

WALDENSIAN DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENTS
IN 14TH CENTURY AUSTRIA AND ITALY

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ABSTRACT

This project began as an investigation into the distinctiveness of the Austrian Waldensian experience, with an eye towards high theology, such as it was among the Waldensians. This is what lead me to investigate the letters surrounding the conversion of Johannes Leser and Siegfried in the mid-14th century. However, in the course of my investigation I repeatedly found evidence of the close ties between the Austrians and the Italians, with the Austrians habitually turning to the Italians as a focus of spiritual authority within the movement. This was true to such an extent that I was forced to reject the idea of a dogmatic distinction between the Austrian and Italian Waldensians, at least in the context of normative theology as espoused by religious elites. After this realization, I began to focus on the ways in which this unity between the movements was constituted, and to widen my focus somewhat. What began as a comparison between Austrians and the rest of the Waldensian movements in a fixed time became a narrative of change of the movement as a whole over the course of a little over a century.

From the beginning, this thesis did not endeavor to assess the religious understanding of everyday believers and instead investigate educated theologians. I do not regret this decision, but I do recognize the degree to which this limits my thesis's findings. However, even if the beliefs of highly educated clerics did not fully disseminate to lay believers, the construction of identity through the creation of knowledge is a process that necessarily happens at these levels as well and does affect daily life of believers. My topic also necessitated that I rely heavily on sources hostile to the Waldensian enterprise, with varying degrees of firsthand experience with the movements which constituted it. I have attempted to remain critical of these sources, while still maintaining the usefulness of these sources. Above all, in these cases I have attempted to be transparent with the reader regarding the

potential issues that these sources represent.

Ultimately, I find that the Italians collaborated with and to a great degree lead the Austrian Waldensians in creating new concepts of Waldensian identity and new justifications for doctrinal shifts during this period. Theological shifts like the permissibility and even necessity of lying and taking oaths under duress were justified through the creation of a new, secret sacred history. This was accomplished through a network of texts and exchanged emissaries which constitute nothing short of a religious community, if a somewhat decentralized one. I hope that my conclusions may prove useful to other scholars investigating the genesis of clandestine movements but that it is also accessible to a lay audience simply interested in Waldensian developments from roughly the mid-13th to mid-14th centuries.

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INTRODUCTION

The Waldensians, or Waldenses, were a religious movement, primarily of laypeople both male and female, which originated in the late 12th century. The movement is credited to a founder known in English as “Peter Waldo.” Valdesius was a merchant in the city of Lyon in modern-day France. It is possible he was involved in the practice of granting loans for interest; the sin known as usury. Probably in 1170, Valdesius had a “conversion” experience when he was quoted the verse from Matthew 19: “If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.” Taking this literally, Valdesius gave what he had away, save some money he reserved for his wife and daughters. He then took to the streets to beg. Some in Lyon began to emulate him, and there were enough of them by 1179 for the “Poor of Lyon” to send a delegation to the Third Council of the Lateran Palace. There, they received a commendation from the Pope for their lives of austerity, but were denied the permission to preach except with consent of the local priest. However, in 1184, Valdesius and his followers were excommunicated by the Church at the Council of Verona. While excommunicated, the movement was not yet declared heretical, merely schismatic. Valdesius died between 1205 and 1207; finally, in 1215 the Waldensians are declared anathema by Pope Innocent III at the Fourth Lateran Council. Although it would take some years for this condemnation to take full effect, organized persecution of the Waldensians drove them to become a secret religion, hiding from inquisitors throughout large areas of Europe. They survived roughly 350 years of persecution. Ironically, what the Waldensian faith could not survive was the Protestant Reformation, ultimately merging with the Reformed branch of the movement and losing much of their distinctive doctrines. From the beginning of the Waldensian movement, its members placed an emphasis on public preaching, rejection of violence, refusing to swear oaths, wearing sandals

in emulation of the apostles, and a focus on learning, memorizing, and translation of biblical texts.¹

This thesis will investigate a series of documents concerning Waldensian theology in an effort to trace some of the developments that occurred in the movement between the beginning of the 13th and the end of the 14th centuries. I will show that the Waldensian movement reacted to changing circumstances in their judicial standing and their organizational structure by forging new identities and new doctrines. These doctrines were the result of external pressures on the movement which resulted in its transformation from a lay movement focused on apostolic living and influenced by the Gregorian Reform into a secret church with a clerical class and institutions of its own. I will highlight two trends within orthodox Catholicism which exerted unique pressures on the Waldensian movements and did much to radicalize, unify, and shape the heretical movement against which they were deployed. In this introductory chapter, I will present a sketch of the movement in its infancy against which to compare later developments. The second chapter, “Waldensian Doctrines,” will present the first of two major changes in the movement as seen through Waldensian documents of the 13th century. “Italian Letters” deals with the Italian response to a crisis within the Austrian Waldensian of the 14th century, this chapter will present Waldensianism as it had changed after the events of the previous chapter. “Austrian Responses” will present the responses of *ex-fratres* of the Austrian Waldensians to their former Waldensian co-religionists and will isolate and analyze doctrinal changes which had occurred in the joint Italian/Austrian Waldensian context in this period.

The Waldensians first emerged ridding the rising wave of popular heresies which confronted the Church, beginning in the 10th century. It's not coincidence that the movement began only a few decades

¹ For a general history of the Waldensian movement, see: Gabriel Audisio. *The Waldensian Dissent: Persecution and Survival, C. 1170-C. 1570*. (Cambridge Medieval Textbooks. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) ;Euan Cameron. *Waldenses: Rejections of Holy Church in Medieval Europe*. (Oxford ; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000); Biller, Peter. *The Waldenses, 1170-1530: Between a Religious Order and a Church*. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001); and Lambert, Malcolm. *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation*. 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992).

before the Albigensian Crusade was declared, the first crusade to be launched against fellow Christians. The institutional church, attempting to project the policies of the Gregorian Reform onto Christendom, found itself beset by heterodox believers. In this climate of growing concern for the beliefs and spiritual health of lay believers, associations of laymen interested in religious devotion exploded. Sometimes lead by educated clerics, as in the case of the Petrobrusians, who moved away from traditional centers of theology and began preaching to the common layman. Other movements were lay-driven, as was the case with the Patarines of Milan. Both movements predated the Waldensians, as did the most prodigious heresy of the period, Catharism. Much has been written on the Cathars and I could not do justice to them here, least of all to the complexities of determining their beliefs. It is sufficient to note, however, the degree to which the papal institution felt besieged by heterodox movements, which threatened to tear a rend in the seamless garment of the Church.

Absolutely central to understanding the birth of the Waldensian movement is the radical change that was occurring within the Roman Church at time of its inception in the 1170s. The Gregorian Reform movement involved a massive increase in the attention that the Church in Rome gave towards the action of lay believers and in the action of everyday parish priests. The Gregorian Reform pushed the Roman Church to pay more attention to the *orbis* which lay outside of its familiar *urbs*, and to become an institution with fully European ambitions. This included a focus on restoring the clergy to the apostolic life and curbing clerical excess generally. Contrary to the misleading nomenclature that history has granted the movement, the Papal institution was not the only force (nor, arguably, the main one) in shaping the direction of the reforming movements. The 12th century as a whole was often a process of negotiation between radical reformers and a Papacy which was at times sympathetic to and at times threatened by such sentiments. Beginning in the 11th century, there was a growing interest in the apostolic life and the emulation thereof in Latin Christendom as a whole. The aforementioned Patarines provide an excellent example, it emerged when the laity of Milan found the clergy of their

city too entangled with affairs of the secular world. The policies of the leaders of the Papacy, and by extension its relationship to these reforming movements, are what generated papal policy in this period. Pope Alexander III was, in 1179, apparently eager to incorporate the Waldensians under the umbrella of the Church. Only five years later, Pope Lucius III publicly condemned the group. There is more to this example than the pontiffs themselves, of course. Tension between the Waldensians and the Bishop of Lyon over the issue of public preaching in the city had escalated in the intervening years, despite papal warnings to the contrary from Pope Alexander. However, the unfavorable eye that Lucius III took to other heretical movements doubtlessly informed his opinion of the Waldensians and predisposed him to enforce conformity rather than negotiate for unity.

There are two central aspects to the Gregorian Reform which influenced the advent of the Waldensian movements; in one way they were innovators and in another they were more closely related to traditional forms of piety. The Gregorian Reform movement's two sides were the applicability and immediacy of apostolic life as well as the promotion of social distinctiveness of the clergy. These two enterprises were linked in a Papal understanding of what the reform meant. The earliest expressions of these linked ideas was the great focus upon the particularly clerical sin of simony. Simony threatened both the apostolic succession of the clergy as well as the *libertas ecclesiae* upon which the reformers focused so heavily. But this *libertas* did not extend merely to removing secular power over the church, but also to removing secular society from the clergy. This included the condemnation of such practices as priestly marriage or concubinage. However, the movement was forever skirting the issue of Donatism, as when Peter Damian proposed in the *Liber Gratissimus* that simoniacal bishops did not have the capacity to ordain priests in their diocese.² That the impurity of the sin of simony could render a priest incapable of performing the sacraments despite performing the ceremony of consecration correctly in all other ways runs totally contrary to the doctrine of *ex opere operato*, the idea that the

² Colin Morris. *The Papal Monarchy: The Western Church from 1050 to 1250*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 102.

sacraments are a result of the form of the ritual, not of the state of the one performing the ritual. This quasi-Donatism had clear dangers for the theology and the authority of the Church, even calling into question the salvific efficacy of any of the Catholic sacraments. After all, what priest could say that no bishop in his entire “lineage” of investiture had not obtained his post by simony? This is why the exhortation of the laity to boycott masses performed by simoniacal clerics (while still accepting the sacraments as valid) was less problematic than the denunciation of their validity.

The Papal model was not the only understanding of reform, however. In the case of the Waldensians, as well as some other lay movements, the exhortation to the apostolic life was enthusiastically received. But for these new organization of lay piety, the application of apostolic commandments and actions, taken from the gospels and Acts, were not limited to the clergy. The clear Waldensian aspiration to apostolic life (through poverty, preaching, and so on) places them very much within the Reform context. In this way, the movement was part of the relatively new phenomenon of apostolic living which had begun in the previous century. However, the Waldensian movement was also a reactionary one, rejecting the increasingly large distinction between ordained clerics and the laity. Beyond the insistence upon the potential for humans to achieve a sanctified state outside of clerical office or monastic life, the rejection of lay/clerical distinction also permeated their theology. Even early Waldensians advocated for the salvific efficacy of confession performed between laity, while still accepting confession from the priesthood as well. In the same way, in instances where a priest was not available, early Waldensians allowed for the lay (and even lay female) consecration of the Eucharist. Both of these positions removed the clergy from their privileged position as conveyors of salvation. This aspect of Waldensian theology was not a result of influence from the Gregorian Reformation. Reformers placed greater emphasis on the clergy by insisting upon their moral purity as a requisite for their ability to perform the sacraments, thereby tightly limiting the ability to perform the sacraments. By contrast, the Waldensians spread the ability to consecrate the sacraments to the laity at

large, maintaining the emphasis on purity but de-centering the clergy in the economy of salvation. Later, as Waldensianism developed from a semi-mendicant movement of lay preachers into a more formal church structure, in the Weberian sense, the insistence upon a morally upright clerical class to perform these sacraments was reinstated. I will speak more on the issue of the construction of a Waldensian clergy, of sorts, below. Here I wish only to emphasize that the Waldensian enterprise was ultimately condemned because in certain ways it was too radically reforming while in others it was a traditional holdout against the papal reforming movement. The very idea of acquisition of apostolic life was a result of the Reform, but the unwillingness to apply it only to the clergy was an expression of the traditional similarity between laity and clergy, which was only now beginning to change as the Papacy wished to set markers of social distinction between the two.

