodegang, cc. 31–32, 34, *Institutio Canonum* (816), c. 141, ed. J. Bertram, *The Chrodegang Rules* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 46–51, 124–125, trans. 76–83, 166–167.
  68. J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 37–38, 124–126, 160–165; H. Mordek, “Quod si se non emendent, excommunicentur”, in Cushing and Gyug, eds, *Ritual, Text and Law*, 170–183 (at 177–178), cross-referencing difficulties of supervising small groups of canons in rural churches, *Capitulare missorum generale* (802), MGH Capit. I, no. 33, c. 22, 95–96.
  69. M. M. Hildebrandt, *The External School in Carolingian Society* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 115–129.
  70. R. McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 115–117.
  71. Smith, ‘Religion and Lay Society’, 673–675; Blair, *Church*, 241–245; M. Lauwers, *Naissance du cimetière* (Paris: Aubier, 2005), 30–31, 98–99, 140–141. For some methodological problems, see E. Zadora-Rio, ‘The Making of Churchyards and Parish Territories in the Early Medieval Landscape of France and England in the 7th–12th Centuries: A Reconsideration’, *Medieval Archaeology* 47 (2003), 1–19.
  72. M. Becher, *Eid und Herrschaft. Untersuchungen zum Herrscherethos Karls des Großen* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1993), 144–175; S. Esders and H.J. Mierau, *Der althochdeutsche Klerikereid. Bischöfliche Diözesangewalt, kirchliches Benefizialwesen und volksprachliche Rechtspraxis im frühmittelalterliche Baiern* (Hannover: Hahn, 2000), 21–39, 169–182, 270–273, establishing the context for such oaths in the diocese of Freising in the early ninth century.

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75. MGH Capit. I, no. 23, Double Edict for *missi* (789), c. 26, 64; Hincmar of Rheims, *Capitula* (852) c. 16, in MGH Capit. Episc. II, ed. R. Pokorny and M. Stratmann (Hannover: Hahn, 1995), 43–44.
76. [Becher, Eid](#), 98, 103–104, 180–189 (the reference at n. 929 should be to p. 98, not n. 98): for Becher, 188, key evidence is Formulary of Marculf I, 40, ed. K. Zeumer, MGH Form (Hannover: Hahn, 1886), 68, trans. A. Rio, *The Formularies of Angers and Marculf* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), 175–176: *pagenses* are to swear *fidelitas* to the king’s son via a royal envoy sent out for the purpose, ‘in the places of the saints and/or (*vel*) on the relics which we have sent there through [our envoy]’.
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80. [Wood, Proprietary Church](#), 226.
81. For the story, and the quotations that follow, see *Annales Nazariani* s.a. 786, MGH SS I, 42–43; for comment, see R. McKitterick, *Perceptions of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Notre Dame IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2006), 68–89; and J. L. Nelson, ‘Opposition to Charlemagne’, the 2008 Annual Lecture, German Historical Institute (London: German Historical Institute, 2009), 5–34 (at 13–25).
82. [Nelson, ‘Opposition’](#), 21.
83. MGH Capit. no. 22 (*Admonitio generalis*), c. 64, 58; no. 25 (*Capitulare missorum*), 66–7, and for the date, see [Becher, Eid](#), 79–87.
84. MGH Capit. no. 33 (*Capitulare missorum generale*), c. 2, 3, 92; no. 34 (*Capitularia missorum specialia*), c. 1, 100, and oath-formulae, 101–102. See Matthew Innes, ‘Charlemagne, Justice and Written Law’, in A. Rio, ed., *Law, Custom, and Justice in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (London: Centre for Hellenic Studies, King’s College London, 2011), 155–203.
85. MGH Capit. no. 28, c. 42, p. 77.
86. MGH Capit. no. 72, c. 7, 163; see [Nelson, ‘Voice’](#), 82; and, for context, [Patzold, Episcopus](#), 72–80.
87. Capit. no. 72, cc. 3–6, 8, 162–163, esp. c. 5 on terrible social consequences.
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89. MGH Capit. no. 71, 161–162.
90. MGH Capit. no. 33, c. 3, 92.
91. [Smith, ‘Religion and Lay Society’](#), 660.
92. The title of Augustine’s *De catechizandis rudibus* is admirably rendered by R. Canning’s translation, *Instructing Beginners in Faith* (New York: New City Press, 2006); see specifically I, 4, 7, 67.
93. [Innes, ‘Charlemagne, Justice and Written Law’](#), 185; [Patzold, ‘Normen im Buch’](#), *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 41 (2007), 331–350. The reference to discussions involving laity with clergy in *palatio regis* echoes MGH Capit. I, no. 116, cc. 11, 12, 235.
94. *Instructing Beginners*, I, 4, 7, 68, dwells on ‘the love which people enjoy for one another in the exchanges of close friendship (*quo invicem homines mutuale familiaritate perfruuntur*)’; cf. Augustine’s *De civitate Dei* XIX, 17, on ‘*societas fruendi Deo et invicem in Deo*’, trans. R.W. Dyson, 947: ‘[the Heavenly City directs that earthly peace towards heavenly peace... which is] a fellowship in the enjoyment of God and of one another in God’.
95. Capit I, no. 22, c. 65, addressed ‘to all’.
96. The commentary is that of Wallace-Hadrill, *Frankish Church*, 11, on Avitus of Vienne’s Homily VI, ed. R. Peiper, MGH AA VI, 2 (Berlin, 1883), 110–112, trans. D. Shanzer and I. Wood, *Avitus of Vienne. Letters and Selected Prose* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002), 381–388.
97. For ‘cross-days’ in the Liègeois, [Dierkens, ‘La christianisation’](#), 326–327; for modern parallels, B. Bushaway, *By Rite. Custom, Ceremony and Community in England 1700–1880* (London: Junction Books, 1982), 49, 81–88.
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99. Capit. no. 23, cc. 18, 26, 63–64.

100. Capit. no. 23, c. 34, 64.
101. Ghaerbald of Liège, Capitula c. 2, MGH Capit. Episc. I, 17; Council of Friuli (796/7). c. 13, ed. A. Werminghoff, MGH Concilia II, i, (Hannover: Hahn, 1906), 194; Brevium Exempla, Staffelsee, dioc. Augsburg (c. 810), c. 3, ed. Boretius, MGH Capit. I, no. 128, 251.
102. Capit. 23, c. 34. Among the near flawless translations of King, *Charlemagne*, here is a rare error in c. 34 of Cap. 23: ‘That people are not to baptize bells and not to hang writings on rods on account of pregnancy’. On bells, see [Dutton, ‘Thunder’](#), and J. H. Arnold and C. Goodson, ‘Resounding Community: the History and Meaning of Medieval Church Bells’, *Viator* 43 (2012), 99–130, though neither paper mentions this capitulum.
103. Paris BNF, MS lat. 1575, ed. H. M. J. Banting, *Two Anglo-Saxon Pontificals*, Henry Bradshaw Society 104 (London, 1989), xxvi–xxxii (on litanies and prayers). N. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), 441–442, dated the manuscript to the mid-tenth century, but D. Dumville, ‘On the Dating of Some Anglo-Saxon Liturgical Manuscripts’, *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 10 (1991), 40–58, to the end of the tenth century; for the identification of Ghaerbald’s capitula in the MS, see Brommer, MGH Capit. Episc. I, 8.
104. [Banting, ed., \*Two Anglo-Saxon Pontificals\*](#), 125–127; [Arnold and Goodson, ‘Resounding Community’](#), 119.
105. *Lex Salica: 100-Titel Text, short prologue*, ed. K. A. Eckhardt, MGH Leg. nat. germ. IV, ii (Hanover: Hahn, 1969), 8–9.
106. [Nelson, ‘The Voice of Charlemagne’](#); Nelson, ‘Charlemagne the Man’, in Story, ed., *Charlemagne*, 22–37.
107. [Mayr-Harting, ‘Charlemagne’s Religion’](#); [Mordek and M. Glatthaar, ‘Von Wahrsagerinnen und Zaubern’](#); [Hartmann, \*Karl der Grosse\*](#), 159–163.
108. Capit. I, no. 116, 234–235, in Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, MS lat. 14727, fols 139r–140r, with, immediately following, Theodulf’s first set of episcopal statutes, the whole part from f. 139–f. 170 palaeographically datable to the beginning of the ninth century. See [Mordek, \*Bibliotheca\*](#), 345–348.
109. *De catechizandis rudibus* I, 4, 7. The passage from Tim. 1 is worth citing in full: (v. 3): ‘Sicut rogavi te... ut denuntiares quibusdam ne aliter docerent, (v. 4) ne intenderent fabulis, et genealogiis interminatis, quae quaestiones praestant magis quam aedificationem Dei, quae est in fide. (v. 5) Finis autem praecepti est caritas de corde puro, et conscientia bona, et fide non ficta’. cf. above and n. 94.
110. Ep. 110 (to Charlemagne), 157–158 (also citing I Cor.3: 1–2); cf. above n. 18 and n. 60.
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# CHAPTER 29

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# PAPAL AUTHORITY AND ITS LIMITATIONS

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KATHLEEN G. CUSHING

## INTRODUCTION

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IN 595 Pope Gregory I (590–604) appointed Augustine, a brother from his former monastery on the Caelian Hill, to lead a group of monks on a mission to bring the word of God to the English. According to Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (which is not without its flaws regarding the conversion of Anglo-Saxon England) this legation did not begin auspiciously and the monks 'began to contemplate returning home rather than going to a barbarous, fierce and unbelieving nation whose language they did not even understand'.<sup>1</sup> Fortified by a letter from the pope and with help from Frankish bishops, Augustine arrived in England where the mission was properly launched with the support of Ethelbert of Kent.

The extent to which Augustine was prepared for the mission to convert the English has in the past been called into question by a letter of Gregory I dated July 601 in which the pope responded to a number of questions sent to him by Augustine. This letter, known as the *Libellus responsionum* and extant in some 200 manuscripts (often transmitted with penitentials, as well as being included in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*), presented the pope's exposition on a number of matters of faith, doctrine and Christian practice including baptism, the Eucharist, marriage and consanguinity, as well as liturgical practice.<sup>2</sup> We find similar later texts, such as the exchange that took place in 726 between Pope Gregory II (715–731) and Boniface, in which the pope provided clarification on matters concerning marriage, consanguinity, the sacraments and clerical discipline,<sup>3</sup> or the *Responsa ad consulta Bulgarorum* of 866 sent by Pope Nicholas I (858–867) to Bulgarians at the request of Boris I which proffered similar advice on matters of orthodox belief and practice, notably marriage.<sup>4</sup>

The *Libellus responsionum* offers a familiar image of the pope as the highest authority of the medieval Latin Church, setting as well as clarifying normative Christian belief and practice. The above noted letters of Gregory I and the other pontiffs clearly underline what was perhaps the fundamental duty of the pope: as guardian of the Christian faith, it was his obligation to pronounce and explicate what was held and what was to be taught by the holy and apostolic Roman Church.<sup>5</sup> Pope Gregory VII (1073–85), for instance, emphasized this role when he wrote to the bishops and abbots of Brittany in 1074, noting that the duties of papal office required not only that he oversee the affairs of all the churches but also that he ensure that correct faith and the dictates of scripture were maintained.<sup>6</sup> Gregory VII was by no means innovative in this respect as an emphasis on this fundamental dimension of papal authority went back to the early Church. This is nowhere more apparent than in what is regarded as one of the earliest examples of papal law, namely the letter of Pope Siricius (384–389) to Bishop Himerius of Tarragona, whose diocese was apparently struggling with heterodoxy, disciplinary problems and a search for norms by which to operate. Siricius wrote that: 'For in view of our office there is no freedom for us, on whom a zeal for the

Christian religion is incumbent greater than on all others, to dissimulate or to be silent'.<sup>7</sup> This letter or papal decretal as it is known clarified the decisions of his predecessors (to whom Himerius had appealed) and also prescribed 'definitive' rulings on a range of matters including re-baptism, those lapsing from the faith, consanguinity, marriage and clerical discipline. Siricius' decretal, moreover, offered an ecclesiology that emphasized both the dignity and the authority of the Roman pontiff (whose authority he described as on a par with conciliar decrees) as well as the duty of others to recognize that status. Indeed the pope concluded by urging Himerius to transmit his replies throughout his diocese and beyond.

Yet Siricius' letter, much like the *Libellus responsionum* or the letters of Gregory II and Nicholas I, was simply that: a response (*rescript*) to a request for clarification from the localities, a request that had been generated by local concerns. In other words, whilst these examples—to which many others could be added—show the papacy as the custodian of orthodox belief and the definer of canonical norms, they also highlight the limits of papal authority.<sup>8</sup> In the early Church and indeed throughout the middle ages, the most authoritative pronouncements were seen to derive from the decisions of the great ecumenical councils such as Nicaea (325), Constantinople I (381), Chalcedon (451) and Nicaea II (787). These were councils that were generally convened by the emperor, that were seen to operate under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and at which the pope was not always personally in attendance. Further substantive ecclesiastical law was made by the Roman emperors such as Theodosius and Justinian, and in the Frankish and Visigothic kingdoms by regional councils and synods whose legislation was confirmed by royal power, and whose canons were often disseminated in royal and later also in episcopal capitularies particularly in the Carolingian Empire. Although popes from Siricius onwards were clearly conscious of their role as 'legislators' and definers of Christian belief and practice, more often than not authoritative pronouncements originated not in Rome—at the see of St Peter—but in response to external requests, as part of an engagement with other traditions of ecclesiastical law and even more so as part of a process of consultation with ecclesiastical officials throughout Latin Europe.

