Encountering Others, Understanding Ourselves in Medieval and Early Modern Thought

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Encountering Others, Understanding Ourselves in Medieval and Early Modern Thought

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Reima Välimäki

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Introduction

The enemy closest to you is the most dangerous one. Such an enemy requires considerable effort in making the distinction between right and wrong – between heresy and orthodoxy.[1] Such was the case with the Waldensians, whose beginnings were situated in twelfth-century reform ideals: the will to follow Christ and the Apostles, live in poverty, and preach the word of the Gospel. The group, founded by Valdes of Lyon in the 1170s, initially gained the support of the local archbishop and even the pope for its humble, penitential life. However, the members' will to preach clashed with the hierarchical structure of the high medieval Church. Preaching was reserved to learned members of the clergy and religious orders – and not even to all of them: only those authorised by the pope or bishops were allowed to preach. Valdes's group was expelled from Lyon, and, in the decree *Ad Abolendam* promulgated at the Council of Lyon in 1184, the 'Humiliati' – or 'the Poor of Lyon' – were anathematised. The reason was not a doctrinal difference, but the group's presumption to preach without authority.[2]

In the following centuries, however, the Waldensians became doctrinally heretical in the eyes of the medieval Church. This was due to a mutually enforcing process in which a dissident group became increasingly radical and hostile towards its persecutors and the Church itself continued to define the boundaries of its doctrine, such as purgatory, in part to distinguish itself from these very dis-

1 Ian Christopher Levy, *Holy Scripture and the Quest for Authority at the End of the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 177; Jonathan Z. Smith, "Differential Equations: On Constructing the Other," in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion*, ed. Jonathan Z. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 230 – 250.

2 On the early history of the Waldensians, see Michel Rubellin, "Au temps où Valdés n'était pas hérétique: Hypothèses sur le rôle de Valdés à Lyon (1170 – 1183)," in *Inventer l'hérésie? Discours polémiques et pouvoirs avant l'Inquisition*, ed. Monique Zerner (Nice: Centre d'études médiévales, 1998), 193 – 218; Euan Cameron, *Waldenses: Rejections of Holy Church in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 11 – 22.

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sidents.[3] The best documentation of late medieval Waldensian beliefs and practices comes from the inquisitorial and polemical sources of late fourteenth-century German-speaking Europe. Waldensians denied, among other things, the validity of sacraments ministered by sinful priests, doubted the ability of the Virgin and the saints to interfere in the affairs of the living, did not believe in purgatory, deemed indulgences and masses for the dead invalid, and confessed their sins to their own lay confessors, known as the Brethren. They considered many material aspects important to the Catholic lived religion[4] – such as blessed water, images, church buildings, graveyards, and priestly vestments – superfluous.[5] That all such features were touchstones of orthodoxy is at least as telling about late medieval Catholicism as it is about the Waldensians. By the fourteenth century, the Catholic lived religion had become more elaborate, and the Church demanded more of the laity than it had in previous centuries. Consequently, more things had become heretical. Inquisitors demanded the accused elaborate their stance not only towards the Eucharist or Trinity, but towards processions, sacramentals, and clerical vestments. In the words of Euan Cameron: "It was the scope of popular Catholicism that had increased, not the depth of Waldensian hostility to it."[6] Yet, it would be wrong do reduce Waldensianism to a mere negative mirror

3 Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 169.
4 The concept of 'lived religion' has established itself in the study of premodern religion. It emphasises religion as a part of everyday life and its practices, questioning the dichotomy between elite and popular religion while nevertheless perceiving religion as something intentional, purposeful, and structural. See Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Raisa Maria Toivo, "Introduction to Medieval and Early Modern Experiences of Gender and Faith," in *Lived Religion and Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Raisa Maria Toivo (Abingdon, Oxford, and New York: Routledge, 2021), 2–3.
5 Dietrich Kurze, "Zur Ketzergeschichte der Mark Brandenburg und Pommerns vornehmlich im 14. Jahrhundert: Luziferianer, Putzkeller und Waldenser," *Jahrbuch für die Geschichte Mittel- und Ostdeutschlands* 16/17 (1968): 77–81; Cameron, *Waldenses*, 125–139; Peter Segl, "Die Waldenser in Österreich um 1400: Lehren, Organisationsform, Verbreitung und Bekämpfung," in *Friedrich Reiser und die "waldensisch-hussitische Internationale" im 15. Jahrhundert*, ed. Albert de Lange and Kathrin Utz Tremp (Heidelberg, Ubstadt-Weiher, and Basel: Verlag Regionalkultur, 2006), 163–175; Georg Modestin, *Ketzer in der Stadt: Der Prozess gegen die Strassburger Waldenser von 1400*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Studien und Texte 41 (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2007), 124–147; see also Marina Benedetti and Euan Cameron, eds., *A Companion to the Waldenses in the Middle Ages*, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 103 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2022); on the material cult and Waldensians, see Reima Välimäki, "More Powerful than Mere Matter? Forbidden but Practiced Material Religion among the Late Medieval German Waldensians," in *Tangible Religion: Materiality of Domestic Cult Practices from Antiquity to Early Modern Era*, ed. Ria Berg et al., Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae 49 (Rome: Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, 2021), 239–253.
6 Cameron, *Waldenses*, 134.