The early history of Waldensianism was marked by negotiation. Starting with the Waldensian delegation to the Third Lateran Council in 1179, the Waldensians were not initially attempting to rebel against the institutional Church, certainly not against a church which had so fervently pushed reform for the previous century. However, disputes between Waldensians and local bishops, especially in Lyon, made coexistence difficult. By 1215, negotiation was more or less over. Valdesius himself died sometime between 1205 and 1207, which may have prompted Durand of Huesca to lead some of the Waldensians back to Catholicism and reform themselves as the Poor Catholics. But this did not lead to the mass acceptance of the Waldensian movement. The Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 declared that “We excommunicate and anathematize every heresy that raises against the holy, orthodox and Catholic faith which we have above explained; condemning all heretics under whatever names they may be known.”³ The council can in many ways be considered the triumph of the Gregorian Reform within the institutional church. Obviously, many of the reforms so proudly trumpeted at this council would take centuries to permeate the everyday life of the parish church, especially in Northern Europe. This was

³ H. J. Schroeder ed. *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation, and Commentary*. (St. Louis, B. Herder, 1937), 236-296.

also true of the denunciation of the Waldensians and other heretics, who still found pockets of toleration in Christendom. Whether it was enforced immediately or not, it did cause immediate concern within the movement, resulting in a Conference between the French and Italian Waldensian societies and an attempt at organizational and doctrinal unity between them. The establishment of the Holy Office of the Inquisition in 1231 signaled the true beginning of Waldensian clandestine worship. With the rise of inquisitors, typically in the form of mendicant friars, Papal denunciations of Waldensianism began to take real effect. By the mid-14th century, persecution through inquisition had become the established modus operandi for response to heterodox belief.

METHODOLOGY

Approaches and Methods

The mere existence of heresy in the Middle Ages has prompted a great deal of debate. What is so fascinating about this phenomenon is the seeming gap of heresy in Latin Christendom between roughly the 8th century with the demise of Arian Christianity and the re-emergence of heretical groups in the late 10th century at the earliest. Between these points, Latin Christendom seems devoid of large-scale, organized heresy. There are two possible explanations for this, though they are not necessarily exclusive. The first, and most intuitive, is that some influences transmitted from outside or changing factors within Latin Christendom caused for the re-emergence of heresy in this period. The second, less intuitive but quite possible, is that the Gregorian Reform movements and growing power of the papacy caused educated clerics to encounter and identify certain aspects of traditional religion as heretical. The increasing awareness by Catholic clergymen of lay piety in Christendom in this period would explain the gap of identified heresy for the centuries preceding. However, just because the literate classes were confronting folk piety for the first time in these centuries does not mean that new forms of religious experience were not also emerging simultaneously. In the case of the Waldensians, it is fairly well documented how new the movement was and how clearly it arose from an exclusively Western Christian context (despite Waldensian claims to the contrary, as I will show below.)

Knowing that the Waldensian movement was a unique product of the late 12th century, it begs the question: what factors produced it and other movements like it? In sources, heresy was often associated with weavers and other workers in growing urban merchant environments. Current writers often connect growing diversification of labor and growing merchant wealth with increasing lay piety expressed through ascetic or apostolic movements. This issue requires an investigation into how religions and religious beliefs change; what causes changes and how is change shaped by historical

actors? Emile Durkheim opined that if the conception of divinity changes, “it is because the institutions have changed, and if they have changed, it is because external conditions are no longer the same. Each variation in the symbol presupposes a corresponding variation in the thing symbolized.”⁴ My thesis is based upon the supposition that religion changes as a result of the political realities in which it exists, and it is clear that religious institutions are responsive to their usefulness in society. Durkheim's model does account for the potential for the individual to create expressions of religion, but this creation exists only in the context of what is possible and useful for society. However, Durkheim's emphasis on religion as a social construct and existing only so long as it is useful should be tempered with a recognition of the ability of the individual to impact or even reject the culture in which he or she is situated. This is most evident in the case of the Waldensians, as the movement began as the brainchild of one man and ultimately spread throughout most of Latin Christendom. This does not discount the fact that ideas of voluntary poverty and apostolic living had existed before Valdesius, but it also recognizes his historical agency in constructing a system which was then received and utilized by some members of his society. This model fits more closely into Weber's concept of “pariah intellectualism,” which produces individuals who “not bound by the social conventions, they are capable of an original attitude towards the meaning of the cosmos.”⁵ The interplay between the individual and his societal context in constructing forms of religious belief and practice should be balanced in order to recognize both the necessity of society for the basic act of religious construction as well as its ability to reshape religious forms to fit social needs. At the same time, the ability of individuals, especially those divorced from traditional centers of intellectual production, to defy and alter expected religious forms cannot be discarded.

Andrew Roach took a particularly novel approach to this idea in his work, *The Devil's World*.

⁴ Emile Durkheim, *Durkheim on Religion*. ed. by W. S. F. Pickering. (Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1975), 20.

⁵ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology*. ed by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 507.

He claimed that lay religion functioned as a market for leisure activity; that is, activity beyond the scope of necessary work. The “demand” for lay involvement had previously been filled by certain agreements between monastic communities and powerful noble families.⁶ However, as new classes of lay society developed, a demand emerged for increased lay religious activity. Roach claims that this demand was initially filled by heretical movements, which were quicker to respond to this demand than the Catholic church. Only later would the mendicant orders move to fill this niche in a fashion compatible with Catholic orthodoxy. Roach admits the anachronistic nature of the terms “supply” and “demand” but maintains that the relationships which they denote are universal across human history and can be profitably used in this circumstance.

In addition to explaining the generation of heresies as a response to demand in this period, such ideas can continue to be useful while charting the course these heresies took over time through changing circumstances. Heresies which were cornered out of certain “markets,” as in the case of the Waldensians who were driven out of the urban centers of southern France, will be forced to adapt to the demand in new market contexts. The degree of supply which can be supported by demand for lay piety is not the only thing which had to adjust. Aspects of doctrine were also subjected to new pressures as the Waldensian movement's demographic focus shifted in the mid 13th century amid increased persecution. The supply-demand interaction presents a useful schema in which to fit changing Waldensian circumstances during this period. However, it does run the risk of too heavily dividing between the so-called suppliers, or clerical class of the Waldensians, from their market of potential lay-believers. Especially at a rural level, these groups could come into closer contact. However, the strict separation between the two which the Waldensian movement established following the death of Valdesius legitimates the use of this method so long as its limitations are kept in mind.

Investigating the theology of a persecuted, clandestine group in a pre-modern period presents

⁶ For more on this, see Dominique Iogna-Prat. *Order and Exclusion: Cluny and Christendom face heresy, Judaism, and Islam (1000-1150)*. trans. Graham Robert Edwards. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).

certain difficulties. Beyond purely interpretative problems, there are issues of source selection which do not exist in other cases. Because the majority of sources were written by educated, orthodox clergy who encountered lay believers, the sources relating to Waldensianism are distinctly “bottom-heavy.” This is in contrast to the “top-heavy” sources which are available when studying medieval Catholicism, where there is a good supply of high theological and clerical sources but a dearth of sources on Catholic lay-religion. Peter Biller leveraged this distinction between top-heavy and bottom-heavy sources when addressing the seemingly heterogeneous nature of Waldensian belief in *Goodbye to Waldensianism?*⁷ Although the presence of admittedly hostile sources describing lay belief is a boon for scholars who focus on those aspects, it also creates problems for identifying the theology of the clerical class, such as it existed among the Waldenses. For the purposes of identifying a normative theology among Waldensian elites, I have placed emphasis on sources created by those elites. To a great degree this limits me to a small set of sources, but it also reduces the interpretative concerns which accompany sources hostile to their subjects.

Obviously, the veracity of hostile sources (especially inquisitorial ones) varies greatly depending on the individual document. However, this has not stopped much ink from being spilled over the question of how far hostile sources ought generally to be trusted. A recently published book by R. I. Moore, *The War on Heresy*, can stand as an exemplar for the continuing viability of a heavily critical approach to these sources. Mark Pegg has done similarly, attempting to deconstruct some of the traditional understanding of the Cathars in *The Corruption of Angels*. These authors do not necessarily doubt the sincerity of medieval documents, but claim that modern readers do not understand the tropes and topoi which these authors deploy. For example, the use of allusions to patristic writings, especially the anti-heretical tracts of Augustine, as a way of referring to contemporary heretical movements. Hence the common reference to Cathars as “modern Manichees” in medieval documents. This has lead

⁷ Peter Biller. “Goodbye to Waldensianism?” (Past & Present, no. 192 (August 1, 2006): 3–33), 21–22.

many to claim that expectations of continuity between Late Antique and Medieval heresies held by orthodox Catholic commentators caused them to observe a similarity of doctrine and practice between Augustinian heresies and contemporary ones which did not necessarily exist. Or, at the very least, that accusations of dualistic theology which were directed against medieval heresies and associated with the Late Antique Manicheans served as a topos in Medieval anti-heretical polemics, and that contemporaries would have understood these references not to be literally true but acting as an allusion.