When Pope Leo I (440–461) identified the Church as the *corpus Christi* or Body of Christ and equated the papacy with its *caput* or head, he provided his successors on the papal throne with a concept of authority—the *plenitudo potestatis* (fullness of power)—that, with refinements by his successors, made the pope the ultimate earthly judge, who could himself be judged by no one save God. The development of papal authority both in theory and especially in practice in subsequent centuries, however, was an erratic process, subject to frequent reversals, that depended not merely on any individual pope's political position and standing within Latin Europe, but also on his ability to maintain and extend that authority. Throughout the middle ages after all, the papacy chiefly operated what has been termed by Karl Leyser 'a customer's service': not only did papal legislation as noted above often come in the form of rescripts to letters from the localities, but papal privileges for monasteries, bishoprics, churches and also bulls of canonization often originated outside Rome.<sup>9</sup> Even at its 'height' under Alexander III (1159–81), Innocent III (1198–1216), and Boniface VIII (1294–1303), the papacy operated through a range of changing structures and personnel. The medieval papacy had to contend with powerful if truculent rulers and aristocrats such as Charlemagne, Henry IV of Germany, William the Conqueror, Robert Guiscard, Roger II of Sicily, Frederick II, or Philip IV of France, whose support could not necessarily be counted on. At the same time, the popes had to face opponents and obstacles within the ecclesiastical hierarchy itself: not only were they often vexed by worldly, inadequate or simply unhelpful bishops, but lesser clergy also presented a whole range of disciplinary and other problems, as did papal legates such as Hugh of Die (1075–85, 1094–

9) who over-extended their jurisdiction or simply failed to implement papal initiatives. Monastic orders required a watchful eye and the Franciscan and Dominican orders who were directly approved by papal authority in 1209 and 1216 often needed to be reined in. Furthermore, as the business and complexity of papal administration and appellate procedures—involving ever more personnel and offices—grew especially from the twelfth century, there were lax, overzealous and avaricious cardinals to be watched and reprimanded, as well as a whole host of functionaries whose positions and responsibilities needed definition. The teaching of Roman and canon law in the schools of Bologna and elsewhere from the second quarter of the twelfth century, the professionalization of legal learning and a swelling in the business of ecclesiastical courts further added to papal burdens, as would the emerging universities at the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth centuries. In addition, as if the above was not enough, there was the historically consistent and perennially bad behaviour of the Romans with which to contend.

This chapter examines the changing nature of papal authority in the middle ages chiefly by focussing on its limitations, its indirect manifestations and the extent to which popes needed to be negotiators, communicators and indeed intercessors between the centre and the peripheries. Whilst, as will be seen, the papacy developed a range of mechanisms by which it could extend its jurisdiction into the localities especially from the eleventh century onwards, the papacy would often find it difficult to control its representatives in the world beyond Rome. Maintaining a balance between their own political survival and their response to the pastoral needs of the wider *familia* of the *societas christiana* was a challenge that, as will be seen, few popes were able completely to meet.

## PAPAL AUTHORITY IN THE EARLIER MIDDLE AGES

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The historical foundation of the Church was described in Matthew 16, verses 18–19:

[Y]ou are Peter and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it; and to you I give the keys of the kingdom of heaven and whatsoever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatsoever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

This was understood by early church writers as the foundation both of the papacy and of papal authority. The nature of this so-called Petrine commission, however, was a matter of much debate in the early Church with questions arising as to whether the power of the keys had been committed specifically to Peter or was shared among all the apostles (implicit, as some writers argued, in John 21:15–17). Beyond this, there was also the worrying question of whether or not this authority was in fact inherited by Peter's successors, an issue compounded by the fact that there was no consensus on the actual chronology of Peter's immediate successors to the papal throne. Indeed it was not until the mid-fifth century that Pope Leo I definitively established, via an appeal to Roman law, that a duly elected pope was Peter's heir (albeit an unworthy one—*indignus haeres beati Petri*) who succeeded to the same authority although not to the same personal merit. Leo I was influential in the development of justifications of papal authority in other ways, not least of all in the ramifications of his equation of the papacy with the head (*caput*) of the *corpus Christi* whilst describing the other churches as its limbs or *membra*. Leo's theory did not of course end the matter: bishops who saw themselves as heirs of the apostles sharing in the power of the keys, would continue to challenge at different times and places the idea that their authority was somehow less than that of the pope.



The development of papal authority in the early Church was also conditioned by elements without the Church. After the conversion of Constantine at the battle of Milvian Bridge in 312, both the Church and the papacy evolved in the context of a world dominated by the Roman Empire, and ruled by an emperor whose authority had formerly been absolute in secular as well as religious matters. With the official acceptance of Christianity, this political reality shifted: the emperor was still the special protector of the Church but had also crucially become, as Ambrose contended, her son (*filius*) and, in theory at least, was subject to the Church's authority in religious and moral matters. The precise nature of the relationship between ecclesiastical and especially papal authority and royal power, however, was far from precise. In the late fifth century Gelasius I (492–496) offered a powerful if problematic description in his letter to Emperor Anastasius in which he contended that the world was ruled by two powers: the sacred authority of bishops and the royal power. Gelasius then went on to conclude that priestly authority was the weightier insofar as priests would be answerable for the souls of all men including kings at the final judgment.<sup>10</sup> Gelasius' ideas about the relationship of the two powers, which he conceded should work together in mutual co-operation, afforded the papacy in theory at least a formidable authority to which both it and its opponents would turn in subsequent centuries. Although Gelasius' intention was clearly to underline the superiority of the clergy in religious matters (indeed he expressly denied a role for the clergy, including the pope, in secular government), he nonetheless provided considerable ammunition for those such as Gregory VII, Innocent III and Boniface VIII who sought to assert such prerogatives by claiming not only that the papacy directly wielded the spiritual sword, but also that it exercised the material sword in the interests of the Church.

By the mid-fifth century Rome was regarded as the 'head of the world' (*caput orbis*) by virtue of its being the seat of St Peter. In reality though, and perhaps especially with the collapse of the Roman Empire and the fragmentation of the West in the centuries before and after the coronation of Charlemagne in 800, papal headship of the Church and with it papal authority was much more limited. The pope, as bishop of Rome, was in many ways the 'first among equals' (*primus inter pares*) even if special concession was afforded to the pope by virtue of his succession to St Peter's See. Although some popes, especially in the ninth century, used the title *papa* to refer to themselves in letters and decretals, this was relatively rare before the later eleventh century. More commonly, the popes simply used their papal name, for example, *Gregorius*, and referred to themselves as *episcopus* (bishop), often complementing this with the self-humbling epithet *servus dei* (servant of God) or the even more emphatic *servus servorum dei* (servant of the servants of God). For many, the pope was thus effectively another bishop even if he held certain jurisdictional privileges of convoking general or universal councils (in theory at least), creating new dioceses and especially archbishoprics, judging and translating bishops and presiding over imperial coronations. Although he maintained an impressive jurisdictional authority and had at his disposal a number of important spiritual sanctions such as excommunication and interdict (even if bishops would also claim a share of these powers of binding and loosing), in many ways the pope, as Duchesne memorably put it many years ago, was 'the high-priest of the Roman pilgrimage, the dispenser of benedictions, privileges and anathemas'.<sup>11</sup> In other words, he was an indispensable, but limited, and, above all, *spiritual* power. Although the ninth-century forgery, the Donation of Constantine, appeared to grant political power to the pope in Italy, before the eleventh century the pope essentially remained a spiritual leader, bishop of his city with little consistent authority beyond its environs. Indeed in many ways the papacy was effectively just one localized centre of power in a Latin West made of local centres of power. There were no sustained attempts by pre-eleventh-century popes to

arrogate to themselves ‘political’ power as universal leaders beyond their claims to universality in spiritual terms as heirs of the *princeps apostolorum*.

This is not to suggest that the pope lacked real practical power. Indeed, it is important to be sensitive to the various ways that papal authority was manifested not just through deliberative or direct means but also and often crucially in an indirect fashion. One important indicator of deference to the pope and papal authority throughout the earlier middle ages came in the form of requests to supply relics of the Roman martyrs for churches throughout the West, especially after the synods of Frankfurt (774) and Mainz (813) stipulated that saints’ relics were required for the consecration of churches. Perhaps even more compelling was the interest in and requests for ‘Roman’ legal and liturgical books. Charlemagne’s acquisition of a ‘Roman’ sacramentary—the so-called Gregorian Sacramentary—in 784 was by no means the first transmission of Roman liturgical books to the Frankish kingdom. There is ample evidence for a range of personal and more official requests for Roman books for Christianizing missions (in the case of Boniface) and Alcuin (c.735–804) seems to have acquired some version of Gregory I’s letters from Rome. Charlemagne acquired a range of other codices containing the *Liber pontificalis* and exegetical works of the Greek Fathers after 800 from Leo III (795–816). Post-conversion England in particular seems to have had an especially high regard for Roman transmission as evinced by Bede who commented upon the ‘very many codices’ sent to England by Gregory I, which seem to have been part of the foundation of the library at Canterbury. The founder of the abbey at Wearmouth-Jarrow, Benedict Biscop (c.628–690), moreover, on multiple trips to Rome apparently acquired copies of innumerable books, along with relics and a papal privilege.

Given the rather dubious quality of Roman libraries from the time of Gregory I onwards and thus the extent of the papacy’s ability to supply materials must make us question whether the books reaching other parts of Europe were actually ‘Roman’. The papal practice of disseminating its own books from the time of Gregory I was carried out so vigorously that materials often could not be found in Rome, for instance a Latin version of the decrees of the second Council of Constantinople as noted in letter of Pope Martin I in 649.<sup>12</sup> Over three centuries later, Pope Sylvester II (999–1003) would lament that he was unable to make a judgment about a particular problem because he did not have those authorities in books available in Rome.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the extent to which these books making their way from Rome were authentic papal and Roman works is clearly problematic. The version of the Gregorian Sacramentary sent to Charlemagne by Hadrian I (772–795) in no way offered a strictly Roman liturgical standard but engaged with a range of traditions. In the same way, the canon law collection known as the *Collectio Dionysio-Hadriana* which Charlemagne requested from Hadrian I in 774, or the unhelpfully named *Romano-Germanic Pontifical*—itself once thought to have been composed in Mainz c.950, though now thought probably never to have been part of a uniform transmission—suggest that putative ‘Roman’ books were works that often originated north of the Alps. None of these realities, however, should detract from the significance of these and ongoing requests. Whilst Carolingian and other appeals to ‘Roman’ traditions were probably as much a part of their own reform efforts, it is clear that ‘Roman’ things mattered both to the papacy and rulers beyond Rome. Rome, after all, represented the centre of spiritual life and was seen as the guardian of pagan and Christian learning. Rulers and churchmen who requested these materials were appealing to a real or imaginary vestige of that Roman tradition of which the popes were seen as custodians. Although the requests from north of the Alps were clearly perceived by the papacy as a readiness to accept the authority of the pope, having ‘Roman’, and hence papal custom mattered just as much to the rulers who requested such materials

even if these Roman traditions were refined by engagement with local church practice.<sup>14</sup> The same would later be true in architecture, where the idea of *more romano* ('Romanic custom') in crypt and church design set specific standards of appropriateness and universal suitability.

Another significant if indirect acknowledgement of papal authority can be seen in the increasing papal confirmation of grants of immunity and exemptions as well as papal *tuitio* (protection) for monasteries.<sup>15</sup> Although it must be conceded these and other privileges like that granted to Fleury by Gregory V in 996 or to Cluny in 1024 by John XIX were made in response to external requests, the mere fact that religious institutions increasingly bypassed local authorities and appealed directly to Rome is indicative of the growing significance that Rome and papal sanction played in clerical and monastic perceptions.<sup>16</sup> Appeals to the papacy to settle disputes between competing religious institutions that could otherwise not be resolved also points, if indirectly, to an increasing prestige. Most cases brought to Rome involved complicated disputes over property and rights and by the twelfth century the pressure of such business led the papacy first to the practice of using judge-delegates and sub-delegates to hear the bulk of minor cases in the localities though litigants with sufficient means could still bring cases to the apostolic chancery court, the *audientia sacri palatii*. From the thirteenth century, there would be increasing attempts to limit appeals to Rome, notably by Pope Innocent III, who urged that only the most problematic cases should have full scrutiny at Rome.

Papal prestige and power was increasingly apparent in other ways. The pronouncement in favour of Otto I's long desired foundation of an archbishopric at Magdeburg in 962 by John XII or Benedict VIII's privilege in 1013 for Henry II's much cherished project for a new bishopric in Bamberg, although again prompted by external petitions, were important manifestations of papal authority over against the political strategies of the emperors who could not proceed in such matters without papal confirmation, even if it meant, as in Otto I's case, waiting many years.<sup>17</sup>

These indirect manifestations of papal authority were increasingly accompanied by direct extensions of that power. For instance, the increasing requirement demanded by the eleventh-century reform papacy that all new archbishops travel to Rome to swear an oath to the pope and receive the *pallium*—the stole that was the visible symbol of the archbishop's jurisdiction—from him in person not only emphasized the authority of the pope but also his superiority over the other bishops. The increasing grant of the *pallium* to favoured bishops was clearly also a tactic in strengthening papal control over the hierarchy as was the increasing demand that higher clergy periodically make visits *ad limina apostolorum* (i.e. to the tombs of the apostles in Rome). The extent to which this papal 'heavy-handedness' was resented in episcopal quarters was nowhere more apparent than in Archbishop Liemar of Bremen's letter to Hezilo of Hildesheim in 1075 in which he complained of papal intrusions into time-honoured episcopal prerogatives and called Gregory VII a 'dangerous man' who ordered bishops about as though they were his bailiffs (*ut villicis suis*).<sup>18</sup>

## PAPAL AUTHORITY IN PRACTICE

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Although modern scholars have described the period c. 1050–c.1250 as the growth of a 'papal monarchy', envisaging the evolution and development of centralized institutions as mechanisms that enabled ever-growing papal supervision over the affairs of the Western Church and its peoples, such labels are arguably far too sweeping for characterizing the



type of power that the papacy actually exercised. That said, as the effects of tenth-century invasions began to recede and western European society slowly re-emerged from the effects of a disintegrating Carolingian world order, new opportunities for consolidation and stability appeared. For contemporaries such as the Cluniac chronicler, Rodulf Glaber, 'it seemed as if the whole world was shaking itself free, shrugging off the burden of the past'.<sup>19</sup> During the course of the eleventh century, the papacy was quick to seize the initiative to take advantage of and even direct wide-ranging religious reform and social change.<sup>20</sup>

From the second half of the eleventh century, the papacy has been credited with a more outward-looking character. Ironically the impetus for this transformation came from the German king, Henry III, who intervened decisively in the affairs of the Church in 1046 to settle a problematic papal schism at the synod of Sutri. The establishment of a series of reform-minded popes, in particular Leo IX (1049–55), Nicholas II (1059–63), Alexander II (1063–73), Gregory VII (1073–85), Urban II (1089–99), Paschal II (1099–1118) and Callixtus II (1119–24) made for a dramatic transformation in the nature of the papacy from being a passive (if nonetheless vital) entity acting in a responsive mode to external forces, towards one that sought, where possible, to seize the initiative to extend its authority. This transformation was achieved at much cost both to individual popes and to the relationship between the papacy and secular powers, especially the German emperor.