This debate is also expressed in the Waldensian context, though to a lesser degree than with regards to the Cathars. Some of the issues which are omnipresent when confronting the Cathar heresy or early heretical movements starting in the 10th century are not as applicable in the case of the Waldensians. Relative to those cases, the beginning of the Waldensian movement is surprisingly well-documented. Additionally, there exist documents produced by Waldensian members from the early years of the movement before their official condemnation by church authorities. The Cathars, with much of our knowledge of them coming from either inquisitorial records, polemics, or converted Cathar *boni homines*, make a heavily critical approach to the sources not only more viable but perhaps necessary. Peter Biller appears fairly critical of this kind of approach, or at least dubious about its applicability in this instance, when responding to the writings of Euan Cameron and Grado Merlo. In reply to the thesis of the latter, Biller argues that “deconstruction has gone too far” and proposes to “mount a case against it.”⁸

Obviously, this debate is a question of degree. Not only are different degrees of trust appropriate for different varieties of sources, but each source should be evaluated individually. This is not merely an issue of dismissing material that we would modernly consider impossible or unscientific. R. I. Moore famously displayed in his *Formation of a Persecuting Society* the degree to which accusations leveled against persecuted groups in pre-modern Europe (in his formulation; Jews, heretics,

⁸ Ibid., 17.

lepers, and witches) were remarkably consistent across different contexts and times. The connection between the portrayal of persecuted groups can be seen even earlier in Jewish studies, as in Trachtenberg's *The Devil and the Jews* in 1943. However, Moore was the first to place this continuity of polemics within a larger scheme of the construction of European society in the High Middle Ages. This knowledge presents us with further difficulties. Although a polemic which claims that a heterodox group regularly communed with the devil can doubtless be discarded as being factually incorrect on that point, it can still be speculated as to whether the author himself believed it to be true. Furthermore, simply discarding accusations of satanic practice or orgiastic sexual rituals (frequently used tropes in this kind of literature) leaves behind the possibility that some passages describing the heterodox group which sounds more reasonable to modern ears could also be invented or distorted.

While investigating my sources, I have attempted to combat this primarily by providing contextualizing information about the presumed author and the way in which biases may have informed the author's portrayal of heresy. Oftentimes, I often present the reader with multiple possible interpretations of the source and indicate which I find to be the most likely. In this way, I hope to impress upon the reader that although it is possible to analyze these sources in a productive fashion, only in very few cases is it possible to arrive at a “definitive” interpretation of the source. I hope that my analysis will show the reader these areas of ambiguity while still advancing my own interpretation, which I believe to be the most probable.

This general debate applies also to inquisitorial sources, to a greater degree than to less problematic literature. However, inquisitorial records have a methodology all their own, which relates to the particulars of inquisitorial procedure. Recent scholarship has done much to deconstruct the simplistic portrayal of inquisition first popularized by anti-Catholic polemics during the time of the Spanish Inquisition. Notably, Edward Peters' *Inquisition*, in addition to giving a history of the development of the legal ideas behind the procedure, has done much to destroy the very idea of a

medieval “Inquisition.” Peters rightly notes that the concept of an Inquisition, or a Holy Office tasked with maintaining religious orthodoxy, is a lamentable anachronism when referring to the High Middle Ages. Instead, it ought to be understood as “inquisitorial procedure,” which became popular in European jurisprudence in this period and was used in a variety of contexts. And although the Pope did occasionally appoint special inquisitors with jurisdiction over certain territories, it is important to note that at the time with which this paper concerns itself, there existed no central office of Inquisition. And by this token, beyond the legal precepts of inquisitorial procedure, early inquisitors did not necessarily share methodology or approach to inquisition. This is one of the reasons for the proliferation of inquisitor's manuals of which Bernard Gui's is perhaps the most famous.

As these manuals gained circulation and popularity, they did little to alleviate the inherent issues of inquisitorial sources. A list of stock questions used by inquisitors could result in seemingly similar answers across large geographic and temporal swaths. This in turn would create the illusion of homogeneity among heretical movements which may not have existed. By the same token, the inquisitor's questions, especially when asked by rote from a collection of stock questions, could project wanted answers onto the participants. Finally, especially when taking the depositions of uneducated laymen, translation also becomes an issue. For instance, it can be difficult to determine whether multiple responses from multiple witnesses followed the same syntax and vocabulary, or whether it was merely translated as such for the sake of the ease of the scribe. Again, this runs the danger of finding homogeneity where there is none, or exaggerating the extent of already known heresies. These kinds of dangers are what lead to the proliferation of “Waldensianisms” in the plural against which Biller has previously argued. Again, the truth is somewhere in between. The term is applicable both in the plural and the singular, in the same way that we may talk about Latin Catholicism and distinctions between German and Occitan Catholicism.

Sources

I'll now briefly address the sources which I will use throughout the course of the thesis and explain how these methodological tools will apply. This thesis will progress between three kinds of sources arranged roughly chronologically. In the first, I will identify something as close to a universally Waldensian doctrine as is possible. This will mostly be from sources in the historic heartland of the Waldensians, southern France and northern Italy. Perhaps most important among these for establishing “orthodox” Waldensianism is the account of a theological council of 1218 between the Lombardy Poor of Northern Italy and the Ultramontane Waldenses of Southern France. These will serve as my main points of comparison to the Waldenses of Austria. However, I will also draw upon writings presented by churchmen and others who encountered Waldensians during the genesis of the movement.

Later developments in the movement will be investigated through the unique opportunity presented by a crisis of sorts within the movement during the mid-14th century. Siegfried and Johannes were two Waldenses who were convinced by inquisitor Peter Zwicker to return (or convert) to the Catholic faith. They then wrote letters addressed to their Austrian brethren, exhorting them to do the same. The Italian and Austrian Waldenses then responded, in a series of letters back and forth between the parties which lasted around a decade. These documents are the only ones written by Waldenses, even former ones, which survive from the period and territory under my investigation. As such, they will be heavily relied upon to represent the Waldensian movement in this period. Unfortunately, the surviving portions of this correspondence come only from the Italian Waldensians and the converted Austrians. But the fact that all of the authors of these letters had first-hand experience with the Waldensian movement means that any narrative distortions will be the result of normal biases and rhetoric, rather than from ignorance. This is often more than one ought to expect with documents concerning heresy, and as a result these exchanges will be central to my argument.

A more-or-less simultaneous development, though not related to these conversions, was the creation of a work known as the *Liber Electorum*. It is a history of the Waldensian movement likely written by an Piedmontese Waldensian brother in the early 14th century. It will be central to my argument of a changing Waldensian theology concerning its claims to being the true church and justification for clandestine behavior. The LE features prominently in all of the correspondence surrounding the Austrian conversion of the 14th century, on both sides of the Alps. Most distinctively, the LE presents a history of Waldensianism which predates Valdesius by centuries, starting with the Donation of Constantine which at that time was understood to have been legitimately granted to Pope Sylvester I. For all sources, in areas of doctrine where the letters and the polemic or inquisitorial sources agree, I can be relatively assured of the doctrine's existence within the Waldenses. In areas of conflict, I will attempt to provide the reader with a reasonable cause for the discrepancy.

Definitions

Before progressing to the material, I would like to take some time to make clear why certain terms will or will not be used throughout this paper. The words we use to describe are important, especially when even the subjects of a paper disagreed upon vocabulary. I would like to make the reader aware of certain aspects of nomenclature which were quite important for historical actors in this period. The first issue is that of Waldo and Waldensians. The founder of the Waldensian movement is known as Peter Waldo in English. The “Peter” surname is now known to be a later addition. Likely speaking Occitan, much has been written concerning his vernacular name.⁹ Throughout this paper, I will usually refer to this person as “Valdesius” because that is how he evidently signed himself on a confession of faith. Any time a quote refers to “Waldo,” “Vaudes,” “Valdes,” or “Valdesius,” the reader

⁹ Gabriel Audisio. *The Waldensian Dissent: Persecution and Survival, C. 1170-C. 1570*. (Cambridge Medieval Textbooks. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 7-11.

should be aware that these all refer to the same person.

The issue of Waldensianism was, if anything, more controversial in the 14th century than it is now. Groups we modernly identify as “Waldensians” typically did not represent themselves as such. Rather “Waldenses” was a pejorative term used by Catholic commentators. This usage is situated in a tradition coming from Augustine who, while combating heresies in Late Antiquity, took to naming them by their founders. This strategy of naming emphasized their schismatic nature when compared to Catholic Christianity. In this way, the Manicheans were named after Mani, the Pelagianists after Pelagius, and the Donatists after Donatus. So, in identifying the Waldensian movement as those who followed the teachings of Valdesius, commentators imposed a model of heretical nomenclature onto the movement. The term “Waldenses” is not a value free term, and can be seen as a condemnation in and of itself.

The members of these movements referred to themselves in a variety of ways and referred to other societies within this movement in diverse fashion as well. Names like the Lombardy Poor, the Poor of Lyon, and the Poor Catholics denoted different aspects of this movement. Furthermore, the Lombardy Poor would often refer to the Poor of Lyon simply as the *Ultramontanes*, those living over the mountains. This excess of terms is one of the reasons for the drive to identify Waldensianisms rather than a single Waldensianism. As I have noted, both approaches have their benefits. For my purpose here, I will refer to a single “Waldensianism” and then subdivide these into regional variants. I would please request that the reader remember that just because I refer to a single Waldensian movement, I recognize the degree to which doctrinal and organizational difference separate these groups. However, I still believe that they share in core values and self-understanding, as I will shortly show.

Finally, when denoting the regional separations of the Waldensian movement, I will typically use the modern borders in which the territory now resides. Hence, “Austrian Waldensianism,” “French

Waldensianism,” “Italian Waldensianism,” and so on. Obviously, these movements did not conform to our modern borders or ideas of borders, and lived a more porous existence. This is also dangerous in the case of the “French” Waldensians, many of whom would have spoken Occitan rather than Old French. Furthermore, the cultural conversion of Southern France to those forms of feudalism practiced in the north was only beginning in the period under question.¹⁰ It would be just as justifiable to divide Occitan and French contexts as it would to divide Italian and Occitan. However, I use modern borders and adjectives merely for the sake of the convenience of the modern reader. Again, I ask that the reader be aware of the degree to which these distinctions are artificial.

There also exists a disparity between the terms Catholics and the Waldensians used to refer to the two ways of existence within Waldensian society. The development from a strictly apostolic movement of wandering preachers to include laymen who wished to remain a part of the world required a distinction to be made between the two. For these groups, I will use the Waldensian terminology, which remains fairly consistent among the various Waldensian societies. The “clerical” class as such were referred to as the *fratres* or “brothers” by the Waldensians, and were typically called *magistri* or “teachers” in Catholic sources. I will use both the English and Latin on occasion. Similarly, the “lay” class of Waldensianism were called the *amici* or “friends” by the Waldensians, and *credentes* or “believers” by the Catholics. On occasion when reproducing sources which use the Catholic nomenclature, these terms will be used. Otherwise, the Waldensian terms or their translations will be the standard usage.

¹⁰ For more on this, see the already-mentioned; Mark Gregory Pegg. *The Corruption of Angels: The Great Inquisition of 1245-1246*. (Princeton, [N.J.]: Princeton University Press, 2001.)

WALDENSIAN DOCTRINES: THE CHURCH OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH IN ROME

Essential Beliefs of Waldensianism

But what makes a Waldensian? That is a question that even the Waldensians themselves could not fully agree upon when they met in 1218, some years before formal inquisition had begun against them. The European Waldensian community was able to exchange correspondence between its member societies despite its condemnation at the Fourth Lateran Council, as I will show. However, maintaining doctrinal unity was all but impossible without the extensive apparatus of secular cooperation, publicly visible institutions, and judicial oppression which was available to the Catholic Church. Even the Church in Rome, after over a century of the Reform movement's efforts, had not achieved that kind of singularity of understanding across all of Christendom. And the Waldensian movement was remarkable for spreading almost as far as the bounds of Latin Christianity. It is not possible to assemble a definitive list of Waldensian doctrines over such a large geographic and temporal spread. Instead, I suggest that Waldensian theology ought to be understood as a range of potential doctrines which were typical of Waldensian movements and were primed to be expressed as a result of certain central beliefs. These central beliefs; the importance of scripture, the imperative to live the apostolic life, and the rejection of property ownership by the church, had theological consequences which were debated even within the Waldensian movement. Pinning down specific Waldensian theologies that are relevant across the entire movement over the whole course of its history is, as a result, impossible. Further, since hostile sources constitute the majority of the formal lists of Waldensian doctrine, such collections are vulnerable to either misunderstandings or purposeful misrepresentations. However, they do provide a sense of the soft limits and trends which existed in the

Waldensian tradition. I reproduce such a list here in an attempt to mine the most salient information from it, as well as check it against non-hostile sources.

Stephen of Bourbon compiled a list of these doctrines from his experience as an inquisitor in the south and east of modern-day France in the mid-13th century.¹¹ Stephen of Bourbon admitted in his work that “they [the Waldensians] quarrel among themselves about these errors.”¹² Doubtless this statement is to a great extent the result of his personal experience with individual believers, who never represent an exact expression of official dogmas, not today and certainly not in the pre-modern world. It was also in his interest to contrast the heretics with the Catholic Church by showing how they “quarrel” between each other, while the Catholic Church was at this point defining itself by the unity of doctrine and authorities inherent in the Gregorian Reform movement. Regardless, I will first quote a selection which I find typifies the Waldensian movements and then present some of his more problematic claims.

Stephen of Bourbon's choice of the first error to ascribe to the Waldensians is not done carelessly. It is perhaps the most iconic Waldensian belief from this period for a number of reasons. He mentions that they “believe that every lie is a mortal sin and an oath is the same.”¹³ This trait is particularly notable in the documents from this period because it was directly relevant to the investigation of Waldensianism through the inquisitorial system. Since Waldensians would have been required both to swear oaths throughout the course of inquisition, and then to lie concerning their religious affiliations in order to prevent being tortured or killed, their inability to do so was a strong boon for inquisitors. Stephen notes that some believe that it is permissible to lie when in danger of death, while others “disguise their lies by wiles and sophistries.”¹⁴ This is an example of one of the

¹¹ A full English translation has been produced and can be found here: Walter L Wakefield and Austin P. Evans, eds. *Heresies of the High Middle Ages: Selected Sources Translated and Annotated*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1969), 346-351.

¹² Ibid., 350.

¹³ Ibid., 346.

¹⁴ Ibid.

three key issues that I have identified as a marker of Waldensian belief; a strictly and exclusively literal interpretation of scripture. This particular doctrine comes from a literal reading of the fifth Chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, in which Jesus commands “I say to you do not swear at all... but instead let your speech be yes, yes, no, no because any more than this comes out of evil.”¹⁵ The Letter of James 5:12 presents a similar prohibition. The literal interpretation of scripture was not unknown to Catholic thought, but the limitation of scriptural interpretation to only the literal meaning flew in the face of the post-Augustinian tradition of scriptural exegesis which focused upon four [factcheck] distinct layers of meaning in the scriptures.¹⁶ This biblical literalism is a key element to Waldensian belief and circumscribes one area of potential Waldensian theology. Stephen of Bourbon also accuses the Waldensians of rejecting any “purgatorial punishment other than in the present life.”¹⁷ This doctrine is not explicitly mentioned in the scriptures and as a result Waldensians understood it to be a clerical fabrication. Further, there is a rejection of the judicial use of execution, claiming that “all judges commit a sin in pronouncing the death penalty, and they regard as murderers.”¹⁸ This is a literal interpretation of passages forbidding killing, which Waldensians understood to mean all killing while Catholics understood to mean unlawful killing.¹⁹ This particular interpretation would have also been quite relevant to Waldensian believers who may have had fellows executed by judicial authorities.

The literal interpretation of scripture is, I believe, a result of its distinctly lay origins. Valdesius was not educated in the style of the clerical elite and was not capable of leveraging interpretative strategies which had been developed in that milieu. By the same token, he was not beholden to the established tradition of biblical exegesis. Although clerics did exist in the early days of the movement,

¹⁵ Matthew 5: 34-37, Vulg.

¹⁶ For more information on the scriptural exegesis of Augustine and its medieval relevance, see: *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*. (Oxford University Press, USA, 1993), sv. “Interpretation, History of.”

¹⁷ Wakefield. *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, 347.

¹⁸ Ibid., 348.

¹⁹ For more on the evolution of the Waldensian doctrine of killing, see: Susanna K. Treesh. “The Waldensian Recourse to Violence.” *Church History* 55, no. 3 (September 1, 1986): 294–306.

as evidenced by Durand of Huesca, the majority would have been laypeople attracted to the lifestyle of the movement. And this is the second theme in which Waldensian doctrines could exist; the advocacy for an apostolic life which rejected a distinction between the clerical and the lay. The most important marker of distinction between the clergy and the laity had always been the ability to consecrate the sacraments; it was a magical display of the charisma of the office and the ability to channel divine grace. Waldensian rejection of the clear divide which had recently been established between priest and layman in this period found expression in many doctrines, but most radically “they say that all good men are priests and that any good man has as much power to absolve sins as we believe the pope to possess.”²⁰ Now, concerning this passage it is noteworthy that Mark Pegg has, in some of his works, come to the conclusion that the signifier *boni homines* refers not to a morally righteous human, but to a quasi-monastic class of holy men in the Cathar religious understanding.²¹ Without touching too heavily upon this topic, I simply wish to note that Stephen may have misunderstood depositions from lay sources. However, what is clear is that for Stephen, the Waldensians do believe that laymen have the power to consecrate the sacraments, as he goes on to claim that the Waldensians believe that “there are others, ordained by God but not by men, such as good laymen who keep God's commandments.”²²

It is not clear whether Stephen understands these “good men” to be distinct from “good laymen” or if he has conflated the two concepts. It is possible that “good men” refer to Waldensian *fratres* or that he has mistakenly combined aspects of Waldensian and Cathar belief. Or that the laymen he spoke with in fact combined aspects of both religious movements. Thankfully, this is irrelevant for my immediate purposes. What this example does clearly show is the Waldensian propensity to elevate the laity to a holier status than the Catholic Church did in this period. It also makes clear that the Waldensian movement had a propensity towards Donatism, just as the Gregorian Reform movement

²⁰ Wakefield. *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, 347-348

²¹ For more on this, see Mark Gregory Pegg. *The Corruption of Angels: The Great Inquisition of 1245-1246*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

²² Wakefield. *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, 348.

generally toed that line. Although Stephen of Bourbon here claims that the Waldensians were fully Donatist, and that “they say that evil men, who live in sin, cannot bind and loose.”²³ As I show below, the Waldensian position, at least as of 1218 at the Conference of Bergamo, was not so clearly Donatist in its theological subtleties. However, the flirtation with full Donatism which occurred in the Waldensian movement was clearly a result of its beginnings in the Reform context and that movement's emphasis on apostolic living. Apostolic living only for clerics for clerics, as the papally co-opted position would have it, or for clerics as well as laymen, in the case of Waldensians and other heterodox movements. Stephen goes on to list numerous other positions which result from the attempt to collapse this distinction. The sacrament of confession, which gives both spiritual and social power over the laity to the clergy, is understood to be unnecessary and that “it suffices for salvation to confess only to God and not to man.”²⁴ The singing of the holy office is also attacked, another distinctly clerical affair, is rejected as seeming “to deride God, as though He could not understand unless one sings to Him.”²⁵ These objections, although they seem like simple anti-clericalism, all attack markers of clerical distinction and elevate the moral righteousness of the human over his ordination.

The final area for potential Waldensian doctrines is the advocacy for a church of poverty. Or, to be clearer, the belief that any church which accepts temporal property is not the church of God. Stephen of Bourbon references this when he wrote that “they say that our clerics and priests who possess wealth and worldly goods are sons of the devil and of damnation.” This is an unambiguous statement, rejecting clerical ownership of property. This is a consequence of the emphasis on apostolic life, with the exhortation in Matthew 6:34 “Do not, therefore, worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough of its problems.”²⁶ However, the Waldensian position was not merely that each cleric sinned by owning property, but that the entire enterprise of a property-owning

²³ Wakefield. *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, 348.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 349.

²⁶ Matthew 6:34.

institutional church was against the will of God. For this reason I feel it is necessary to acknowledge it as a separate doctrinal area from the idea of apostolic living. This emphasis is clear from the passage where Stephen of Bourbon states that “they assert that the Roman Church is the harlot of Babylon of whom one reads in the Apocalypse.”²⁷ This obviously carries overtones of criticism of the wealthiness of the church, referencing the whore who “was enrobed in purple and scarlet and gilded with gold and expensive lapis and pearls.”²⁸ And just as the Roman Church was accepted by the secular kingdoms, so was the Whore of Babylon “with whom the kings of the earth fornicated.”²⁹ As I will show, the ownership of property by the church was one of the main distinctions which the Waldensians drew between themselves and the Church in Rome. This focus upon institutional poverty was not nearly so strong in the early days of the movement, obviously, but developed as a result of its expulsion from orthodox Christendom.

As I stated above, Stephen of Bourbon's list is potentially inaccurate for a number of reasons, both intentional and unintentional. I have only used this source in order to sketch the potential range of doctrines which are possible within the Waldensian movements. I would be remiss to ignore the opportunity to expose some of the shortcomings of this method, however. For instance, Stephen of Bourbon claims that some of the Waldensians believe that “there is no spirit in heaven but the spirit of God” and that when a man dies he is “one with the spirit of God and is God himself.”³⁰ However, through the course of the Bergamo Conference, there was an issue of disputation between the Italians and the French as to whether the soul of Valdesius and his companion Vivetum were in paradise or not.³¹ It is possible that the Waldensian brothers at Bergamo simply said that (in the case of the French) that “Valdes is in the paradise of God” as a shorthand to mean that his soul went up to heaven and

²⁷ Wakefield. *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, 349.

²⁸ Revelations 17:4.

²⁹ Revelations 17:3.

³⁰ Wakefield. *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, 349.

³¹ Giovanni Gonnet, ed. *Enchiridion fontium valdensium*. (Torre Pellice, Libreria editrice claudiana, 1958), 176.

merged with the divine as Stephen would have it here. I find it more likely that Stephen encountered believers who were of a different sect or partially influenced by the Waldensian movement and that he is faithfully representing authentic lay belief. It may have been an offshoot of Waldensianism and it may not have been. It is, regardless, a useful reminder of both the limitation of hostile sources in this area as well as the impossibility of defining strict doctrine for such a range of heterodox beliefs.