One of the earliest flashpoints came in 1058–9 when a small group of reformers, refusing to accept the election at Rome of Cardinal-Bishop John of Velletri as Pope Benedict X, elected instead Bishop Gerard of Florence as Pope Nicholas II in Siena. In order to legitimize Nicholas II's election, the reformers moved quickly to promulgate a decree on papal elections, stipulating that the election of a pope (for which there was surprisingly no clear guidance in canon law other than the *ordo* of 769 that said the election was the business of the Romans) was to be decided by the cardinals. The decree, moreover, not only ignored the rights that the emperors had accumulated since the time of Charlemagne, but it also reduced the role of the Roman clergy and people to that of acclamation. Although these stipulations were almost never followed in practice in subsequent elections, the decree was nonetheless an important statement of independence on the part of the papacy both from imperial interests and those of the Roman aristocracy who had for so long manipulated papal elections to their own advantage. Whilst the decree did concede to the infant King Henry IV of Germany 'due honour and dignity', it did so as a concession and not as an automatic right.<sup>21</sup>

Although it is unlikely that the framers of the decree intended to exclude the emperor from any role in papal elections, the wording suggested a fundamental change in the attitude of the papacy and its supporters. With the young king destined for a long minority, it is clear that the reform papacy was beginning to see imperial interest as merely one of the political forces, and not necessarily the most powerful, to be taken into account. The simultaneous papal alliance with the Norman rulers of southern Italy, Robert Guiscard and Richard of Capua, who were described as *fideles sancti Petri* (faithful ones of St Peter) and thus effectively as papal vassals only reinforced this new dispensation as did similar rapprochement with other secular princes such as Duke William of Normandy before the invasion of England in 1066. Gregory VII in particular would energetically seek alliances with rulers on the periphery such as Duke Wratislav of Bohemia, Duke Boleslav II of Poland, King Sweyn Estrithson of Denmark, King William I of England and King Sancho I Ramirez among others. His objective in making these new alliances was at once political, judicial, and pastoral. By fostering connections with kingdoms on the periphery with a habit of obedience to the papacy, he sought to establish some sort of balance of power thereby

keeping the German emperors in check. Gregory clearly also looked to underline the role of the papacy as the moderator of disputes within and between kingdoms and principalities, a role he would unsuccessfully claim after 1075 in the German Empire. It must be underlined as well that Gregory's perhaps overriding ambition in this was a pastoral one, namely that of securing obedience to St Peter and propagating the Christian faith in a universal context.

The pontificate of Gregory VII has long been seen as particularly important for the articulation of papal authority.<sup>22</sup> The enigmatic and much-debated *Dictatus papae*, the twenty-seven sentences inserted into his *Register*, outlined an uncompromising statement of papal prerogatives including stipulations that the pope had the right: to depose and reinstate bishops; to depose the absent; that he could be judged by no one; that he could depose emperors and absolve subjects from their sworn oaths of fidelity.<sup>23</sup> The deteriorating relationship between Gregory and the German King Henry IV throughout 1075 over the promotion of reform and particular the question of lay investiture, first emerging in the election of a new archbishop in Milan, led Gregory to throw down the gauntlet in letter to the king in December 1075. Henry's response was to summon a synod of German bishops at Worms in January 1076 who renounced their obedience to the pope whilst the king charged the pope with having stolen his hereditary privileges, threatening his life and office and he commanded Gregory to descend from the throne of St Peter. In February at the Lenten synod in Rome, Gregory responded by excommunicating the king, declaring his kingship void, and absolving all Christians of the oaths of fidelity that they had sworn to the king.

The following months revealed however that the king had seriously overestimated the strength of his position. Henry had been battling with the German princes since 1073 and the nobles moved quickly to support the papacy. The moral force of Gregory's condemnation clearly had a persuasive impact and even the German bishops who had renounced Gregory at the synod of Worms quickly began to desert the royal cause to seek the pope's pardon. Facing the combined pressure of nobles and bishops, Henry was forced to agree to quite humiliating terms of surrender, namely to appear at a synod at Augsburg in February 1077 to be presided over by the pope at which the question of whether Henry would be restored to the kingship would be deliberated. Although this seemed to be an important articulation of papal power and hence an important victory for the pope, Henry IV's skilful manoeuvring and appearance before the pope as a penitent at Canossa in January 1077 presented the papacy with a serious dilemma: to grant absolution to a penitent or to uphold the papacy's claim to decide the question of the kingship. After keeping Henry IV waiting for three days, Gregory restored him to communion though—as he would later claim—not to the kingship which still needed to be decided by the council at Augsburg. In so doing, Gregory VII lost the 'political' initiative; the king's supporters rallied to his cause after learning of the reconciliation; the German princes refused to wait and elected Rudolf of Rheinfelden as king at a council at Forchheim in March 1077; and the pope was left without a clear plan of action. Although continuing to insist on his role of deciding the kingship, Gregory equivocated for three years before deciding in favour of the German anti-king Rudolf. His second excommunication of Henry IV in 1080 lacked the moral high ground of the earlier sentence and with the death of Rudolf later that year, Henry no longer looked to reconcile with the pope and proceeded to elect a serious rival in Wibert of Ravenna. Gregory's pontificate ended in disaster after a three-year siege of Rome and he died in Salerno on 25 May 1085 having been rescued by his Norman allies.

Gregory's vision of papal authority was an uncompromising one, and one that in reality was in many ways disastrous for the papacy. His reinterpretation of Gelasian dualism, elaborated in many of his letters but nowhere more so than in his second letter to Bishop



Hermann of Metz written in March 1081, offered a stringent expression of the superiority of ecclesiastical power, without however a full cognizance of the logical implications of his position.<sup>24</sup> Unlike Gelasius and Ambrose, Gregory did not envisage two separate spheres, each with its own set of powers, but seems to have conceived first and foremost of a hierarchical subordination of one to the other. Interestingly, although he claimed the right to depose the king, Gregory at no point asserted that royal authority was delegated to a king through the pope and he also continued to insist that the election of a king was the business of the princes. But the uncompromising language with which he articulated his convictions, all of which were undoubtedly rooted in his desire for moral reform, were such that no ruler of the time could accept his strictures and comply fully with a programme that demanded abandoning royal control and investiture of bishops and abbots. The elevation of a credible anti-pope in Clement III in 1080 (enthroned 1084) left the reform papacy and movement in tatters, which the brief pontificate of Victor III (May 1086–September 1087) did little to alleviate. The pontificate of Urban II (1088–99) was in many ways initially an exercise in damage limitation. Although he consistently claimed to be Gregory's utmost follower in all things, Urban spent much of his pontificate outside Rome following a judicious policy of reiterating the 'Gregorian' programme whilst carefully permitting exceptions and dispensations where they seemed advantageous, for instance allowing former supporters of the anti-pope to continue in their orders and benefices. Urban had clearly also learned the lessons of 1084 when numerous cardinals had defected from Gregory VII and he associated them in the business of the papal government. Urban's many councils reinforced this dual approach: adherence to the reform programme in demands for a free, chaste and catholic Church combined with pragmatic dispensations when warranted. His famous Council at Clermont in November 1095 at which he launched the first crusade offered an impressive statement of papal authority even whilst extending the contest over lay investiture with his stipulations against bishops performing homage to lay rulers. This issue, over which the final phase of the Investiture Contest would revolve, would only be resolved after considerable acrimony, polemic and even the capture of Paschal II with the compromise known as the Concordat of Worms in 1122.

From the late eleventh and throughout the twelfth centuries, papal authority was increasingly conceived of in legislative and judicial terms. Despite the ongoing clash between the reform papacy and the German Emperors Henry IV and Henry V in which the theoretical claims of Gelasian dualism were literally fought out in Italy and elsewhere after 1080 in the Investiture Contest, it is clear that the papacy was consciously adopting mechanisms with which to make their theoretical claims to authority stronger and to extend that authority into the localities. This can be seen in a number of arenas, namely the development of papal administration, the more regular convening of councils, the use of legates and other papal representatives well as an increasingly self-conscious attitude towards the pontiff's role as legislator.

The newly-emphasized judicial character of papal authority in large part derived from the development and extension of the papal administration. Whilst the papacy had long had an administrative structure, before the pontificate of Urban II it was one of limited capabilities geared chiefly towards the administration of Rome along with the dioceses and lands belonging to the patrimony of St Peter. The chief administrative centre of the Roman church was the palace adjoining the Lateran basilica which had a host of various officials. Some of the offices, such as that of the papal chancellor, the papal librarian and the seven palatine judges, had been in existence for centuries. From the later eleventh century we can see the increasing importance and expansion of the papal chancellor's functions at the expense of other ancient offices, such as that of the palatine judges whose role became increasingly

ceremonial during and after Urban's pontificate. The term of 'curia' in fact was not used prior to the pontificate of Urban II, who reorganized papal finance, and split the various functions of the administration into the 'camera' or financial office, the papal chancery, and the chapel. These offices were developed in concert with the College of Cardinals which itself was only emerging in a definitive form c.1100. From this time, the increasing prominence of the cardinals as the pope's special advisors who were consulted about a range of cases brought to the apostolic see is apparent. The number of cardinals was in theory over fifty but as the popes had the authority to nominate candidates, they could keep seats vacant for long periods or else flood the college with their own supporters, as in 1123 when Calixtus II sought to minimize dissent over the Concordat of Worms or in 1187 when Clement III (1187–91) created twenty-five cardinals to fill the college to further his programmes. The later practice of nominating leaders of national churches as cardinals outside the curia was rare in the twelfth century and most cardinals were Italians. Throughout the twelfth century, the cardinals would increasingly assert control over papal elections, a role formalized in the election decree of 1179 *Licet de vitanda* which gave the decision to the cardinals as a whole in a two-thirds majority vote. This emphasized the extent to which they, at least in theory, were now quasi-joint rulers of the Roman Church together with the pope.

Throughout the twelfth century, the curia evolved further to cope with the flood of ecclesiastical business as appeals to Rome became ever more routine with the increasing familiarity and use of procedural law derived from Roman law. Indeed by the mid-twelfth century, it was not uncommon to appeal to Rome over minor property disputes involving even parish churches so as to avoid lengthy local litigation and local judges who might be prejudiced against a particular case or plaintiff. This press of business elicited much consternation from those such as Bernard of Clairvaux who warned his protégé Eugenius III (1145–53) that the juridical activity of the curia should focus on spiritual matters, not temporal ones. Eugenius' successors did try to curtail and moderate the never ending appeals. Innocent III in particular made concerted efforts to limit the number of appeals, to regularize procedures and the duties and payments for lawyers and proctors. The Apostolic Chancery courts were also streamlined: the consistory court of the cardinals dealt with the major cases (*maiores causae*) (the pope was present only for the most complicated matters); the *audientia sacri palatii* was reserved for minor lawsuits and the *audientia litterarum* was the appellate court in which appeals against the decisions of the judges of the papal curia were brought. Each court was serviced by a range of different proctors and lawyers and a bustling legal business grew simply to advise the petitioners as to which court they should submit their cases.

The papacy also created new curial departments such as the Papal Penitentiary to handle particular types of cases. The precise origins of this office are murky though the first Cardinal Penitentiary appears in the record during the pontificate of Honorius III (1216–27). The Penitentiary was not a 'court' per se but rather an administrative department that was granted authority by the pope to issue certain dispensations and papal graces such as absolution, dispensation of consanguinity and special licences such as the right to choose one's own confessor. The Penitentiary was not the exclusive source of these graces, but these were often granted to legates *in partibus*, though the pope reserved to himself certain cases of absolution for heinous offences. These new offices and procedures were important extensions of papal authority exercised through various administrative officials. That said, in many ways these new procedures also contributed to the continuing nature of the papacy as an authority that functioned in a responsive mode.

At the same time, the papacy also developed and extended other mechanisms such as councils that enabled channels of communication with the localities as well as providing a forum in which to disseminate policy. Councils, as noted above, had been a central feature of the early Church, albeit one that exercised its authority in matters of doctrine and faith essentially as rivals to papal authority. Throughout the earlier middle ages, many churchmen including Pope Sylvester II believed that regional councils were the best places for resolving most ecclesiastical matters. That said, there was from the second half of the eleventh century an increasing recognition by the papacy of the benefit of convening councils especially in Rome as a means of disseminating policy. As the consistory of cardinals became the core assembly of the Roman Church, a new type of council emerged that was presided over by the pope as his entourage moved throughout western Europe. Such councils were intended to bring together the pope, the curia and the bishops and often originated in response to a crisis. For example, councils at Clermont in 1130, at Reims in 1131, at Pisa in 1135 and at Tours in 1163 were aimed at rallying support in times of papal schism though their business often also included pronouncements of wider papal policy such as the decrees against heresy at Tours in 1163. The most famous councils known as the Lateran Councils of 1123, 1139, and 1179 were ostensibly called to resolve issues posed by the ending of a schism and the return of the papacy to Rome after an extended absence, though again important ecclesiastical matters were debated and decrees promulgated. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 was a momentous undertaking that sought to offer definitive rulings on all matters of doctrine and Christian practice and it is worth underlining that this was the first council in the history of the Church to issue a normative statement of Christian belief in the first canon along with measures to enforce that belief.

The use of papal legates, papal judge-delegates, the Penitentiary, and the convening of councils were important extensions of papal authority throughout the twelfth century and beyond. Yet even more important was the increasing self-consciousness of the papacy in seeing its own decretals and the conciliar decrees of the councils over which it presided as definitive law. Innocent III, perhaps more than anyone, underscored this by commissioning what is known as the *Compilatio tertia*, the oldest official collection of the legislation of the Roman Church, which was approved in the bull *Devotioni vestrae* in 1210.<sup>25</sup> It must be conceded that this new decretal law was considerably conditioned by consultation with the localities whose requests for clarification prompted the issuing of the papal decretals. Moreover, it should be stressed that the popes could not even guarantee the uniform dissemination to the localities of its own decretals, let alone the decrees of the Lateran councils, as is shown by the multiple and conflicting extant versions of the decrees for the Third Lateran Council, in spite of Alexander III's express command for their dissemination. Indeed, despite the many administrative advances, one should not overestimate the efficiency of the curia, as seen in the inability to preserve papal registers before Innocent III's pontificate. That said, all of these mechanisms did allow the papacy not merely to respond to external petitions and pressure but also to offer formative leadership for Christian society beyond Rome.