Attempts at Doctrinal Unity

It is difficult to assess the mindset of any pre-modern movement merely from textual remnants. As I have shown, it is all the more difficult in the case of the Waldenses, who had no formal locus of authority or dogmatic power. This leads to the plurality of distinct doctrines which Stephen of Bourbon's short tract attests to. However, in the case of the Austrian Waldensian movement, it is possible to isolate some discrete beliefs and dogmas which were, at the very least, available to 14th century Waldensian *fratres*. In the following analysis, I will not only enumerate these theological positions, but also to show that they had authoritative weight and immediate relevance for the religious life of the Austrian Waldenses. In doing so, I will establish a norm against which to show particularities of the Waldensian theological experience within the Austrian milieu. Being a theological account, this chapter will by necessity be drawn almost exclusively from religious elites within the movement rather than lay believers. Although I do not discount impact of lay belief on theology, I will be dealing with the finished product of the process of theological knowledge creation, whether that knowledge originated in elite or popular conceptions. As such, I will look exclusively at this finished product as expressed by religious elites.

The first document under investigation is a letter which includes a summary of the decisions reached during a conference between Waldensians of northern Italy and those of southern France and is addressed by the Italian movement represented at the council specifically to their “beloved brothers and

sisters, our friends of both sexes who live in piety beyond the Alps.”³² As I mentioned previously, in this document, the group which the Lombardy or Italian Waldenses refer to as “Ultramontanes” I will for ease of use refer to as “French.” In the same manner, the “TranAlpes” will here be glossed as “Austrian.” In the same way, I will often refer to “Waldensians” or “Waldenses,” but it is important to note that these groups did not refer to themselves in this way. Indeed, for some the figure of Valdesius as a founder or saint-figure was not so central to their idea of what it meant to be a “Waldensian.” The centrality of Valdesius himself (or lack thereof) to the movement is probably what the Italians were referencing when they refer to the French as “ultramontani Valdesii socii”³³ or refer to the French positions as “Valdesianorum confessionem.”³⁴ This identifier is used in opposition to themselves, who venerate Valdesius as a good man, but not pivotal for their self understanding, clearly rejecting the moniker that the majority Catholic position imposed upon them.

Although the Conference of Bergamo between the Italians and French did not result in a total agreement on all points, it is a notable document for several reasons. Simply the act of calling such a conference shows an important development in the mindset of Waldensian leaders in this very turbulent period. Being only three years after the official condemnation of the movement at the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 as anathema, the attempt to arrive at a doctrinal unity speaks to several characteristics of the movement. First, and most basically, it shows that the various branches affiliated with the teachings of Valdesius were in some degree of communication with each other and were generally aware of the existence of other followers of Valdesius in other regions. This is alluded to in the summary of the Conference drawn up by the Italians when they say “we wish you to know of the result

³² Giovanni Gonnet. *Enchiridion fontium Valdensium: recueil critique des sources concernant les Vaudois au moyen âge*. (Torino: Claudiana, 1958), 171. trans. Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans as *Heresies in the High Middle Ages: Selected Sources Translated and Annotated* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1969), 279. *dilectis in Christo fratribus ac sororibus, amicis et amicabus transalpes pie degentibus in vero salutari salutem et dilectionis perpetue firmitatem*.

³³ Ibid., 173

³⁴ Ibid., 179

we were able to achieve some time ago... in the dispute which for long has existed between us and the chosen ultramontane comrades of Valdesius, *after each party had exchanged a number of inquiries with the other.*”³⁵ (emphasis mine) This would seem to indicate that in order to organize the conference an exchange of letters had been necessary between the two groups. It is probable that these letters were accompanied by representatives of the Italian position, as was the case with this very letter to the Austrians, which was accompanied by two Italians, “our most beloved Ugolus and Algossus.”³⁶ The exchange of letters as well as emissaries would certainly denote an extensive connection between these Waldensian societies.

Second, this attempt at a theological reconciliation between these two major groups of Waldensians denotes that regardless of the practical separation of the functioning of the Waldensian *societates*, as the Bergamo Conference report calls them, these functionally distinct groups understood themselves to be parts of a unified, whole Waldensian movement; the kind of holistic understanding evident in Peter Biller's 2006 publication, *Goodbye to Waldensianism?*, a convincing argument for the continued applicability of “Waldensianism.”³⁷ I do not mean to say that Waldensianism was in any respect homogenous within the vast geographic and temporal ranges which it occupied. However, it is clear that the Waldensians as a whole constituted a community of shared texts and emissaries. And in this case, “Waldensianism” refers to the idea of connectedness within the Waldensian movements, if not a practical unity of doctrine or single doctrinal authority. They still understood themselves to be part of a singular tradition. This aspect of the Waldensian movement, as evidenced by the very existence of the Conference of Bergamo and championed by Biller, is an important part of Waldensian

³⁵ Gonnet, *Enchiridion fontium valdensium*, 172 trans. Wakefield, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, 279-280. *Scire autem, fratres, volumus de controversia, que inter nos et ultramontanos electos Valdesii socios iam diu versatur, ad quem finem olim anno nativitatis Christi MCCXVIII mense maio iuxta civitatem Bergami post multas inquisitiones invicem habitas potuimus pervenire.*

³⁶ Wakefield, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, 288.

³⁷ Peter Biller. “Goodbye to Waldensianism?” *Past & Present*, no. 192 (August 1, 2006): 3–33.

self-understanding.

The attempt at theological reconciliation is a response to the events then assailing the Waldensian movement. I previously mentioned the condemnation of the Waldenses in 1215. Before this point, it was possible for Waldensians to also consider themselves Catholic. In the first few decades of the movement, relations between fledgling Waldensian leaders and Church authorities were more negotiable than they later became. This is most typified in the person of Durand of Huesca, who attempted to form some of the Waldensians into an order of “Poor Catholics.” And although there was a steady deterioration of relations in the first decade of the 13th century, after 1215 it becomes much clearer that those who took serious issue with the Waldensians had come to positions of power in the Church. It is extremely likely that the Conference, and the exchanged letters exploring the possibility of such a conference, were a response to this official condemnation. The Waldensian movement no longer felt that it had a place in the Church of Rome. As is often the case, once officially ejected from the mainstream, the Waldensians felt themselves freer to reject orthodox Church authority. Indeed, this rejection of Church authority extends also to the theological arguments surrounding the sacraments in the Conference summary.

The widening gulf between “Waldensian” and “Catholic” as markers of identity is formalized through an Italian line of argument which runs thus:

if a minister – we mean a minister ordained in the order of the priesthood of Christ³⁸ - shall undertake to consecrate it [the Eucharist] and God shall hearken to his prayer, we believe that the substance of the bread and wine is, after the benediction, the body and blood of Christ, yet never is this due to the ministrant himself or done through the ministrant.”³⁹

³⁸ This refers to the ministers ordained in the Waldensian tradition, as opposed to the priesthood of the Roman Church, which is elsewhere in the document differentiated from the priesthood of Christ and referred to instead as “*sacerdote ab ecclesia Romana ordinato*.” Gonnet, 179.

³⁹ Gonnet, 180. trans. Wakefield, 286. *Dicimus quod nemo bonus sive malus, nisi ipse qui est deus et homo panis et vini*

This passage sets out two markers of distinction between the Waldensians and the Church in Rome. Most obviously, it identifies the Waldensian religious movement as the true Church of Christ, and its ministers as the true priests of Christ. By setting this distinction, it becomes impossible to be both a Waldensian lay believer as well as a Catholic layman who believes in the salvific efficacy of the Catholic Eucharist. The importance of the Eucharist was at this time also being accentuated as a marker of distinction between laity and clergy, with the clergy receiving both the wine and the bread while the laity were relegated to only the bread, still being exhorted to “receive reverently at least at Easter the sacrament of the Eucharist.”⁴⁰ This creation of distinction by opposition had become necessary because the Waldensian movement had been officially closed off from the ministrations of the established Church after 1215.

Additionally, this passage shows an unreserved willingness to break from established Catholic doctrine, a radical departure made easier by the condemnation. However, the way in which this deviation is constructed is notable. Waldensian intellectual elites had not discarded the church fathers, as is evidenced in the 14th century Italian letter we will address shortly, which references the authority of “Augustine in his book On the Profit of Believing.”⁴¹ It is my belief that the somewhat circuitous (or perhaps more direct) construction of divine involvement in the sacrament is a result of the desire to skirt around the edges of the Donatist heresy denounced by both Augustine and the Catholic Church. Because the priest in the Waldensian conception is not channeling God's power in order to accomplish the miracle of the sacrament, it does not matter whether he is worthy. Instead, it is God directly, through His divine judgment, who determines whether or not to consecrate the host. Interestingly, the

isibilis in Christi corpus et sanguinem potest transubstanciare substantiam, unde, si minister ad hoc conficiendum accesserit, ministrum dicimus in Christi sacerdotii ordine ordinatum, et deus oracionem eius exaudierit, credimus panis et vini substantiam post benedictionem esse Christi corpus et sanguinem, alioquin minime quod ad se et per se.

⁴⁰ H. J. Schroeder ed. *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils*, 236-296.

⁴¹ Peter Biller. *Aspects of the Waldenses in the Fourteenth Century Including an Edition of Their Correspondence*. (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1977). 277. (Translation mine)

Italian argument here presents the recipients of the sacrament as having agency in its validity in addition to the priest who performs the ritual. “if anyone shall present himself as worthy to partake of this sacrament, he obtains what he desires from the Lord, but not by way of the prayer or from the blessing of an unworthy or reprobate minister; that is, he accepts the body of the Lord for his own salvation according to his desire.”⁴² In this conception, although the priest (properly ordained in the Waldensian tradition) and the ceremony are both necessary parts of beseeching God for the sacrament, whether or not God will respond is a matter of divine judgment. And furthermore, the sacrament never flows through the priest, but always directly from God, with the priest only acting as the supplicant to God in place of the community of believers.

To complicate matters, this drastically anti-Roman position, which the Italian Waldenses enumerated, was not universally agreed upon. In fact, the French delegation maintained, according to the Italians, that “On the question which was put to us about the breaking of bread, we believe as follows: that the bread and the wine become the body and blood of God after benediction by a priest ordained in the Roman Church, whether righteous or unrighteous, so long as the congregation of the baptized upholds him in his office.”⁴³ Obviously, it is clear by this passage that the Italian branch of the movement was more comfortable with removing itself from the body of the Roman Church than the French movement. The passage infers that the French Waldenses had maintained some degree of ties with their regional clergy, who were apparently willing to perform the Eucharist for them. Clearly the Italian practice of separating the “Catholic” identifier and the “Waldensian” identifier had not occurred in the French branch. This is also a reminder that, although ultimately the movement would become a separate community of the faithful (within Christendom but outside of the Church) this was not an

⁴² Gonnet, 180. trans. Wakefield, 286. *Tamen si quis ad recipiendum hoc sacramentum dignus accesserit, credimus quod, licet non per ministri indigni et reprobi oracionem sive benediccionem a domino impetrat quod exoptat, id est corpus domini ad sui salutem iuxta suum recipit desiderium.*

⁴³ Gonnet, 179. trans. Wakefield, 285. *Ad questionem, que nobis facta fuit de panis fraccione sic credimus: a sacerdote ab ecclesia Romana ordinato, donec congregatio baptizatorum sustinet eum in officio, sit iustus vel iniustus.*

immediate or homogenous process. This is the evident problem of relying only on legal sources; it's clear that the condemnation of the Waldenses in 1215 was legislation targeted against an existing arrangement. In this case, the apparent arrangement some French Waldenses must have had with Roman-ordained clergymen speaks to at least tolerance if not acceptance by the priesthood in southern France who were at that time, admittedly, preoccupied with the perceived Cathar threat.

In addition to the theological deliberations of this conference, the assembled delegates also addressed issues of administration and organization. In fact, this seems to be more pressing in their minds than theological issues, given the amount of space they commit to explaining their consensus to their transalpine brothers. Of note for our purposes is that elements of the organization of the Waldensian movement which would enable it to survive in the countryside of Europe for centuries had already crystallized. I refer to the distinction between the “clerical” class of Waldensians, or full Waldensians, and their lay believers. The Waldensian clerical class refer to themselves simply as “*fratres*,” and lived as itinerant preachers, somewhat along the lines of the emerging mendicant orders of their times. In addition to these priestly Waldensians, there also existed the lay believers who supported them by holding property for them. In return, they received the sacraments from the brothers and (as I have shown) increasingly only from the brothers. These lay-believers were known as *credentes* or *amici*. This early formation of the brothers-friends stratification of Waldensian society was already in place at the beginning of the movement, and certainly at the beginning of the Austrian movement which formed later than its French and Italian sisters.

So, with regards to the Austrian movement, the Conference of Bergamo is valuable for two reasons. First, it is one of the earliest statements of Waldensian belief which was unfiltered by a desire to appear palatable to a Catholic audience. As such, it allows us to view an embryonic form of Waldensian doctrine, which would form the basis for the movement. It gives us an initial condition of theological norms against which to measure later developments, including in the German-speaking

regions. But more importantly, it shows a major development within the Waldensian “societies,” as they refer to themselves. Although they are clearly different movements with different theologies and relationships to the Catholic church, this Conference is an attempt to unify them. The ultimate failure of this enterprise should not blind us to the importance of this fact; this Conference was an attempt at doctrinal and organizational unity. I believe that the Conference was organized in response to Lateran IV and the condemnation thereat. Just as condemnation made deviation from established doctrine easier for the movement, it also drove together religious movements which otherwise may not have felt the need to unify. In an environment without such pressures, the Lombardy Poor and the Poor of Lyon may have denounced one another over the issue of Valdesius's final destination, or over the Eucharist. Instead, they were willing to overlook these points in favor of an imagined unity which had been prompted by outside pressures.

ITALIAN LETTERS: VENOM IN THE CHURCH OF GOD

Sometime between 1365 and 1367, a number of Waldensian *fratres* converted to Catholicism, primarily under the influence of two of their number, Johannes Leser and Siegfried. By this period, the Austrian Waldenses had been established for at least a hundred years. Evidently, Johannes and Siegfried wrote to their former compatriots urging them to do similarly and attacking the Waldensian faith. In response, the Austrian Waldenses wrote to the Italians, asking for guidance. The letter which the Italians wrote in return to the Austrians is the first of this correspondence which is still extant, and it contains the Italian response to the particular issues which the Austrians apparently detailed in their letter. It is clear that by this time, over a hundred years after the Conference of Bergamo, the Austrian movement was still aware of and in some degree of contact with the Italians. And, the fact that they turned to the Italians for guidance indicates that the Austrians held the Italian branch of the movement in some high regard. If the Austrians had sent similar letters to the French, and had they responded, we would expect to see at least responses from the converted *fratres*, John and Siegfried against a French letter even if that correspondence had been lost. However, only the responses to the Italians exist. It is not an unreasonable assumption that the Austrians looked rather to the Lombardy Poor in northern Italy rather than the Poor of Lyon in France for their counsel.

This itself would indicate that the Austrians were more willing to believe the Italian position which was enumerated at Bergamo rather than the French variants. And it is not hard to believe that the Austrians would reject the ministrations of the Roman-ordained clergy, since the believers (*credentes*) of heresies were official condemned and declared valid subjects for heresy charges by Gregory IX in *Inquisitionis negotium*.⁴⁴ This would lend credence to the idea that, by the time of the

⁴⁴ Henry Ansgar Kelly. *Inquisitions and Other Trial Procedures in the Medieval West*. (Burlington, Vt: Ashgate/Variorum, 2001), 447.

letter to the Austrians, the position of the *fratres* as the sole pastoral providers for the Waldensian community had been solidified. In the course of consoling the Austrians, the Italians gave some general pastoral advice, listing the most important qualities which a Waldensian *frater* ought to have regarding his flock. Included is the duty that the *frater* must “be useful while teaching his neighbors, because a speech of practicality is given to each; in the letter to the Ephesians III, ‘Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for edifying according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.’”⁴⁵ Additionally, there is an exhortation to “be liberal with free conversation, because man ought to give knowledge “without pretense,” and “converse without ill will,” and “not hide his honesty,” as is said in Wisdom 6.”⁴⁶ These passages point to the role of *frater* as the primary teacher for the *amici* who were his flock and patrons. The importance of the biblical texts, and specifically the memorization of biblical texts was always central to the movement; it is likely that this process of giving wisdom and edification was at least in part oral transmission of these biblical texts in addition to a more general education of Waldensian belief and history.

The pastoral importance of the *fratres* does not necessarily show the salvific authority which the Italians appropriated exclusively for themselves in 1218, however. This point is addressed by the Italians as they responded to an apparent accusation by the converts, that the Waldensian *fratres* suffered of a “lack of authority.”⁴⁷ Going into more detail, the Italians relate the charges against them; that “we do not have a true foundation or beginning of our order, and that it does not come from the apostles because we do not minister all the sacraments.”⁴⁸ This is essentially the same charge that had been levied against the Waldensians from the beginning and which we see in Walter Map's

⁴⁵ Biller, *Aspects*. 281. *Quarto debet esse utilis cum proximorum edificacione, quia unicuique datur sermo utilitatis; ad Eph. IIII, Omnis Sermo malus ex ore vestro non procedat: sed si quis bonus ad edificacionem fidei ut det gratiam audientibus.*

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Biller, *Aspects*. 275. *propter auctoritatis privacionem (quod falsum est, ut in subsequentibus demonstrabimus)*

⁴⁸ Ibid., 282-283. *non habeamus verum fundamentum seu principium ordinis nostri, et quod non derivatur ab apostois quia non ministramus omnia sacramenta*

condemnation as early as the late 12th century; that they had usurped the apostolic mandate. When Christ spoke to the apostles, according to the interpretation of the Catholic church, he was speaking only to the apostles and no-one else. The Church in Rome, being the only institution of apostolic succession, was the only body which could legitimately claim to receive and carry out the commands Christ made to the apostles. Although the Waldensian movement was one of the apostolically-minded religious groups coming from the Reform, they did not reject the apostolic succession as unnecessary. In fact, their insistence upon the validity of the apostolic succession points to a growing importance of the Waldensian movement as an institutional replacement for the Roman Church for everyday believers. The movement had by this point developed from an individual calling to the creation of church.

The Waldensian movement answered this charge of “lack of authority” in a way that maintained the apostolic authority of itself as an institution. The production of a work in the first half of the 14th century purporting to teach the true history of the Church was in all likelihood a mixture of previous literary sources as well as an oral Waldensian tradition. Portions of this history, known as the *Liber Electorum*, were reproduced by the Italians to counter the claim of the Roman church. So, to counter the claim that Waldensian ministrations are not supported by sufficient sources of apostolic authority, the Italians simultaneously question the legitimacy of the apostolic succession of the Popes in Rome while appropriating this succession for their own society. They claim,

in the time of Constantine the Great, when Pope Sylvester received the treasure [the Donation of Constantine], the aforementioned comrades of Sylvester objected, saying “we have been warned of this by God, that we should not possess earthly goods.” ... Sylvester, however, said, “unless you stay with me, I will forbid you on the earth.” However, they said to him, rejoicing, “for this we thank God, because if on account of the observance of His orders we are forbidden the earth,

we will justly be presented heaven, as Christ said.” However following this argument with Silvester that same night a voice was heard coming down from heaven, saying “Today poison is poured into the church of God.”⁴⁹

The Waldenses did not counter the claim of apostolic succession with a theology in which Christ speaks to all of Christendom when he speaks to the apostles. Instead, they re-routed the apostolic succession, showing the continuity of the *socii*, the comrades of Silvester who have now become the *socii Cristi*, or the *societas Cristi*. The implication, of course, is that it is not the Waldensians who lack proper authority to perform the sacrament, but the Roman clergy, as a result of the poison poured into the Church with the ownership of earthly property. This history is merely a formalization and justification of the rejection of Roman ministrations of the sacrament that is already evidenced at Bergamo in 1218. The *fratres* still held a monopoly on legitimate salvation within the Waldensian community, at least at a normative theological level.

Obviously, these statements come from the Italian context. However, we can infer some things about the Austrian position from the letter. First, it is clear from the context that the Italians are writing against several specific categories of accusation:

Namely those men [with objections], that we perceive, struggle to prove that our lives are not meritorious of salvation, and most especially in three aspects: First because of false knowledge, secondly because of the lack of authority (which is false, as we will subsequently demonstrate),

⁴⁹ Ibid., 283-284 *Quod autem ordo iste derivatur ab apostolis – notate quod tempore Constantini Magni cum Silvester Papa thesaurum reciperet socii predicti Silvestri renuerunt, dicentes, “Hoc preceptum a Domino habeamus, quod nulla terrena possideamus;” Mt. X: “Nolite possidere,” etc.; et infra, “Si vis perfectus esse,” etc.; et “Petrus: Ecce nos reliquimus omnia, et secuti sumus te,” etc., Mt. XIX. Silvester, vero dixit, “Nisi mecum manseritis ego terram vobis prohibebo;” illi autem letantes dixerunt, “De hoc Deo gratias agimus, quia si propter observanciam mandatorum eius terra nobis prohibetur, celum nobis merito exhibetur, Cristo dicente,” Istis vero altercantibus cum Silvestro eadem nocte sequenti audita est vox de celo dicens, “Hodie diffusum est venenum in ecclesia Dei;”*

and thirdly they say that our lives are bad and dishonest, and as a result are not meritorious of salvation nor sacred.⁵⁰

These three accusations against the Waldensians were apparently levied by the converted Austrians against their former brethren. As we have already seen, the accusation of a lack of authority is taken by the Italians to refer to a lack of apostolic authority to perform the sacraments. By this, we can infer that the converted Austrians had raised this very point, and that by extension the Austrian Waldenses claimed authority enough to celebrate the sacraments before this objection, already espousing the church history as evidenced in the *Liber Electorum* and the narrative of Pope Sylvester's acceptance of the Donation of Constantine. As such, this would indicate that the Austrians had developed a system similar to the one advocated by the Italians in Bergamo, with a clerical class of wandering *fratres* performing pastoral duties for groups of *amici*. Furthermore, we can see that the issue of voluntary poverty which had been so central for Valdesius and his movement was still the initial and primary marker of distinction between Waldensian and Catholic identity, and is placed at the heart of the historical distinction between the two churches.