## THE PARADOX OF PAPAL AUTHORITY

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In 1296 in the midst of the first of his bitter disputes with the French King, Philip IV, over the right of secular kings to tax the clergy of their realms, Pope Boniface VIII (1294–1303) promulgated his bull *Clericos laicos* which denied the principle that kings possessed an absolute authority over their kingdoms. Although he was forced in 1297 to a humiliating

capitulation in the face of combined pressure from Philip and a faction of cardinals, Boniface recovered much of his spiritual authority and prestige when he declared a Jubilee Year of remission and pardon in 1300. Thousands of pilgrims journeyed to Rome to pray at the tombs of the apostles and to receive the special papal indulgences that were promoted for the Jubilee. This acknowledgment of papal authority suggested the unassailability of the pope as the spiritual head of western Christendom.

Buoyed by the outpouring of devotion, in 1302 Boniface issued arguably one of the most important papal bulls of the middle ages, *Unam sanctam*, in which he declared that it was absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman pontiff. Like Innocent III in his decretal *Per venerabilem* (1202), in which he outlined a justification for papal action not only in the case at hand but in all secular matters, the origin of *Unam sanctam* went back to a specific though unnamed dispute involving Philip IV, namely his presumption to try the Bishop of Pamiers in 1301, an act that contravened the principle of canon law that a bishop could only be judged by the pope. Although on one level *Unam sanctam* was essentially an extended theological statement about the unity of the Church under Rome, it also offered a ringing declaration of the subordination of temporal power to spiritual power as an element of that unity. After *Unam sanctam*, no compromise was possible and Philip IV began an unprecedented personal attack on the pope. Boniface was denounced as a usurper, heretic and criminal in 1303 at a council of French bishops and nobles. The charges were repeated in June, but the king had already decided on more draconian measures. Philip's minister, Guillaume de Nogaret, together with Sciarra Colonna (the brother of one of the cardinals who had forced Boniface to retract *Clericos laicos*) led an army of mercenaries to Anagni where the pope had retired. After heavy fighting, they broke into the papal chambers, insulted the pope and probably physically attacked him. It is unclear whether the intention was to compel Boniface to renounce the papacy or to transport him forcibly to France to stand trial. A dispute between Nogaret and Sciarra Colonna (who wanted to assassinate the pope then and there) allowed supporters to reclaim the situation. Boniface returned to Rome but never recovered from the ordeal and died a few weeks later.

Throughout the middle ages, papal authority was absolute in the sense that the pope, as the heir of the prince of the apostles, held the powers of binding and loosing. Yet papal authority was also limited: the pope had no consistent and guaranteed means of making his theoretical claims tangible ones. The pontificate of Boniface VIII and *Unam sanctam* reveal the paradox of papal authority in stark relief: what the pope could claim was almost never what he could impress or enforce.

## NOTES

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1. Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), I.23, 69.
2. See [Bede's Ecclesiastical History](#)>, I.27, 78–103; R. Meens, 'A Background to Augustine's Mission to Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England* 23 (1994), 5–17.
3. The exchange is known only from Gregory II's response: *Die Briefe des heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, ed. M. Tangl, MGH Ep. Sel. 1 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1916), no. 26, 44–47. cf. *Regesta pontificum romanorum*, ed. P. Jaffé, 2nd edn by S. Loewenfeld (henceforth JL: an. 882–1198), F. Kaltenbrunner (JK: an.?–590), P. Ewald (JE: an. 590–882), 2 vols (Leipzig: Veit, 1885–9), JE 2174.
4. *Epistolae Karolini aevi*, ed. E. Perels, MGH Epistolae 6 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1925), Ep. 99, 568–600; JE, 2812.
5. One of many examples is Gregory II's letter: *Die Briefe des heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, no. 26, 44: '... qualiter teneat vel doceat haec sancta apostolica Romana ecclesia'.
6. *Registrum Gregorii VII*, ed. E. Caspar, MGH, Ep. sel. 2, 2 vols (Berlin: Weidmann, 1920–3); English trans. H. E. J. Cowdrey, *The Register of Pope Gregory VII, 1073–85* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), Reg. 2.1, 124 (trans. 92).
7. JK, 255; trans. R. Somerville and B. C. Brasington, *Prefaces to Canon Law Books in Latin Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 36–46.
8. D. Jasper and H. Furhmann, *Papal Letters in the early Middle Ages* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001).
9. K. Leyser, review (in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 39 (1988), 246–248) of H. Zimmerman, ed., *Papsturkunden 896–1046*, 3 vols (Veröffentlichungen des Historischen Kommission, 3/174, 177, 178; Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1984–5, 1989).
10. JK, 632.
11. L. Duchesne, *The Beginnings of the Temporal Sovereignty of the Popes* (London: Kegan Paul, 1908), 271.
12. JE, 2059.
13. JE, 3930.
14. R. Schieffer, 'Redeamus ad fontem: Rom als Hort authentischer Überlieferung im frühen Mittelalter', in A. Angenendt and R. Schieffer, eds, *Roma—Caput et Fons. Zwei Vorträge über das papstliche Rom zwischen Altertum und Mittelalter* (Opladen: Gerda Henkel Vorlesung, 1989), 45–70.
15. See B. H. Rosenwein, *Negotiating Space: Power, Restraint, and Privileges of Immunity in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).
16. [Zimmerman, ed., Papsturkunden](#), 2, no. 355, 655–657 (Fleury); no. 558, 1052–1054 (Cluny).
17. [Zimmerman, ed., Papsturkunden](#), 2, no. 154, 281–284 (Magdeburg); no. 478, 906–909 (Bamberg).
18. C. Erdmann and N. Fickermann, eds, *Briefsammlungen der Zeit Heinrichs IV* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1950), no. 15, 34.
19. Rodulf Glaber, *Historiarum libri quinque/Five Books of the Histories*, ed. J. France (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3.13, 114–116.
20. See also chapter by [Miller](#), this collection.
21. *Decretum electionis pontificae*, MGH, Const. I (Hanover: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1893), no. 382, 538–541. cf. D. Jasper, *Das Papstwahldekret von 1059. Überlieferung und Textgestalt* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1986), text. 98ff.
22. H. E. J. Cowdrey, *Pope Gregory VII, 1073–1085* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), esp. 495–583, 608–618.
23. *Registrum Gregorii VII.*, ed. E. Caspar, MGH, Ep. Sel. 2, 2 vols (Berlin: Weidmann, 1920–3), 2.55a, 201–208.
24. *Registrum Gregorii VII.*, 8.21, 544–561.
25. The *Compilatio tertia* is part of what is known as the *Quinque compilationes antiquae* that updated Gratian's *Decretum* with papal legislation up to the pontificate of Gregory IX. See W. Hartmann and K. Pennington, eds, *The History of Medieval Canon Law in the Classical Period, 1140–1234* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2008).



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# CHAPTER 30

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# BISHOPS, EDUCATION, AND DISCIPLINE

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SARAH HAMILTON

SCHOLARS interested in exploring how far medieval laymen and women assimilated Christian doctrine into their everyday beliefs and practices are inevitably drawn to the study of the texts generated by the different forms of ecclesiastical discipline and the ways in which it was administered. These range from penance to excommunication and interdict, from liturgical rites to synods, episcopal visitations, church courts, and inquisitions. Using a wide array of measures medieval churchmen sought to inculcate Christian teachings into their flock and, if necessary, to punish those who contravened their authority. Church discipline and the ways in which it was implemented therefore offers an important window on to the relations between churchmen and lay people. For medieval churchmen, however, its significance was far greater: in the words of one influential sixth-century collection of church law,

[g]reat indeed is the authority of a commander who first performs the very things which have been commanded, so that the discipline of ecclesiastical order, remaining invulnerable, might offer to all Christians a gateway for gaining the eternal prize; by means of it both the holy bishops can be fortified with paternal rules and the obedient people can be imbued with spiritual examples.<sup>1</sup>

The authors of this text envisaged ecclesiastical *disciplina* as providing all Christians with the rules to follow for the route to salvation. It should inspire and inform as much as punish, and serve as a guide for both churchmen and members of the laity.

Ecclesiastical discipline has lost some of its positive resonances for modern English-speaking scholars. The critique by sixteenth-century reformers of penance, inquisition, and other forms of church discipline has its legacy in modern debates about the extent to which medieval churchmen used disciplinary measures to assert and enhance their authority over the laity. These debates are perhaps at their most overt in work on the reaction of churchmen to heresy in the central middle ages.<sup>2</sup> One way through what can only too easily become a rebarbative thicket of presumption and counter assumption is to recognize that scholars working on ecclesiastical discipline confront three problems: these are ones of language, specialization, and chronology.

First that of language: like its modern English equivalent, the Latin word *disciplina* conveyed a range of different meanings to medieval clerical writers. The mid-tenth century bishop of Verona, Rather, captured these when he described Christ's disciples 'as both those who then were his disciples and those today who do not hate his discipline, that is his teaching, correction and commandments'.<sup>3</sup> In his study of the evolution of the meaning of *disciplina* in late antiquity H.-I. Marrou demonstrated how it acquired this threefold meaning.<sup>4</sup> From at least the fifth century onwards it was used to refer to the *trivium*, that is the fundamental *artes* of the scholastic curriculum: grammar, rhetoric, and logic. It is in this pedagogic sense that we still speak about different academic disciplines today. Secondly, in classical Rome *disciplina* had been used to signify education, especially moral education, and it retained this meaning in the early Church; as such it came to signify the culture or rules of an organization (Christ's commandments in Rather's example). Augustine used it in this sense to signify both the doctrinal and practical teachings of the Church: *disciplina christiana*.<sup>5</sup> For Gregory the Great *disciplina* denoted the collection of rules and rites which

constituted the Church and separated Christians from non-Christians.<sup>6</sup> *Disciplina* often retained its moral overtones as referring to the rules for Christian life as well as belief. Finally, *disciplina* could be used to refer to punishment or correction, as it was by the translator of the Vulgate of Proverbs 3:11: ‘My son, reject not the correction [*disciplina*] of the Lord and do not faint when thou art chastised by him.’ It is this meaning which is also adopted by most modern scholars. But coercion and punishment only ever represented one element of the meaning of *disciplina* to medieval churchmen, for whom the different meanings of *disciplina* constituted a greater whole. It was the body of rules, and the punishments for those who contravened them which, when taken alongside efforts to educate all Christians in these rules, constituted church discipline for medieval churchmen. It is in this sense that the compiler of the ninth-century collection of conciliar canons and forged papal decretals now known as the *False or Pseudo-Isidore Mercator Decretals*, used the word in his preface:

Thus by the discipline of ecclesiastical order gathered and arranged by us into one both the holy bishops (*sancti praesides*) may be instructed with paternal rules and the obedient ministers and people of the Church may be imbued with spiritual examples and not deceived by the depravities of wicked men.<sup>7</sup>

The echoes with the sixth-century text cited above are striking; in fact versions of this particular passage are cited in the prefaces to both earlier and later canon law collections testifying to the popularity of this interpretation. *Pseudo-Isidore*, for example, now survives in over 100 manuscripts from the ninth to the fifteenth centuries, testifying to its influence throughout the middle ages.<sup>8</sup> The *topos*, that discipline is autonomous and provides a guide to the bishop, and through him to the clergy and people, resonated throughout the middle ages.

The second set of problems modern scholars have to confront are perhaps best categorized under the heading of ‘specialization and its consequent problems’. The term ‘ecclesiastical discipline’ itself encompasses an extremely varied collection of different practices and sanctions. Thus discipline refers to both the practice of individual confession of personal sins which emerged out of late antique monasticism, and to collective punishments such as the interdicts which the central medieval papacy imposed on entire kingdoms because of the actions of their leaders which led to the closure of churches and the suspension of all religious services in that area. Such disciplinary measures might therefore be either a voluntary act of devotion or atonement for the everyday sins of this life, as in the case of many personal confessions, or a compulsory sanction inflicted on a recalcitrant sinner for a specific offence, as in the case of excommunication. They might be time limited, as in the case of personal penance which could comprise of fasting for a specified period, or a specific act such as giving alms to the poor or the recitation of a certain number of psalms, but they might also be timeless and without end, as in the tenth-century Frankish excommunication formula which enjoined of those cast out from the Church:

Let no Christian say ‘*ave*’ to them, let no priest celebrate mass, nor if they are sick receive their confessions, nor give them communion of the holy body, even at the very end of his life, but ‘let them be buried in an ass’s grave’, and let them lie above the face of the earth on the dung heap, so that they are an example of disgrace and cursing to present and future generations.<sup>9</sup>

Unless contumacious sinners recanted they were cast out of the Christian community for all eternity.

Such variety is, of course, to be expected over the course of the thousand or so years covered by the medieval Church, and some measures only came to the fore at specific periods; the interdict, for example, assumed prominence only from the thirteenth century onwards. But it is important to recognize that at any given time throughout the middle ages churchmen had access to a wide assortment of different disciplinary measures. One gets some idea of their scope from Bishop Burchard of Worms' early eleventh-century collection of church law, the *Decretum*.<sup>10</sup> This was divided into twenty books. The first covers the role of popes, patriarchs, and metropolitans within the Church before moving on to how to conduct a synod, judge cases and deal with accusers and witnesses, and the other aspects of the episcopal ministry. Books II to V deal with the ministry of priests and the lesser ecclesiastical orders; church buildings and the payment of tithes; baptism; the Eucharist. The next five books comprise the regulation and penances for homicide, incest, the contravention of religious vows, marriage, and magic. Subsequent books encompass the regulation of excommunication, perjury, and fasting, the punishment of gluttony, the ministry of secular rulers, the regulation of courts, penances for fornication and incest, the visitation of the sick and delivery of the last rites, and the administration of penance, concluding with a final book on the theology of the Last Things.