In the construction of Waldensian identity in opposition to Roman Catholicism, we can observe a fascinating case of appropriation. Specifically, the acceptance and embracing of the typical Catholic position that the Waldensians were *illiterati et idiotae*. They claim, in response to accusations along these lines,

The brothers [monks or friars of the Catholic Church] call us un-knowledgeable and lacking in understanding, we concede this in part to them. We admit, namely, that we, as the apostle says,

⁵⁰ Ibid., 275 *Ipsi enim, ut percipimus, multis allegacionibus vitam nostram non esse salutis meritoriam nituntur approbare, et specialiter in tribus: primo propter defectum sciencie, secundo propter auctoritatis privacionem (quod falsum est, ut in subsequentibus denionstrabimus), tercio dicunt quod vita nostra sit mala et inhonesta, et per consequens non sit salutis meritoria neque sancta.*

“are unskilled in disputation” or in the knowledge of speech, and yet, it may be known, not in the knowledge of the spirit. Better one farmer be taught through the grace of God than an emperor or a philosopher through his own worldly knowledge.⁵¹

This position is a complete rejection of the relevancy of earthly knowledge in a world which has, instead, the revelation of Christ. Furthermore, it frames the dispute between the Catholics and the Waldenses very much in the context of the Pauline corpus. Specifically, the letter to the Corinthians, to which several references are made. E.g., “God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that none may boast before him.”⁵² Ironically, of course, this point of the Italian Waldenses is supported in their letter not only by Paul but by Church authorities such as Bernard, and is presented in educated prose. Still, while the style may be educated, the content is radically anti-intellectual. Certainly, the *sapientia mundi* is ridiculed as a fool's goal at best and a sinful trap at worst.

In the case of the Italians, whose position was much stronger in their valley strongholds, the luxury of good education was theirs to reject, just as the luxury of wealth was for Valdesius. However, in the frontier of the movement in rural Austria, it is quite probable that the glorification of being persecuted evidenced in this passage of Paul would have struck closer to home. It is possible that the Waldensians of Austria were more often *illiterati et idiotae* than their Italian brethren, who were clearly neither. If this were the case, it might explain the reliance upon Italian theology, history, and strategies of disputation.

⁵¹ Biller, *Aspects*. 277-278 *Dicunt fratres nostros inperitos et sciencia carere, quod in parte eis concedimus. Fatemur enim nos, ut apostolus ait, inperitos sermone vel sermocinali sciencia, non tamen spirituali scilicet sciencia. Melius enim per Dei gratiam instruitur unus agricola quam imperator seu philosophus per suam scienciam mundanam.*

⁵² Ibid., 278, (1 Corinthians 1) : *sed que stulta sunt mundi elegit Deus, ut confundat sapientes: et infirma mundi elegit Deus, et ea que non sunt, ut ea que sunt destrueret: ut non gloriatur omnis caro in conspectu eius.*

In the preceding chapter I have shown that a community of corresponding Waldensian societies spanned the greater part of Latin Christendom and shaped together an identity that increasingly created an exclusionary relationship with the majority Catholic one. This identification through exclusion was accomplished through enumeration of some of the values and practices which remained important for this movement, especially with regards to the position and qualifications of the wandering priest-functionary, the Waldensian *frater*. In the next chapter, through the use of more hostile sources, I will show that this conflict over institutional legitimacy between Waldensians and Catholics had lead to a theological change within the Waldensian movement in the intervening century since the Conference of Bergamo.

THE AUSTRIAN RESPONSES: I HAVE BECOME A STRANGER TO MY BROTHERS

Background to the Responses

I have previously cited Stephen of Bourbon's list of Waldensian doctrines from the mid-13th century. In it, he noted that although lying and swearing oaths were considered sins, it was acceptable to do so in order for the believer to save his life. An English courtier and intellectual, Walter Map, attended the Third Lateran Council of 1179 and produced an even earlier account of the Waldensians. This was prior to their condemnation and a small delegation of them attended the council. Map wrote of them that “they go about two by two, barefoot, clad in woolen garments, owning nothing, holding all things in common like the apostles, naked, following a naked Christ.”⁵³ It may be difficult to determine from this passage whether Map found the Waldensians admirable or contemptible, but his claim that “they are making their first moves now in the humblest manner because they cannot launch an attack. If we admit them, we shall be driven out,” makes his position more clear.⁵⁴ His personal feelings about the Waldensian movement aside, some things are clear from his depiction of the delegation. Obviously, the movement as described by Map is apostolically motivated. The commandments Jesus gave to the apostles in the Gospels are understood to be commandments to all Christian believers. This emphasis on apostolic purity and public preaching is a clear expression of one of the three areas of potential Waldensian doctrine I have previously described. It is also an expression of values consistent with the Gregorian Reform movements; the behavior of these Waldensians is exceedingly public. This represents an early expression of the movement which had not yet been subject to organized persecution. It was only after persecution began against the movement that they abandoned such public

⁵³ Wakefield. *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, 204.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

preaching and wandering. This period, represented by the Conference of Bergamo, also coincides with the creation of a church structure. This chapter will investigate how the process of persecution shaped Waldensian doctrine over the course of the late 13th and early 14th century.

It was inevitable that a hidden movement such as the Waldensians' would have to deal with pressures from the majority, public society. Indeed, in areas where Waldensians did not hold political power, most of Christendom, daily life would have been an exercise in hidden loyalty and constant temptation. Comparisons could be drawn between Jewish converts to Christianity and Waldensian converts to Catholicism. Like Jewish converts, Waldensian converts were probably born into the movement, and some might have found the dominant faith to be appealing for either strictly theological or for practical reasons.⁵⁵ This was the case when, at some point in the 1360s, Johannes Leser, Siegfried, and several other Waldensian *fratres* left the movement in favor of Catholicism. This rift, although unfortunate for the Austrian Waldensian movement, is a boon for investigation into Austrian Waldensianism. The letter which I have previously investigated, from the Italians in response to a call for aid from the remaining Austrian Waldensians, is the only non-hostile source still extant from this exchange of letters. However, there exists a small corpus of letters from the converts which both refute condemnations from former brethren as well as exhort them to conversion. These documents should obviously be treated with caution. However, they are often better informed and more reserved than their inquisitorial or simply polemical counterparts who were not personally familiar with the daily life within the movement.

While there is only one letter from an unconverted Waldensian source, the converts to Catholicism authored several letters responding to the Waldensian position both as they remembered it and, apparently, as it was presented to them in letters following their conversion. It's difficult to say what kind of personal relationships would have existed between the converted brothers and their former

⁵⁵ For more on the hereditary nature of Waldensian belief, see: Gabriel Audisio "How to Detect a Clandestine Minority: The Example of the Waldenses." *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 21, no. 2 (July 1, 1990): 205–16.

co-religionists and whether the conversion was motivated by theological reasons, as they claim, or personal ones. Even if no love was lost between them, the remaining Waldensians would certainly feel betrayed by their actions. In his response to a now-missing letter from the Waldensians, Johannes Leser mentions that they cited Psalms to him “this can be said about us, “I have become a stranger to my brothers” - in this you spoke well.” It is clear from other portions of this work that Johannes was in fact a *frater* in the Waldensian movement. In referencing the Waldensian history which is contained in the *Liber Electorum*, Johannes wrote “your “Rule” describes – I can recall it from memory – that the light of faith never died from the time of Abraham up to Christ.”⁵⁶ What is fascinating from this passage is the recognition that the *Liber Electorum* had become a central aspect of the education of the Waldensian priestly class. In fact, whereas the Italian brothers referenced numerous other works in addition to the *Liber Electorum* and the bible from among the church fathers, Johannes Leser does not seem to stray much beyond scripture and the LE. In this chapter, I argue that the *Liber Electorum* became the central explanation both for the worldly history of the Waldensian movement, but it also created the framework for a religious doctrine which was more capable of dealing with the reality of everyday persecution which Waldensians generally and the Austrians in particular were faced with.

It is clear from Johannes's letter that the Austrians were under heavy duress in the 1360s. Firstly, the desertion of the movement by Leser and his associates would have been a harsh blow to the manpower of the movement. But even more dangerous was the exposure of previously covert Waldensians to secular and religious authorities. The letter to the Austrians does reference previous inquisitions against them, as when it states that “there are those who remember the persecution 100 years ago.”⁵⁷ Biller relates this to the inquisition in Passau of 1266, which was apparently still well-remembered by the Waldensian community. It is likely that persecution or the threat of such was a

⁵⁶ Biller, 316. *Vestra eciam “Regula” narrat – ut ego memorie mee tradidi – quod sicut a tempore abraham usque ad Cristum numquam defecit lucerna fidei.*

⁵⁷ Biller, 318. *Quia sunt qui memorie tradiderunt presecucionem factam ante C.*

daily reality for these believers. At the very least, the narrative of persecution was kept strong through an oral history of both recent persecutions and either an oral or written reproduction of the secret history contained in the LE. It is my opinion that the need for secrecy and the danger of everyday life was more immediate for Austrian Waldensians than their Italian counterparts and that this can explain some differences in the emphases placed upon certain doctrines.