Medieval churchmen recognized the problems generated by such variety. In his preface to the *Decretum*, for example, Burchard himself wrote of his ambition

to compile into one corpus from various useful things—from the statements of the holy Fathers, from the canons and from diverse penitentials—a little book for the work of our fellow priests. And for this reason especially because in our diocese the laws of the canons and the judgements for those doing penance are confused, varied and disordered, just as if they were completely neglected, and are greatly among themselves and supported by the authority of almost no one so that because of the discord they scarcely can be disentangled by experts. Whence it frequently happens that for those fleeing to the remedy of penance, both on account of the confusion of the books and also the ignorance of the priests, help no way is at hand.<sup>11</sup>

The reference to the confusion of the law and the need to sort it out in order to enable priests to do their job properly was something of a trope amongst compilers of canon law; indeed Burchard was deeply indebted to the dedicatory letter which preceded Halitgar of Cambrai's ninth-century collection for this particular passage.<sup>12</sup> But his reference to his different sources—patristic writings, canon law, and penitentials—points the way to the later specializations of the central medieval schools into theology and church law, and thence to the path followed by modern scholars who have been only too conscious of the need to master the rules governing particular parts of the law and the particular genres it generated, leading them to specialize in particular forms of ecclesiastical discipline.

Each sub-division of discipline generated its own texts in law and its own body of material as to its practice, and as a consequence its own historians. The variable nature of the textual legacies left by these very different forms of ecclesiastical discipline provides a rich set of resources for those interested in gaining insight into the thoughts and behaviours of all those making up local communities. Penance, for example, generated both liturgical rites and handbooks to help priests in the administration of penance. Early medieval penitential handbooks, written and rewritten between the seventh and early eleventh centuries, set out how penance should be administered and the various sentences (tariffs) which should be imposed for various sins.<sup>13</sup> It is only by mastering the debts individual compilations owed to earlier texts that scholars can begin to identify the sorts of behaviour which were of especial concern at particular times and in particular areas.<sup>14</sup> Thus it is only such painstaking editorial work which reveals the uniqueness of Burchard of Worms's injunction of a penance of ten days' fasting on those women who, when a newly born child



dies immediately after baptism, bury him with a wax paten with the host in his right hand and a wax chalice with wine in his left.<sup>15</sup> Part of a series of penances for female superstition which seem unique to Burchard and may, therefore, tell us about beliefs in the eleventh-century Rhineland, it hints at a world of widespread Christian practice but poorly understood theology, in which the knowledge that children should be baptized was combined with the teaching that Christians should partake of the Eucharist regularly into the erroneous belief that the Eucharist was essential for salvation.<sup>16</sup> The confession manuals which superseded penitentials from the late twelfth century onwards tended to be rather different in structure and content but shared a similar purpose and require a similarly nuanced approach from modern scholars.<sup>17</sup> The sanction of interdict generated commentaries on canon law, alongside papal letters imposing it on particular communities.<sup>18</sup> The practice of excommunication generated not only canon law but also references in secular laws; it is only from the tenth century onwards that liturgical formulae are recorded; and treatises and commentaries on the law of excommunication only appear in the late eleventh century in the wake of the Investiture Contest.<sup>19</sup> From late medieval England comes evidence for the routine way in which bishops' officers invoked the aid of the secular arm to arrest recalcitrant excommunicants who had refused, in the face of such a sentence, to submit to episcopal authority. Some 7,600 significations survive written between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries; these are requests sent by the bishop's officers to the royal chancery requesting that the secular arm arrest named individuals who had ignored the bishop's judgement.<sup>20</sup> The English evidence is unique in Europe and points to a world in which excommunication was routinely imposed on all sectors of society, ranging from abbots, archdeacons, and members of the lesser clergy to lords of the manor and knights, schoolmen, specialized tradesmen and craftsmen, and household servants.

Some types of evidence only emerge in the late middle ages. Records of church courts, responsible for regulating the sexual and moral behaviour of all Christians, both clerical and lay, survive, albeit patchily, from the thirteenth century onwards, especially for England.<sup>21</sup> The richness of this material has generated further specialization; scholars have used the records of the various ecclesiastical courts to study marriage, fornication, defamation, and domestic violence in later medieval communities.<sup>22</sup> In particular they have investigated how far laymen and women came to use ecclesiastical courts for their own ends; Margaret Harvey, for example, has demonstrated how the fifteenth-century citizens of Durham used the prior's court to collect local debts and sort out quarrels, and how one couple were sufficiently *au fait* with the laws on marriage to use the court to validate a marriage against the opposition of the girl's parents.<sup>23</sup> The records generated by the medieval inquisitions into heresy from the thirteenth century onwards are similarly uneven. Building on a body of late antique texts and law, the problem of central medieval heresy generated its own laws, but inquisitors also wrote handbooks on how to identify heresies for other inquisitors, and kept records to help them in their activities; in a limited number of cases their archives, or parts of them, survive including copies of the depositions of those interrogated by the inquisitors and registers of sentences imposed on those found guilty of heresy.<sup>24</sup> Such specialization is wholly understandable, and necessary, but it leads to problems by tending to privilege one form of ecclesiastical discipline over others. It means that modern scholars risk losing sight of the ways in which churchmen conceived discipline as part of a whole, and of how therefore both lay people and churchmen, both as ministers of, and the object of, discipline experienced it in the round.

As this brief survey of the evidence for different forms of discipline suggests, both the nature of the evidence for and the forms of discipline changed across the middle ages. The

consequence of following particular types of discipline and particular genres of material is that historians concentrate on particular periods, leading to the third issue which scholars need to be aware of: chronology. Chronology is, of course, not in and of itself a problem, but becomes so as studies of individual disciplines inevitably come to privilege the significance of particular periods of history and ignore others. There is thus a tendency to treat the later middle ages as distinct and markedly different from the earlier middle ages. There are obvious reasons for doing so: there is a wealth of material for the later middle ages, beginning in the thirteenth century, which is simply not there for the earlier period. But this can lead to the identification of innovation where there may be none. Canon 21 of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) famously enjoined that

all the faithful of either sex, after they have reached the age of discernment, should individually confess all their sins in a faithful manner to their own priest at least once a year, and let them take care to do what they can to perform the penance imposed on them. Let them reverently receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least at Easter unless they think, for a good reason and on the advice of their own priest, that they should abstain from receiving it for a time. Otherwise they shall be barred from entering a church during their lifetime and they shall be denied a Christian burial at death.<sup>25</sup>

Historians have long debated when the practice of annual confession became widespread. Those who specialize in the central and later middle ages regard the early medieval evidence for penance as prescriptive and punitive.<sup>26</sup> Early medievalists, however, have demonstrated that penitentials are numerous and widely copied, and demonstrate a concern with intention and contrition rather than simply listing tariffs.<sup>27</sup> One Old English penitential from mid-eleventh-century Worcester, for example, describes the bedside of a dying man; if the priest only arrives once the dying person is beyond speech, then those 'standing around' may testify on his behalf to his intention to make a last confession.<sup>28</sup> Churchmen before the twelfth century attributed considerable importance to the internal desire to atone, and not just to external actions.

Partly as a consequence of such work scholars to date have identified two key periods in the history of ecclesiastical discipline: the pastoral reforms of the Carolingians in the ninth century, and the pastoral revolution of the thirteenth century. Both witnessed a great flourishing in concern to promote and regulate pastoral care and discipline. Thus late medievalists often trace their concerns back to the disciplinary decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council.<sup>29</sup> Amongst other issues these were concerned with monitoring clerical behaviour, educating local priests, preaching to the laity, and enjoining the practice of annual confession and communion on all Christians. Metropolitans were reminded of the importance of holding annual provincial synods for the 'correction of excesses and reform of morals, especially among the clergy'. Bishops were to do likewise. Bishops should be diligent in correcting their subjects, particularly their clergy, inquiring into and punishing offences. Bishops must 'carefully...prepare those who are to be promoted to the priesthood and...instruct them, either by themselves or through other suitable persons, in the divine services and sacraments of the Church, so that they may be able to celebrate them correctly'. Bishops should appoint 'suitable men' to act in their place as preachers because 'bishops by themselves are not sufficient to minister the word of God to the people, especially in large and scattered dioceses'; those appointed should be men 'who are powerful in word and deed', and they should also be active in helping bishops in 'hearing confessions and enjoining penances and in other matters which are conducive to the salvation of souls'. The canons also decreed that all the faithful should make their confession once a year and take the Eucharist at Easter.<sup>30</sup> It is a very striking programme but one which for early medievalists has many similarities with the aspirations of ninth-

century Frankish rulers and churchmen.<sup>31</sup> They enjoined that the faithful should go to confession and take communion not once, as in Lateran IV, but three times a year.<sup>32</sup> They promoted the holding of annual synods, and also issued a form of episcopal statute known as episcopal capitula which were widely copied in the ninth and tenth centuries and which testify to bishops' concerns to regulate and educate their diocesan priests as to their behaviour and knowledge.<sup>33</sup> The ninth-century bishops also drew up examinations for priests to check their level of knowledge prior to ordination.<sup>34</sup> They promoted penitentials and penitential *ordines* to support the hearing of confession and made various attempts to systematize them in order to remove contradictions.<sup>35</sup> They composed liturgical rites and liturgical commentaries to inform and educate their clergy.<sup>36</sup> Sermons were written for delivery to lay as well as clerical audiences.<sup>37</sup> Taken together, these ninth-century texts all point to a world in which pastoral care, clerical reform, and ecclesiastical discipline were taken very seriously. Later medievalists point out that the evidence for ninth-century churchmen's pastoral concerns is based almost wholly on prescriptive evidence; it tells us churchmen's aspirations, not reality.<sup>38</sup> Early medievalists in turn point to the importance of prescriptive evidence to the thirteenth-century pastoral revolution: we know about their concerns through sermons, synodal statutes, and confession manuals, but, given the increase in population, these texts are not copied in significantly greater numbers than the ninth-century material.<sup>39</sup>

The study of ecclesiastical discipline has reached something of an impasse, in which late medievalists, faced with much richer evidence, use it to argue that there is something distinct and qualitatively different about their period. Thus scholars of penance, excommunication, interdict, church courts, and the inquisition have all identified the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries as a period of particular importance for the development of these particular forms.<sup>40</sup> To these forms of discipline should be added another which is more usually associated with the thirteenth-century pastoral changes: records of bishop's visitations, and those of his officers. The first reports of the results of such visitations only survive in registers from the thirteenth century onwards; examination of these texts has provided scholars with ways into understanding both clerical behaviour and identity, of investigating the impact reforming initiatives had on local clergy, and of researching incidents of heresy.<sup>41</sup>

But the system of bishops visiting a locality, questioning witnesses under oath, and hearing cases involving both laity and clergy, is first recorded in detail in a formulary of the bishop of Constance c.880, although episcopal visitations are alluded to much earlier.<sup>42</sup> The first detailed *ordines* as to how the bishop should conduct the visitation of his diocese, and the sorts of questions he should ask of both the local clergy and a jury representing the lay people of each local community are early tenth century.<sup>43</sup> The later survival of visitation records seems, therefore, to reflect changes in bureaucracy rather than procedural novelty; that particular innovation can be traced to the years around 900.

Chipping away at the barriers imposed by different chronological perspectives can only take one so far. Another way around these problems is to switch the focus away from distinct forms of discipline to the figure responsible for their administration: the bishop. This is to move away from quarrying the evidence produced by the ministers of various forms of church discipline in order to study the ways in which the laity engaged with the Church, and instead to re-focus on what those ministers thought about the process. The merit of doing so is that we adopt the perspective of the authors of our texts, on the one hand, and on the other that we can begin to look at discipline in the round rather than

refracted through the particular perspectives of different forms. It was the bishop who assumed responsibility for all ecclesiastical discipline within his diocese, and this is reflected in the dedication of collections of church law to him, such as that by Regino of Prüm who dedicated his work on ecclesiastical discipline to the archbishop of Mainz, having begun his collection at the request of the archbishop of Trier. His intention was to produce a *vade mecum* of church law which the bishop could take with him as he toured his diocese.<sup>44</sup> The decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council similarly assign responsibility for education and discipline of both the clergy and the laity to the bishop. Therefore the remaining part of this chapter will focus on the bishop especially in the years between the ninth and thirteenth centuries. By choosing to focus on a period between two which have long been recognized as significant in the history of pastoral care, it is possible to overcome some of the more overt problems caused by focussing on material from either the earlier or later middle ages. Acknowledging and reflecting upon the significance of connections in clerical ambitions and ideas is a process fraught with danger, given the importance that medieval culture attached to earlier authorities, but the figure of the bishop provides an important point of continuity. We have already seen the role attributed to the bishop as mediator of discipline in one trope found in canon law texts. There is not space here to outline in detail the role of the bishop in different forms of ecclesiastical discipline. Instead in what follows I will suggest the potential insights to be gained from adopting such a perspective through two short case studies: of the significance of developments in the tenth century, and of attempts to monasticize the conscience of the laity in the earlier middle ages.

## LOCAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE TENTH CENTURY

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Whilst the importance of clerical reform has long been recognized for tenth-century England, it is only very recently that scholars have begun to draw attention to its significance alongside the revitalizing of ecclesiastical discipline on a wider, albeit local, scale across much of northern Europe over the course of the tenth century.<sup>45</sup> Canon law collections, letters, records of councils, and liturgy all testify to the widespread interest shown by individual bishops in the discipline of their diocesan clergy and that of members of their lay flock. As we shall see this interest was largely pragmatic: this material was produced in order to support bishops in their ministry.

There was a healthy appetite for canon law; collections were compiled and copied across much of the tenth century and some circulated reasonably widely.<sup>46</sup> They were clearly intended for use by bishops. The *Collectio Anselmo dedicata*, for example, compiled in late ninth-century northern Italy, is dedicated to Archbishop Anselm of Milan (882–896) who is ‘always contending both inwardly and outwardly for the communal growth of the flock entrusted to you’.<sup>47</sup> It now survives in three manuscripts and a further four fragments copied in northern Italy, southern Germany and West Francia in the tenth century, as well as a further five manuscripts and one fragment from the eleventh and twelfth centuries.<sup>48</sup> The *Collectio* had some influence; Bishop Atto of Vercelli drew on it when compiling his capitula setting out the knowledge, duties and responsibilities he expected of his diocesan clergy.<sup>49</sup> We have already encountered Regino of Prüm’s *Libri duo de synodalibus causis et disciplinis ecclesiasticis*, which he compiled around 906 at the request of Archbishop Rathbod of Trier and dedicated to Archbishop Hatto of Mainz which now survives in some eleven manuscripts copied in Lotharingia, northern France and at various centres in



Germany between the tenth and twelfth centuries. It also had an important afterlife, being taken up in various subsequent collections including Burchard of Worms' *Decretum*.<sup>50</sup> These best sellers represent the tip of the iceberg: Wilfried Hartmann's careful work has demonstrated the scale of industrious activity in compiling and copying legal collections around the year 900, and indeed across the tenth century. For alongside the compilation of existing books, a good deal of ninth-century material was copied, including penitentials, canon law, and episcopal capitula setting out the norms to which the parish clergy were expected to adhere.