Influence of the Liber Electorum

The letter of Johannes features numerous examples of polemical topoi typically deployed against heretics. There are references to the topos of the *illiterati et idiotae* which dominated anti-Waldensian discourse from the beginning. Leser is more oblique in this than others, but it is clear that he considers the Waldensians unqualified to speak on issues of doctrine. He laments “O how great a subversion of order, that he judges so harshly who is too ignorant to judge.”⁵⁸ Leser even mocks a passage apparently quoted from one of their earlier letters, concerning their clear disregard for Catholic doctrine that “if the laity babble so greatly, it is right that their simplicity be taken into account; but the excuse of simplicity does not adhere in your case, because you said “we understand.” Therefore your discrepancy seems to be not from simplicity but from voluntary error.”⁵⁹ The Waldensian claim for a lack of distinction between laity and clergy is being played with here. The implication from Leser is that if the Waldensian *fratres* wish to pretend to priestly expertise, then they should expect to be judged from that metric. Whether the Waldensians in Austria were in fact less educated than their Catholic counterparts or whether this trope is being deployed from a purely polemical perspective is difficult to say. I present this point as a warning; the prevalence of topoi in describing heretics is so ubiquitous that it can be difficult to separate them from actual observation. However, to totally disregard them would also be dangerous. It is well within the realm of possibility that rural preachers in this

⁵⁸ Biller, 303-304. *O quanta ordinis perversio, quando is iudicat qui ignorat iudicium.*

⁵⁹ Biller, 313. *Quod si layci talia balbutirent, posset eorum inputari simplicitati; sed simplicitatis excusacio in vobis locum non capit, quia dicitis “videmus.”*

area, which was only beginning to share the kind of institutional knowledge of contemporary France and Italy, would have been relatively under-educated.⁶⁰

The other topos which Leser draws upon I wish to examine in more detail, primarily because he devotes so much of his letter to this particular issue. He wrote concerning Waldensian doctrine “hidden teaching would cause suspicion, and suspicion begets contempt, and contempt has no fruit. The doctrine is not false because it is hidden, but it is hidden because it is false.”⁶¹ On this point, Leser is quite adamant. The insidious nature of hidden heresy is likened to wolves, and he says that he and his comrades “disdain to imitate the ways of these wolves, which sleep secretly among the shepherds and attack the flock in their absence, they are turned to flight from these same shepherds.”⁶² Certainly, his comment that hidden teaching causes suspicion is not unwarranted. The threat of hidden subversives within Christendom did much to fire the imaginations of cleric and laity alike. And Leser's focus upon this point is not out of character with the casual deployment of this topos in order to discredit heterodox believers. After all, why would they hide their activities unless they were immoral or even demonic? However, I do not believe that the focus upon the secretive nature of the Waldensian movement was simply a pragmatic use of this topos. Instead, it represents a real theological dispute between the Catholics and the Waldensians, as well as an aspect of Waldensian identity which had evolved over the previous hundred years.

Leser summarizes the Waldensian argument regarding the authority of Christ's Church by saying:

Because of the position that you have about the most true faith, in fullness of authority, we do not believe you to be in a state of salvation. Because you deride the teachings of Christ, the

⁶⁰ The universities of Vienna and Prague were only officially constituted in the middle of the 14th century.

⁶¹ Biller, 305. *suspicio vero contemptum parit, contemptus autem fructum non habet. Non propterea doctrina est falsa quia occulta, sed occultatur quia falsa.*

⁶² Biller, 308. *Nos autem mores luporum imitari dedignamur, qui furtive pastore dormiente vel absente greges aggrediuntur; preventi vero ab eodem vertuntur in fugam.*

apostles, and the martyrs and the confession of faith. This is shown thusly: because you say clearly that true faith is not possible nor wanted in the presence of the public; that Christ established this, and he taught others to establish similarly, that a lapse [in this case] is not possible, and that until the end of everything pre-ordained it is not possible to come to a lapse.⁶³

What becomes clear from this passage is that the Austrian Waldensians did not understand the secrecy of the Waldensian church (the true Church of Christ, in their minds) to be necessary and that it had been established merely for practical purposes. Instead, they believed that it was a necessity from the very foundation of Christendom that the true faith could not be practiced in public. Judging from Leser's response, the Waldensians apparently brought forth the passage from Sirach 13:1 "He who touches tar becomes dirty" in order to showcase the necessity for a removal of the Waldensian church from the public sphere. This is obviously fairly distinct from the movement's origin as a collection of apostolically-minded wandering preachers. Furthermore, this distinction should not be understood in the context of Stephen of Bourbon's claim that the Waldensians found it acceptable to lie and to swear oaths in cases of mortal peril. This is not the conditional acceptance of what is otherwise a sin, but a major shift in Waldensian self-perception and doctrine.

It is important to note that the *Liber Electorum* was written, or at least recorded, only 30 years prior at the earliest. And yet, judging by Johannes's letter, it had apparently already become a central document for the education of Waldensian *fratres* in the German-speaking regions. At the same time, a narrative of being the chosen people and a doctrine emphasizing the need to protect the purity of Christ's Church had apparently already been established. It is my opinion that these two developments are clearly linked. The *Liber Electorum* created a narrative of a secret sacred history which enabled Waldensians to project their persecuted, clandestine state back to the beginnings of the Apostolic

⁶³ Biller, 315 – 316. *propter hoc solum non sentiremus vos in statu esse salutis, quod precepta Cristi, apostolorum et martirum confessionem fidei deridetis. Quod sic probatur: quia expresse dicitis quod fides vera in palam predicari non possit nec proficiat; ergo Cristus instituit, et instituendo precepit, quod processum non habet, et quod ad finem preordinatum venire non potest.*

Church. That this occurred is a result of the persecution which the Waldensian community endured and the internalization of that persecution. Inquisition and condemnation was transformed from an event in secular history to which the Waldensians were forced to respond to an event within sacred history which was established and pre-ordained by God.

It is difficult to say at what point the *Liber Electorum* was adopted in Austria as the standard history of the movement, as it is possible that the narrative presented in the LE was circulated in an oral fashion before it was recorded. However, the existence of a Piedmontese and Latin version while no German version is extant would seem to indicate that its origins lie in northern Italy. The rapid acceptance of the *Liber Electorum* as a definitive version of the origins of the Waldensian movement would seem to indicate at least one of two potential causes. First, the Italians could have had such a degree of influence over the Austrian branch of the movement that they were able to export the LE into the Austrian territories. This hypothesis would seem to be borne up by the extensive degree of Italian involvement in the exchange of correspondence which resulted from the conversion of Johannes, Siegfried, and their fellows. I have already commented upon the Italian pre-eminence within the movement. It is also possible that the Austrian Waldensians responded particularly well to the narrative of the LE. The Austrians, not as well-established as the Italians, had already been subject to inquisition in the tail end of the 13th century. For the Austrians, the necessity of a hidden church was obvious. This may have made them more willing to accept the claims of the LE and place it so centrally in their education.

The theological shift that resulted from the acceptance of the *Liber Electorum* by the Waldensian movements was the legitimization not only of secrecy of individuals but of a secret institution; in fact, of an institution defined by its secrecy. In fact, only in the short period from Valdesius's conversion until the movement's condemnation was it forced to return to secret practice. By establishing this, the LE puts the contemporary Waldensian movement closer in practice to the

Apostolic Church than to early Waldensianism. And, as I have shown previously, the Papacy is the new Rome, the Whore of Babylon and as such she persecutes the true believers. The command to secrecy is placed within sacred history and made the norm throughout the history of Christendom, rather than an invention to respond to contemporary persecution.

CONCLUSION

Waldensianism was constituted in a time of multiplicity of religious experimentation unparalleled before in Latin Christendom; its birth out of the Gregorian Reform established its basic theological premises, from which later doctrines would take their direction. However, the Waldensian movement went through two changes which were the result of periods of increased persecution and less formalized pressures from the majority culture. These periods of increased stress upon the movement forced a response from Waldensian leaders which resulted in changing self-conceptions and theologies. The first period of increased pressure placed upon the movements was the official condemnation of the movement beginning with the Synod of Verona in 1184 which culminated with the declaration of anathema at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. This was obviously a slow process over the course of several decades and took just as long to be absorbed into the understanding of Waldensian leaders and result in doctrinal changes. I believe that the major theological event in Waldensian history which responded to these events was the Conference of Bergamo in 1218. Similarly, the second period of pressure also progressed over the course of decades; the increase in persecution which began in the second half of the 13th century and continued into the 14th, primarily in the form of institutionalized judicial violence organized through inquisitorial procedure. In response to this development, I believe that the creation and increasing importance of the *Liber Electorum* was the doctrinal corollary of the Conference of Bergamo.

These two events, driven from outside pressures, resulted in dogmatic and organizational changes within the Waldensian movements. The condemnations of the late 12th and early 13th century resulted in the Conference of Bergamo. It is clear from the contents of the *rescriptum* sent to the Austrians that there was legitimate need for such a Conference; the Italians and the French had very

different views of what their society should look like. Indeed, they could not even agree upon a name for themselves, certainly not the heretical moniker “Waldensians.” However, papal condemnations did result in an attempt at doctrinal and organizational unity. Although this was not achieved, that in which the Conference did result was the creation of a unified identity. Although there may not have been an agreement as to what this identity should be called, the existence of the Council was a tacit agreement that a unified front was required and appropriate because of a shared history. In this case, the condemnation is what prompted the creation of such an identity. Having a common founder in Valdesius was not necessarily a guarantee that the movement would continue as a single society, even in name only. The existence of the Poor Catholics and their return to Catholicism is evidence of this. The pressure exerted from outside by the Papacy is what drove these groups together and required a singular identity, and without this pressure it is difficult to say whether the same process of unification would have occurred.

However, in 1218 the pressure against the Waldensians was more symbolic than real. And certainly it was not yet judicial or military. By the 14th century, the inquisitorial apparatus of prosecution had been firmly established as the premier method for litigation against public crimes, including heresy. This kind of pressure, more organized and more deadly, required a further shift from the movement. The Liber Electorum gave to a collection of nominally unified but doctrinally disparate movements a shared history. This history, as evidenced by the correspondence of Johannes Leser, was leveraged to justify the existence of a hidden faith. In fact, because the idea of a hidden church was worked into sacred history to become the normative form of a Christian Church, starting at the time of Christ, the hidden character of the Waldensian movement became a justification for its status as the keeper of the true faith. As a result of the LE, secrecy was transformed from an acceptable action in those instances where it was necessary into a necessary attribute of the true believer. Although the LE notes a period of about 200 years when the true church was open, this was not the case for the majority

of its existence. The Waldensian movement sacralized the persecution it was forced to endure by manufacturing a continuous history of such persecution.

These two periods of increased persecution shaped the Waldensian movement by limiting viable forms of religious expression. From the areas of potential doctrinal evolution, only certain theologies were viable within the political climate in which the Waldensians lived. I do not mean to imply that religious movements are strictly proscribed by political situations. I still maintain that the individual, especially the ostracized and pariah intellectual, is capable of creating forms of religious experience which do not resonate with his society. However, only religious movements capable of survival and membership retention will have the opportunity to change over time. Beyond a single generation, only these forms of religious experience can be fruitfully investigated by the historian. My thesis has focused upon theological developments in the Waldensian movement relating to their self-perception as a movement and as the true church. Although my focus throughout this work has been wider than I would have initially anticipated, I felt that in order to investigate change on a multi-generational level, such a wide focus was necessary. In future research, I would like to narrow my focus to a single generation and investigate more fully evolution in the doctrines of individual actors. This would require an individual with an unusually large literary production, which is why I would highlight Durand of Huesca as distinct in being a literate, early Waldensian. Further research into his works, as yet unpublished, may yield interesting results about the formative years of the movement.

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