The contents of both the *Collectio Anselmo dedicata* and Regino's *Libri duo* suggest that they owe their popularity to an episcopal appetite for works which would support them in the performance of their duties. The *Collectio* is arranged in twelve books which trace the hierarchy of the Church, and the bishop's role alongside the responsibilities of different orders of society within the Church. It thus begins with the primacy of the Roman see and other primates, moving on to consider the role of bishops and choirbishops, how synods are celebrated and business and judgements at them conducted, the office and life of priests, deacons, clerics, monks and nuns, and the laity; the final five books deal with the Christian faith: 'what Christians must believe and do', baptism, churches and tithes, the church year, and heretics, schismatics, Jews, and pagans.<sup>51</sup> The broad division into what is expected of the clergy and laity respectively is also one used by Regino in his *Libri duo*.<sup>52</sup> His was a more overtly practical work, designed as we have seen, for bishops visiting the churches within the diocese; the first book relates to the clergy, and begins with some ninety-six questions the bishop should ask the local priest at the visitation. The second book relates to the laity and describes how the bishop, or his officers, should convene a synod, and select a jury of seven men to testify to the behaviour of members of the laity within the community before the bishop.<sup>53</sup> The eighty-nine questions seek to uncover cases of murder, sexual misconduct, theft, perjury, magic and superstition, and incorrect Christian practice. They are followed by canons which include possible prescriptions for particular sins. The purpose of the bishop's visit was first and foremost to ensure that Christianity was being correctly followed, and correctly administered in that parish, and secondly that episcopal authority and jurisdiction was respected. The jury had to swear a public oath to report any act which they knew to have been committed and which fell within the remit of the synod and which 'pertain[ed] to the ministry of the bishop' on pain of damnation. Alongside major offences, the bishop should check if the major fasts were being observed, if anyone who was not excommunicated did not take communion three times a year, if anyone failed to attend Mass on Sundays and feast days, and 'if any man, on entering church, is accustomed to recite stories and not to listen diligently to divine worship, and leaves before the mass has finished.'<sup>54</sup> Both the *Collectio* and Regino's *Libri duo* promote an overall vision for Christian society in which discipline was secondary but crucial.

Collections such as these reflect episcopal demand for aids to support them in the running of their diocese. Much of this activity was resolutely local. Both Regino's *Libri duo* and the *Collectio Anselmo dedicata* were composed for specific bishops but there are many other compilations which did not circulate beyond the diocese in which they were composed.<sup>55</sup> Even in England, where the royal court has been identified as playing an active role in reform, much of the activity was at the level of individual bishops and their connections.<sup>56</sup> Bishops required such practical law collections to support them in their day-to-day diocesan ministries. Other evidence such as episcopal letters provides the context for their interest; bishops acted as judges, investigating offences on their annual visitation, commenting on judicial disputes.<sup>57</sup> Such judgements took place not only on the visitation but at the synod.



The importance of referring important offences to the diocesan synod was emphasized in the oath sworn by the lay jurors in Regino's idealized account of the visitation process.<sup>58</sup> The popularity of the text now known as the *Admonito synodalis*, which comprises a series of statements about the knowledge, duties, and responsibilities of the local priest, indicates that the synod was also regarded as a suitable place for education as well as discipline of members of the clergy.<sup>59</sup> To this material can be added the interest in copying and composing penitentials.<sup>60</sup>

Alongside their interest in compiling legal material, tenth-century churchmen displayed their interest in disciplinary procedure in other ways. Indeed, Wilfried Hartmann has recently identified the years around 900 as ones of considerable innovation in ecclesiastical discipline.<sup>61</sup> For example, the liturgical rites for the imposition of excommunication, and subsequent reconciliation of contrite excommunicants, were recorded for the first time only at the beginning of the tenth century.<sup>62</sup> Indeed Regino's *Libri duo* contains some of the earliest records for such rites.<sup>63</sup> The liturgy for excommunication varied a good deal more than that for rites such as baptism, perhaps because it entered the canon relatively late. But even more established disciplinary rites, such as those for public penance, demonstrated a good deal of local variation and innovation over the course of the tenth and eleventh centuries.<sup>64</sup> They are testament to a lively interest in disciplinary procedure at this time.

Both the ninth-century and thirteenth-century pastoral movements, with their concern to reinvigorate church discipline, are usually seen as the result of top-down rather than bottom-up processes. Thus the role of the Frankish rulers and royal court in the promulgation of reform is widely recognized, as is that of the papal *curia* for thirteenth-century developments. Whilst research has identified the importance of local influences and initiatives, nonetheless it is clear that these movements gained considerable resonance because of central direction and collaboration, as evidenced by conciliar decrees.<sup>65</sup> But not all pastoral movements needed central direction. Research in the last two decades on the eleventh-century papal reforms, for example, has identified the significance of local movements to its origins and success.<sup>66</sup> The evidence for the preceding century is, of necessity, patchy but it suggests that in dioceses across the tenth-century West—in Italy, West Frankia, Lotharingia, East Frankia and England—individual bishops, and networks of bishops, were preoccupied with discipline and sought materials to support them in that work. These developments lacked the leadership provided by the Frankish court in the ninth century or the papal *curia* in the thirteenth century; instead of being seen as part of a wider phenomenon, individual texts have generally been treated discretely and consequently the wider resonances of this movement neglected. But switching the perspective away from the centre to focus on the activities of local bishops allows us to see these developments as part of a wider movement for bottom-up change, and suggests we should reconsider the traditional chronological framework scholars use to understand developments in specific forms of ecclesiastical discipline.

## DEVELOPING LAY CONSCIENCE

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One issue particularly affected by the limitations of the chronological approaches reviewed above is that of the relationship between discipline and belief; at what point and how far did lay Christians internalize Christian teachings and what role did ecclesiastical discipline play in this process? Some scholars view the increasing evidence for expressions of lay piety in the central middle ages as a consequence of the extension of monastic ideas of penance to

earthly society, and suggest that this period witnessed the democratization of monastic ideals.<sup>67</sup> Scholars who work on discipline in the central and later middle ages, and in particular on the inquisitions undertaken in the face of heresy, have taken up these ideas; they have identified the mendicant Orders as initiating a significant change not only in the conduct of discipline through the method of inquisition and regular confession, but in how the clerical elite viewed the laity. The Fourth Lateran's requirement that all Christians confess their sins at least once a year extended the monastic life of self-correction and self-examination to the laity. Christine Caldwell Ames' recent study demonstrates how the Dominicans set out to develop this monastic model further by not only promoting the idea that the laity should examine their own souls through confession, but by encouraging them to be vigilant about the behaviour of others, reporting offences to the inquisitors, in order to promote awareness that they are part of the universal community of the Church.<sup>68</sup> John Arnold has suggested how the work of the inquisitors in promoting minimum standards for Christian behaviour, and in encouraging self-reflection, meant that the process of inquisition was never simply repressive but rather led to 'a new sense of what a lay person was and should be in the later middle ages'.<sup>69</sup> But the monasticization of lay conscience, as evidenced by the promotion of self-policing of lay individuals and lay communities, is not just a consequence of inquisitorial and mendicant efforts, but rather emerges against a long background of episcopal interest in such matters, as we shall see.

Judgement is, of course, integral to the whole Christian message: in the words of the Nicene Creed 'He (Christ) will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end'. In such a scenario what was the role of the bishop, as Christ's representative on earth, in this process? This was a real issue for late Antique churchmen in a changing world, and it is patristic writers such as Augustine and Gregory the Great who worked out the nature of episcopal office and its role in judgement, and in doing set out their own ambitions for the laity.<sup>70</sup> Episcopal authority was crafted around two different kinds of authority, one the power to absolve sinners on this earth derived from the power of the keys granted by Christ to Peter and thence to all bishops, and the other one which derived from ascetic discipline and training, which helped them to act as protective pastors and judges. Ascetic and apostolic forms of authority thus overlapped in the episcopal office and *discretio*, the ability to discern inner secrets, became an important aspect of episcopal authority; bishops united the power to absolve sins (the power of the keys) with discernment. Gregory the Great developed these ideas to suggest that pastors, bishops, and priests, should promote penitential asceticism to all Christians, with the aim of encouraging lay Christians as well as churchmen to examine and judge their own conscience, so as to prepare them for the Last Judgement: 'Let us not cease to judge ourselves whilst it is in our power...For it is no longer in the power of man to come near God for judgement.'<sup>71</sup> Christians should be educated by their pastors to become their own judges.

Under the Carolingians these episcopal ideals were taken up on a much wider scale and became a more universal aspiration.<sup>72</sup> The Rule of Benedict and Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care*, for example, was read aloud at the five reforming councils held in 813 because bishops recognized that in order to educate all Christians they needed to educate the clergy. Those at the council held at Châlons in that year placed the emphasis on personal examination: one could not be purged of sin just by looking at a reliquary but must instead make confession to a priest and undertake penance.<sup>73</sup> Going to a shrine was not a substitute for acknowledging and correcting sins. Self-recognition is as important as punitive action. Other scholars have demonstrated how this emphasis on self-examination and penance played out in ideas of rulership and became central to the behaviour of the governing elites

of the Frankish kingdoms, and of how they conceived their rule, as well as spreading to Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>74</sup> Louis the Pious, for example, did penance before the bishops of his kingdom not once but twice. The sense that these ideas had become internalized amongst the Frankish elite by the 840s comes also from the handbook written by a lay woman, Dhuoda, for her son. She sets out the social order, and its members' responsibilities including the episcopate: 'Bishops are called *episcopi* and "overseers" because they admonish us always to be alert in our direction and goal... It is the responsibility of bishops to reveal each man to others and our responsibility to observe and obey those bishops.'<sup>75</sup> These ideas reached their apogee in Regino of Prüm's early tenth-century text setting out how the bishop should conduct his visitations of local communities.

Many of the penitentials produced at this time to support priests in their penitential ministry also linked belief to behaviour, and used the process of discipline to educate the laity in the demands of their faith. One text outlining how the priest should conduct a confession at the beginning of Lent, explains that after the priest has interrogated the penitent about the orthodoxy of his beliefs, but before he interrogates him about his sins, he should remind him how he should behave:

Fast each day in this Lenten period to the ninth hour (*nones*) and abstain from dairy foods and guard yourself against the eight chief sins so that you do not commit them: they are murder and theft and false oaths and avarice and fornication and gluttony and calumny and false witness. And keep the twelve Ember Days that are in the year, and guard yourself against witchcraft and sorcery and fornication and detraction and pride and covetousness of other men's possessions; guard yourself against all these things. And love your Lord with your whole mind and with all your might and all your power and with all your inner heart steadfastly, and be merciful to the poor and gentle and charitable and diligent in attending church and giving tithes to God's Church and to the poor. Then God will be gracious to you and merciful and kind, and you will be permitted then to dwell with him in the world of all worlds ever without end, if you do so.

The priest should then interrogate the penitent about what sins they have committed, and is reminded that he should take account of the individual's circumstances when setting a penance, for 'discretion among all men is needful, even though they might commit similar sins'.<sup>76</sup> This particular text comes from tenth-century Worcester and circulated in several episcopal manuscripts of the eleventh centuries; it is written in Old English although the text owes a good deal to ninth-century Frankish Latin precedents. It was composed under the aegis of the bishop of Worcester in order to educate his pastoral clergy. Bishop Oswald (961–992) introduced reformed monks to the cathedral community at Worcester, so the emphasis on internal reflection may also be a consequence of monastic influence.<sup>77</sup> The language of education and discretion used here point to the realization of Gregory the Great's ideas. They also demonstrate how the promotion of monasticizing self-discipline amongst the laity is not new to the later middle ages, but rather a product of and a reflection of how bishops viewed and constructed their office and of their ambitions for the laity. The relationship between personal responsibility and correction versus social discipline and punishment was thus not a new idea in the later middle ages but rather part of an ongoing process. These case studies demonstrate that whilst we should never lose sight of the particular circumstances which led to specific examples and the evolution of specialized forms of discipline, we can gain fresh insights by switching our focus away to look at it from the point of view of its administrators, the bishops.



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# CHAPTER 31

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# CONCLUSION

## *Looking Back from the Reformation*

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RONNIE PO-CHIA HSIA

IN the midst of the turmoil he had unleashed, Martin Luther, the German Professor of Holy Scriptures at the University of Wittenberg, reflected on the religious chaos and political disorder around him. In his commentaries on the *Book of Daniel* (1530), Luther observed: 'Everything has come to pass and is fulfilled: the Roman Empire is at the end, the Turk has arrived at the door, the splendour of popery has faded away, and the world is cracking in all places, as if it is going to break apart and crumble'. Medieval Christendom was no more. This statement represented not only the feelings of many contemporaries of Luther, but also represents much of how modern scholarship interprets the events of the sixteenth century.

In the rise of history as a professional discipline in nineteenth-century Germany, it seemed as if Protestants and Catholics were drawn respectively to the study of the Reformation and the middle ages, thereby reinforcing the idea of rupture between medieval Christendom and the Reformation world. No less an authority than Max Weber (a Protestant) presented the Reformation as the dawn of modernity: the Protestant ethic and this-worldly asceticism created the spirit for capitalist enterprise; the spirituality of the Protestant Reformation, especially in its Calvinist strand, and even that of the Counter-Reformation Jesuits, exemplified a more rational spirit; the religious revolution of the sixteenth century, in short, inaugurated the disenchantment (*Entzauberung*) of a religious middle ages and created the modern age. A sociologist with brilliant insights, Weber would find that the majority of historians of the Reformation and the late middle ages today agree there were a hundred ties that bound Latin Christendom and the age of confessional conflicts. For the late Heiko Oberman and his students, the aim was the search for theological continuities between Luther's ideas and late medieval scholasticism, whether it be the struggle between the *via antiqua* and *via moderna* in late medieval scholasticism, or the influence of the scholastic Gabriel Biel (d. 1495) on Johann Staupitz and Luther, or the indebtedness of Luther to the medieval German mystics, especially to Johannes Tauler (d. 1361) and Heinrich Suso (d. 1366). For Bernd Moeller and students of the urban reformation, it meant understanding the urban reformation as the realization of the medieval *corpus christianum*, much in the way that Nicholas Terpstra has interpreted civic religion in this volume.<sup>1</sup> Still others see the Protestant Reformation as the culmination of a *longue durée* of religious dissent in the middle ages, a view much influenced by classic Protestant historiography. For John Dolan and many Catholic scholars, the whole idea of reformation was nothing new, the word being used in many monastic reforms and in the *reformatio* of the mendicant Orders in the fifteenth century, not to mention the papal reform of the twelfth century that changed fundamentally the character of Latin Christianity.

It is clear in more contemporary scholarship that the Protestant/Catholic divide no longer separates medieval and Reformation Christianity. Two Catholic scholars hold opposite interpretations: while Jean Delumeau emphasizes continuity and interprets medieval and early modern Christianity as a religion of fear, John Bossy sees a fundamental break between kinship-centred medieval Christianity and the more individualistic religion of the early modern world. A meaningful task for the future, it seems, is to question specific aspects in the theology, rituals, practices, and institutions of Christianity and see the extent



of change and continuity between the high middle ages and the Reformation century. There is no better place to begin than by reflecting on some themes which arise from this volume.

## SPACES

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From the conversion of the Roman Empire to the papal reforms of the twelfth century, one can follow a chronological and spatial narrative of Christian expansion. Following the conversions of Germanic kings in the confines of the western Roman Empire between the fourth and sixth centuries, Latin Christianity experienced a series of territorial expansion at the cost of Muslims and pagans. The campaign of Charlemagne against the Saxons, the Catholic 'Reconquest' of Muslim Iberia, and the Crusades to Byzantium and Palestine expanded by force the territory of Christendom, while the conversions of Poles, Bohemians, Hungarians, and lastly Lithuanians completed the greatest extent of Latin Christianity in Europe. This process of external expansion, which lasted approximately five centuries, was complemented by an internal ordering of Christian space that had begun at the end of the eleventh century. The papal reforms of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries centralized and strengthened the institutional Church, while also sharpening the demarcation between Christians and non-Christians within the spatial extent of Latin Christendom (against Jews in England, France, Central Europe, and Iberia; against Muslims in Spain). If the process of external expansion had halted by 1400 (with the exception of the takeover of Granada), the tightening of internal boundaries against non-Christian minorities continued into the Reformation centuries. With a pause of perhaps 100 years, a fresh force of expansion was again present, inspired this time by the confessional conflicts between the Christian confessions and abounding very much at first to the advantage of the Catholic powers. The creation of a global Portuguese maritime network and the establishment of a Spanish empire represented the strongest continuity with developments from the middle ages. In the methods of religious dialogues and conversions, and the attitude toward non-European peoples, the Iberians would draw on their own institutions and experiences of the many centuries of contact with Jews and Muslims.

Post-Reformation religious space was a landscape torn by conflicts. While battles raged between Catholic Christians and Muslims on land in the Balkans and North Africa and on sea in the Mediterranean, a large part of northern Europe between France and Poland was turned into a battlefield between Catholics and Protestants. Religious differences intensified the regional differences already present in medieval Christianity, so that Catholicism and Protestantism became synonymous with national identity, to wit, the self-consciousness of sixteenth-century Spain and England. In the larger European space, one particular medieval institution—monasticism—suffered a devastating blow. Monasteries disappeared completely from some Protestant lands (England, the Netherlands), while surviving as Protestant female cloisters in others (Protestant Germany). But even in Catholic lands, monasticism was on the retreat, yielding to new religious orders such as the Jesuits and Capuchins that espoused a more activist agenda. Civic religion, which had played such an important role in the early Reformation movement, yielded in significance in the post-Reformation years, as state churches in Protestant countries and a reinvigorated Roman Church claimed greater central authority. In this landscape of violent religious confrontations, some sense of peace was found in local and domestic spaces, which had played an increasingly important role in localized faith in the later middle ages, as Katherine French has demonstrated.<sup>2</sup> This search for irenicism and safety from religious repression took many spatial forms: one finds them in household chapels of the English

Catholic gentry under a harsh Protestant regime; it existed as compacts (a kind of peaceful space) between Huguenot and Catholic villages in France torn by bloody religious wars; it showed up as concealed Catholic chapels built into spaces of Dutch burgher houses; and finally, it was represented in confessionally-torn Germany after 1648 as ‘simultaneous churches’, where the Lutheran and Catholic communities would be assigned separate spaces in the same church.

## PRACTICES

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The survival of medieval religious practices varied greatly from region to region. In countries that experienced little or no religious dissent, such as Spain and Portugal, pilgrimages and the cult of saints continued without disruption. In Protestant regions, obviously, these were suppressed, more effectively so in Calvinist than in Lutheran areas. The importance of pilgrimage and sainthood in Catholic countries can be seen in the example of Ignacio de Loyola (1491–1556), the Basque nobleman and one-time soldier who became the founder of the Society of Jesus, the most important new religious order of the post-Reformation centuries. There is much in the biography of Loyola that is ‘medieval’: in his search for life’s mission, he lived as a hermit and mystic in Spain before undertaking a pilgrimage to Palestine. Even though Weber may identify the Jesuits as embodying the most rational element in the Counter-Reformation Church, their origins and their spirituality had deep roots in medieval Christianity.

Pilgrimage and sainthood also revived in those areas of northern Europe challenged by the Protestant Reformation. By the seventeenth century, pilgrimage had rebounded strongly in Catholic Germany and in the Spanish Netherlands. The canonization of sixteenth-century saints in 1610 and 1622 (Carlo Borromeo, Teresa of Avila, Francisco Xavier, and Ignacio de Loyola) boosted saintly devotions. The resurgence in pilgrimage and saintly cults belies however a fundamental change. As André Vauchez has pointed out, whereas medieval cults of saints arose spontaneously out of local sponsorship, the making of Counter-Reformation saints underwent a fundamental transformation: all cases were placed under central, Roman control, and stricter criteria (theological and medical) were introduced to ensure papal approval. A similar impulse for greater clerical control was also present in the revival of pilgrimages: confraternities were placed under stricter clerical discipline, and ‘secular frivolities’ were suppressed in processions and festivities.

The overall tendency was to stress central control, which meant Romanization and clericalization, echoing the priorities of the twelfth-century reforms. The difference in the Counter-Reformation lies in the greater support from Catholic authorities, who did not hesitate to use coercion to enforce religious discipline and conformity. One important result in this process was the centralization or Romanization of the Catholic liturgy. After the Council of Trent, the *Roman Missale* gradually replaced divergent local liturgies as it was adopted in all Catholic countries in Europe and in the non-European missions. Liturgical unity went hand-in-hand with a new assertion of sacerdotalism (that is, the necessity of priestly mediation between God and the laity). A strong discourse of papal power emerged in the course of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, even more intensely than in the twelfth century. In practice, however, the reality of papal power was severely limited by the good will of the Spanish and French monarchies, which were the strongest political supporters of early modern Catholicism. This renewed Roman self-confidence had a negative impact on ecumenical relations with the eastern orthodox churches, and its effects on the boundary between Catholic Poland and orthodox Russia, or between the Catholic

Habsburg monarchy and orthodox Romania in the Ottoman empire, remain visible to this day. Overseas, the intolerant attitude of a renewed Roman Catholicism soured relations with the Coptic Church in Ethiopia, with Armenians in Persia, and with Syrian Christians in South Asia. The hardened attitude, no doubt, developed out of the embittered struggles against the Protestants, which continued at least polemically into the eighteenth century.

In theology, the Council of Trent was less creative than the Fourth Lateran Council. In ecclesiology, it adopted a strongly conservative and pro-papal position; in dogma, it affirmed and clarified traditional teachings—the seven sacraments, the Vulgate Bible, the superiority of the clergy in matters of salvation, etc. An aspect of this conservatism was the affirmation of medieval authority in theological teaching, namely, the advancement of Thomism and rationality as the centrepieces of Catholic authority. In this, there was a marked difference between Catholic and Protestant theologies. We speak not only of the greater importance of St Augustine for Reformation theologians, but also of the general significance of eschatology in a variety of Protestant thought, ranging from the millenarian activism of Anabaptist and other sectarians, to the more intellectually defined eschatology of the main reformers.

## EMOTIONS

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In the late middle ages, the people of Latin Christendom could seem terrified by death and damnation.<sup>3</sup> Death rituals encompassed a wide spectrum of practices; they ranged from the Church-approved sacrament of Extreme Unction, edifying books on the Four Last Things, to the performance of the *danse macabre*. Fear, specifically the fear of death, is the title word of a book by Jean Delumeau that sums up the religiosity of the West between the high middle ages and the Enlightenment. To alleviate this all-pervasive fear, the Church offered the sacrament of penance, which, by the forgiveness of sins, promised eternal life, in the next world if not in this. The sacrament of penance consisted of confession, contrition, and doing penance or making restitution. The first step established the authority of the clergy over the laity, external submission over internal introspection; the second required the cognizance and remorse of the individual will over his state of sinfulness; and the third pertained to the interaction between the institutional church and society. For the middle ages, we know more about the history of conscience and confession among the elites than the common people: the temptations and pangs of conscience among saints and cloister-inmates, the political performances of rulers and kings (Henry IV at Canossa). Since there were no requirements to keep parish records concerning confession before the sixteenth century, we cannot estimate rates of compliance with penance among the common people. It is still an open question whether the majority of Luther's contemporaries felt as intensely as he did about the burden of sin and the failure to find consolation in the sacrament of confession.<sup>4</sup>

What is clear, however, is that Luther's Reformation transformed drastically the emotional world of sin and confession. With confession no longer a sacrament in the Protestant churches, the reformers faced a new challenge to maintain church discipline, instituting thereby church visitations and synodal hearings to probe the conscience of their flock. In Calvinist communities—in Switzerland, the Netherlands, and northern Germany—synods worked effectively to discipline behaviour, punishing drunkenness, sexual sins, and blasphemy. In Protestantism, the fear of death was perhaps replaced by the fear of God: the omnipotent, omniscient, and unpredictable God in the theology of John Calvin. In Lutheran

Europe, at least until the mid-seventeenth century, parishioners were admonished routinely of God's wrath in sermons, prayers, and spiritual readings.

For Catholicism, the Reformation had the opposite effect of tightening clerical control over the sacrament of confession. On the one hand, it meant strengthening sacerdotal authority. Handbooks of sacraments described the confessor as a judge and the penitent as a sinner/criminal before the ecclesiastical/divine tribunal. The Council of Trent required annual confession and communion. On the other hand, the Church also cracked down on abuses associated with confession, prosecuting the clergy for sexual solicitation during confession and introducing the confessional to protect anonymity. Even with this stricter regime, it is doubtful that a regime of fear was successfully maintained. Visitation records suggest the majority of parishioners adhered to the minimum requirement of annual confession. With everyone rushing to confess during Lent, there would be little time for the clergy to maintain the surveillance of conscience.

If the Catholic Church failed to control the disposition of the soul, it was more effective in controlling the body of the faithful. The requirements for church attendance, confession, and communion resulted in bodily conformity. The problem of dissimulation, Nicodemism as Calvin called it in reference to the New Testament, was widespread as dissenters hid their thoughts from the rigour of the Inquisition. The Counter-Reformation Church, however, was more successful in its control of the body in mystical rapture. The reaction against mysticism, as against all forms of religious enthusiasm, was a general reaction of the Reformation, among both Catholics and Protestants. In the Catholic Church, it implied stricter control of female spirituality, as the majority of mystics, in the middle ages as well as in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, were women. While many female mystics were cloistered nuns, others belonged to that amorphous category called *beatae* or holy women. As laywomen who acquired saintly reputations and a following, the *beatae* represented a greater problem for the male ecclesiastical hierarchy. Whereas mysticism in female cloisters could be strictly investigated and disciplined, *beatae* in Spanish and Italian cities exerted an influence on society at large that was potentially more troublesome for the Church. Teresa of Avila, a Carmelite nun in sixteenth-century Spain, found her way to canonization more by her activities in reforming cloisters than through her famous visions and mystical unions, as her biography bears witness to the hostility and suspicion to the latter on the part of her male confessors.

## IDEAS

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In the production of books, the Reformation inspired a genre that was relatively neglected in the preceding centuries: ecclesiastical history. While we have Bede and Gregory of Tours in the age of conversions, the schoolmen of the high middle ages preferred law and theology as subjects of intellectual pursuit. In the sixteenth century, ecclesiastical history became again a prominent subject. In challenging the legitimacy of the Roman Catholic Church, Luther and the Protestant reformers represented themselves not as innovators but reformers, reverting back to the 'true' tradition of Christianity, and continuing the work of dissenters and critics of the papacy throughout the ages. And as adherents of reform fell victim to violent repression, the Protestants saw in martyrdom another manifestation of their connection to the apostolic church. Church history, and the subgenre of martyrology, strengthened the identity of the Protestant churches: the *Magdeburg Centuries* (1559–74) of Matthias Flacius, the *Book of Martyrs* of John Foxe (1563), and Jean Crespin's *Histoire des*

*Martyrs* (1564), represented monuments in the creation of Lutheran, Anglican, and Huguenot identities.

The Catholics were quick to respond. To counter the criticisms that the medieval papacy had deviated from the true Christianity of the Apostolic Church, as is alleged in the *Magdeburg Centuries*, Cardinal Cesare Baronio composed the multi-volume *Annales ecclesiastici* (1598–1604) that surveyed the history of the Church from Christ to 1198, rebutting Protestant criticisms and affirming the apostolic succession of Rome. To counter Protestant martyrologies, the Jesuits offered their own martyrologies, the most famous being the 1685 work of the Bohemian Jesuit Matthias Tanner, which arranges Jesuit martyrs by region, showing the global scale of their missionary martyrs, who fell to the violence of Protestants, Muslims, and pagans.<sup>5</sup> Still another subgenre in the Catholic repertoire was hagiography. The post-Reformation centuries saw a systematic, comprehensive, and scholarly effort that encompassed the work of many generations of Belgian Jesuits. The project began in the early seventeenth century with the idea of the Antwerp Jesuit Johan Boland (1596–1669) to collect and edit the sources related to the saints, a project considered insane in its scope by Cardinal Baronio. Boland persisted, and his successors Gottfried Hensken and Daniel Papebroek, with the support of the Flemish Province of the Society of Jesus, eventually launched the *Acta Sanctorum*, the systematic collection and edition of Latin and Greek manuscripts in European libraries, and their redaction according to the feast days of the saints. This immense project, like the building of medieval cathedrals, took several centuries before its completion. In its careful linguistic, humanistic, and historical scholarship, the *Acta Sanctorum* transcended the confessional antagonism that characterized most intellectual production of the post-Reformation years and would stand as a great monument to ecclesiastical history and humanistic scholarship.

If some among the clerical elites of the twelfth century disdained the unlearned Christian masses, as Peter Biller argues, the difference between the laity and the clergy developed quite differently in the Protestant and Catholic churches.<sup>6</sup> The idea of an educated, professional clergy was largely accomplished in the Protestant churches one century after the Reformation. By 1600, a university education, with some knowledge of the biblical languages, was expected of all candidates for the ministry. Universities in Protestant countries, led by Germany and England, trained generations of competent and knowledgeable candidates, who were, however, subject not only to their clerical superiors, but also to lay supervision. While the pastorate in Lutheran countries was subjected to the corresponding ministry in the state, Calvinist ministers were no less responsible to the presbytery, constituted by elders, the most notable members of the community, often magistrates and officials. At the parish level, clerical candidates were required to give trial sermons and their future career depended on good relations with their parishioners. Clerical celibacy having been abolished, the Protestant clergy fitted into lay society as a special status group that shared a similar culture and outlook with their lay counterparts in a society of estates. The question of ‘popular religion’, as posed by Laura Smoller, is less meaningful for the post-Reformation centuries, as the vernacular replaced Latin as the language of liturgy and spirituality.<sup>7</sup> In books, in psalms, in print, in reading, and in singing, the Word was made equal to clergy and laity and contributed in no small measure to levelling the hierarchy that still obtained in the Catholic world.

The Catholic revival of the late sixteenth century was in large measure a re-assertion of sacerdotal authority. With few exceptions, the vernacular Bible was suppressed; and the Catholic clergy jealously and rigorously vouchsafed their exclusive claim to interpreting and performing the sacred. The distance between the clergy and the laity was less one between intellectuals and the ignorant masses, as some medieval churchmen might have



formulated. After all, Counter-Reformation Europe, in the many Jesuit colleges, succeeded in forming an educated and largely loyal lay elite: Ferdinand II, Holy Roman Emperor, Maximilian, Duke of Bavaria, Justus Lipsius, Leuven professor and the greatest neo-classicist of the seventeenth century, and René Descartes, a loyal but problematic son of the Church, had all studied at Jesuit colleges. Strong supporters of the Roman Church, at least not openly challenging Roman teachings, the Counter-Reformation lay elites nonetheless deferred to sacerdotal authority in the campaign to indoctrinate and discipline the Catholic masses. They shared the common aim of stopping Protestant expansion and winning back territories and souls lost to the reformers. To that end, there was a subtle and significant social arrangement that would characterize Catholic society in the post-Reformation centuries.

The outsiders to this new arrangement in the Catholic world were the sceptics. Dorothea Weltecke has shown that whilst doubt clearly existed in the medieval world, philosophical scepticism was really an early modern phenomenon.<sup>8</sup> The concept itself describes a range of beliefs and behaviour, from atheism (still very rare), doctrinal doubts, religious indifference, to anti-confessional ecumenism that extended even to non-Christian beliefs. In this well-studied subject, we only need to observe that while it was possible for Spinoza to flourish in the Protestant Netherlands, the concern for repression in Catholic France caused Descartes to be more circumspect in publicizing his ideas.

## IDENTITIES

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The disintegration of Christendom also swept away its binary identities. In a landscape of multiple Christian churches, the contrast between *ecclesia* and *synagoga*, or between Christendom and Islam lost much of its significance. In the short term, Jews and Judaism became polemical words in the Reformation years, when some Catholic writers accused reformers of ‘judaizing’, and the concern for Christian purity led some reformers, Luther included, to vent their frustration at Jews for their refusal to convert. In the long term, the Jewish communities in Europe benefited from the competition between the Christian churches. Through the emphasis on biblical scholarship and the study of Hebrew in Protestantism, Judaism gained a greater respect, especially in the Calvinist Netherlands. Better knowledge of Judaism by Christians did not necessarily diminish prejudice against the Jews, but it contributed to the demystifying of Jewish rituals that had led to ritual murder and host desecration accusations in the middle ages.

Islam, on the other hand, remained Christianity’s implacable foe in the form of the Ottoman empire. While there was little direct religious exchange between Christianity and Islam in the post-Reformation centuries, Mediterranean warfare, piracy, and slavery created the ground for conversions between the two faiths among merchants, mariners, sailors, and prisoners-of-war, with defections going in the most cases over to Islam.

The bifurcation in Christianity between Good and Evil, God and the Devil, followed divides other than the visible differences between Christianity and other religions. Rather, in Christian Europe, both Catholic and Protestant, evil seemed to lurk in invisible places, in witchcraft, embodied especially by women. The witch-craze in the post-Reformation period reached its height between 1580 and 1650 and swept across Europe, with England, France, and central Europe registering the most witch-burnings, while Catholic Spain, Portugal, and Italy saw relatively few prosecutions. While witchcraft or the practice of magic had long historical roots, persecutions against witches and a discourse about witchcraft—demonology—began to predominate in the fifteenth century. The first cases against witches

for causing crop damages through conjuring inclement weather took place in the mid-fifteenth century in the mountains of Francophone Switzerland, and the *Malleus Maleficarum*, which collected many anecdotes of bewitchment, was compiled and published in 1486 by two Dominicans, Heinrich Kramer and Jakob Sprenger, who were active in southwest Germany. Other demonologies in the sixteenth century added to this ‘science’ of witchcraft; tens of thousands became victims in the witch-hunts that stretched from the mid-fifteenth to the early eighteenth centuries, and it is estimated that women comprised the majority of all those prosecuted.

The fate of dissenters was again very different in Catholic and Protestant Europe for the simple fact that the Inquisition represented an effective institution for repression in Spain, Portugal, and Italy. A medieval institution that acquired broader powers in the hands of secular governments, the Inquisition, although staffed by the clergy, was ultimately answerable to secular authorities (in the Papal States, the Pope, as Paolo Prodi has demonstrated, was both secular and spiritual head). In fifteenth-century Spain and Portugal, the Inquisition targeted mostly New Christians, Jews who converted under coercion; in the sixteenth century, it turned its attention to Christian dissent, rooting out suspected mystics (*illuminados*) and Protestants.

Protestants were no less fervent to uphold the unity of faith, but they generally lacked the necessary coercive institutions. Other than the persecutions of Anabaptists in the first decades of the Reformation, the death penalty was seldom applied, except in egregious cases, such as expressed blasphemies or the denial of key Christian doctrines, as in the case of the Spanish physician, Michael Servetus, who was burned at the insistence of Calvin in Geneva for denying the doctrine of the Trinity. Calvin’s Geneva represented a special case wherein the authority of the reformer commanded the collaboration of the political authorities. Everywhere else, it was the secular authorities—princes and magistrates—who decided on religious dissent. By and large they opted for leniency and social harmony (again, with the exception of persecutions against Anabaptists) over doctrinal purity and the uniformity of the Christian community. In Amsterdam, the urban magistrates repeatedly ignored petitions by Calvinist ministers to curb the nascent Jewish community, formed ostensibly of New Christian merchants from Spain, who quickly reverted to the open practice of Judaism. In other Dutch cities and in many Protestant areas in Germany, religious dissenters were tolerated, and even Catholics received protection, as it was guaranteed in the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, in staunchly Lutheran cities such as Hamburg and Frankfurt. For Protestant clerics, the ban was the only option to deal with religious dissent. It was used by orthodox Calvinists in the Netherlands (Counter-Remonstrants) in the early seventeenth century against Remonstrants, and by orthodox Lutherans in Germany in the late seventeenth century against pietists. And it was used by the religious dissenters themselves, as Anabaptist communities multiplied as a result of leadership and doctrinal clashes.

## POWER

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The struggle between papacy and empire in the Investiture Controversy continued into the late middle ages. In the 1320s, Emperor Ludwig IV and Pope John XXII clashed over the former’s support for the spiritual Franciscans, who were strong critics of papal power, and papal claims to intervene in imperial affairs and John’s support for the imperial rival of the Bavarian. A strong supporter of the imperial party, the Italian jurist Marsilius of Padua composed a treatise, *Defensor Pacis* (1324), in which he denied the clergy any right to

pronounce in temporal affairs and condemned them for using spiritual weapons such as the interdict to further political aims. Sovereignty rested in the people, represented by a law-giver, a prince; and it was the state that provided public peace. While Marsilius granted the Roman pontiff a place of honour, he argued that the clergy must refrain from unjustified interpretations of divine law. Ultimate religious authority in Christendom rested in a general council representing all the people, and not just the clergy, not to speak of the papacy.

Nestled in the struggle between the Guelfs and Ghibellines in the Italian communes, this fiercely anti-clerical political discourse was resurrected in the Reformation. The *Defensor Pacis* never appeared in print during the late middle ages, having been condemned by two popes, but it was first published in 1522 at the height of Luther's defiance of papal authority. There was, indeed, a direct connection between the publication of *Defensor Pacis* and Luther's pamphlet, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, the two works separated only by one year. Against the condemnation of Pope Leo X, Luther invoked a higher authority in his struggle for true Christianity, for princes too, the reformer argued, following Marsilius of Padua, were divinely ordained and obligated to ensure the moral integrity and well-being of the Christian commonwealth. In 1535, Thomas Cromwell, the chief minister of Henry VIII and the architect of the Protestant Reformation in England, sponsored the translation of *Defensor Pacis* into English. It would serve as justification for the acts of Parliament that overthrew allegiance to Rome and established royal supremacy over the Anglican Church. *Defensor Pacis* became an important text not only for Protestants but also for those Catholics opposed to the political pretensions of the papacy.

Reacting to the Protestant Reformation as an attack on the clergy and papal legitimacy, the papacy condemned vigorously the theological challenges of the reformers, and delayed reforms. At the Council of Trent, the papal legates favoured discussion of dogma over reform. Aware of abuses in ecclesiastical practices and the inadequacy of the clergy, the papacy was nonetheless anxious to retain the prerogatives of reform in its own hand and hence safeguard papal authority from further erosion: sacerdotal authority first, moral reform second. This double programme was most effectively carried out in the Papal States, where the pope was both prince and bishop. Thus the suppression of heretical books went hand-in-hand with the arrest of religious dissenters, while officials of the Papal States hunted down brigands and chased out prostitutes. When there was a conflict between the reason of state and church reforms, the logic of the pope's 'Two Bodies', as Paolo Prodi has shown, resulted in the primacy of political considerations over spiritual or ecclesiastical arguments. In short, Catholic reform and Counter-Reformation were effective precisely because the papacy disposed of the means of secular coercion within its own realm. The lesson was not lost on other Catholic powers.

Philip II was the first Catholic ruler to promulgate the decrees of the Council of Trent. As ruler of the most powerful Catholic nation, he had little need of papal authority to bolster Catholicism. Not only did Philip make all major ecclesiastical appointments in his realm, but all papal bulls needed royal approval before they could be published in his lands. While appeals to Rome could be made in ecclesiastical matters, they seldom occurred. The Inquisition in Spain operated as a royal institution and the Inquisitor-General had a seat on the *Junta da gobierno* of the state. The king's power in ecclesiastical matters was demonstrated fully in the Carranza case. The Dominican Bartolome Carranza, spiritual advisor to Emperor Charles V, Philip's father, had published a commentary on the catechism in 1558, while he was serving with the aging emperor in his native Netherlands. Appointed Archbishop of Toledo, the primate of Spain, Carranza came under suspicion of heresy for his catechism. Arrested by the Inquisition with the permission of the king, Carranza was kept in Spain even though he was cleared of heresy by the Council of Trent.

Repeated papal demands to release Carranza to Roman jurisdiction were rejected by Philip II until 1566, when the ailing archbishop arrived to spend his last years in papal Rome.

As an Italian prince, the pope also found his authority challenged by another Italian state. In 1605, the Republic of Venice arrested two clerics on petty crimes and also passed a law restricting church ownership of property. When the republic refused to back down upon papal demand, Pope Paul V placed it under an interdict. The Venetians instructed their clergy to ignore the papal interdict and continue church services, expelling those like the Jesuits who refused to comply. A war of words ensued between the Servite monk Paolo Sarpi on behalf of Venice and the Jesuit cardinal Robert Bellarmine on the papal side. Eventually, the interdict was lifted with the mediation of Henri IV of France, but the Venetians continued to ban the ultramontane Jesuits until 1621 from their territories. This episode demonstrated clearly the limits of papal authority in ecclesiastical matters outside the Papal States.

That limit was even more manifest when the papacy confronted the Spanish and French monarchies, its strongest secular backers in the age of confessional conflicts. In the matter of ecclesiastical appointment, application of the Tridentine decrees, or the definition of papal rights in Spain and France, the Catholic Monarch and the Most Christian King trumped the Supreme Pontiff. Not for nothing were the Jesuits, staunch defenders of papal sovereignty, the least appreciated clerics in Spain and France. If the conflict between popes and monarchs in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries echoed the Investiture Controversy and the humiliation of Boniface VIII by Philip the Fair, there was no doubt who was the final winner. During the five years of negotiations (1643–8) at Münster that led to the Peace of Westphalia, the conclusive peace that ended the religious and dynastic conflicts of the Thirty Years' War, the papacy was represented by Fabio Chigi. The cardinal and future pope (Alexander VII) found his words routinely ignored by his fellow Catholic diplomats and the arguments of the papacy shunned, relegated by the reasoned arguments of the state. Perhaps only then were the middle ages truly over.

## NOTES

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1. See chapter by [Terpstra](#), this volume.
2. See chapter by [French](#), this volume.
3. For a slightly different view, see chapter by [Angenendt](#), this volume.
4. Though see chapter by [Meens](#), this volume, for some thoughts.
5. *Societas Jesu usque ad sanguinis et vitæ profusionem militans, in Europa, Africa, Asia, et America, contra Gentiles, Mahometanos, Judæos, Hæreticos, ... Sive vita, et mors eorum qui ex Societate Jesu in causa fidei, & virtutis propugnatae, violenta morte tot orbe sublatis sunt. Bei Societas Jesu usque ad sudorem et mortem pro salute proximi laborans.* Prag o.J. (1685).
6. See chapter by [Biller](#), this volume.
7. See chapter by [Smoller](#), this volume.
8. See chapter by [Weltecke](#), this volume.



## FURTHER READING

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