of contemporary Catholicism. The late medieval Waldensians had a sense of identity and history, a conviction that they alone had preserved the apostolic tradition amidst the Roman Church's corruption by wealth and power since the days of Emperor Constantine and Pope Sylvester.[7]

Despite their anticlericalism and critique of what they regarded as later inventions, the Waldensians held the basic Catholic worldview, accepting its main articles of faith and sacraments. It was precisely for this reason they were so dangerous. A Dominican inquisitor writing in the Austrian diocese of Passau in the 1260s, commonly known as the Anonymous of Passau,[8] described in an often-quoted passage that the 'Leoniste' – that is, the Waldensians – were the most dangerous heretics, because, among other things, they had a great outward appearance of piety (*species pietatis*): "In front of the people they live justly, and they well believe all about God and in all the articles that are included in the Creed – they blaspheme only the Roman Church and clergy, which is easy to believe for many laypeople." In the same passage, the Anonymous continued that they can be recognised from their words and actions: their manners are modest and composed, they avoid using prestigious clothing, they do not trade because they avoid lying, fraud, and oath-taking, and, instead, they live out of their own hands' work. They do not multiply riches but are content with what is necessary. They are chaste and moderate in food and drink. In their speech, they are likewise modest and precise, avoiding idle talk and lies.[9] In other words, the Waldensians would be perfect Christians were it not all just a front to hide their perverse heresy.

With the apparent similarities between the two, the boundary between Catholicism and Waldensianism was built and reinforced by several centuries of polemical refutations of Waldensian errors. This Catholic polemical response is the topic of this chapter. I concentrate not on specific doctrinal debates but on polemical strategies that were intended to undermine the very credibility

7 Peter Biller, "Goodbye to Waldensianism?," *Past and Present* 192:1 (2006): 3–33, https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtl004.

8 Alexander Patschovsky, *Der Passauer Anonymus: ein Sammelwerk über Ketzer, Juden, Antichrist aus der Mitte des 13. Jahrhunderts*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica Schriften 22 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1968).

9 Alexander Patschovsky and Kurt-Victor Selge, eds., "Auszüge aus dem Sammelwerk des Passauer Anonymus (um 1260)," in *Quellen zur Geschichte der Waldenser* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1973), 73–74: "Hec Leonistarum magnat habens speciem pietatis – eo quod coram hominibus iuste vivant et bene omnia de deo credant et omnes articulo, qui in symbolo continentur – solummodo Romanam ecclesiam blasphemant et clerum, cui multitudo laicorum facilis est ad credendum." Translations from Latin by the author unless otherwise indicated.

and authority of the Waldensians to voice theological arguments in the first place. I start from early polemics written around 1200 and end with the texts written in the 1390s, when the persecution of German Waldensians inspired the last significant medieval anti-Waldensian treatises (after which, focus was on the Hussites). A short book chapter cannot pretend to be an exhaustive treatment of such a topic, but I have aimed for an illustrative selection of examples.

I have chosen the typology proposed by Herbet Grundmann in his classic essay *Der Typus des Ketzers in mittelalterlicher Anschauung* (1927)[10] to guide the reading of sources. For historians of heresy in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Grundmann is the giant on whose shoulders we stand to see further. Although they have been much commented and built upon, his ideas remain original and topical. Moreover, very recently, his essays on heresy, inquisition, and literacy were published in an English translation for the first time.[11]

For Grundmann, the two essential building blocks of the profile (*typus*) of the heretic in the medieval worldview were *superbia* (pride) and *species pietatis* (the outward appearance of piety). The latter we already encountered in the description by the Anonymous of Passau. I have classified many often-repeated polemical statements about Waldensians according to this profile:

Superbia:
Waldensians preach and minister sacraments without being appointed.
Waldensians teach despite being unlearned and illiterate.
Waldensians allow women to teach.

Species pietatis:
Waldensians feign piety to appear holy and hide heresy.
True nature of heresy is demonical.

In the medieval understanding, *superbia* was particularly the root of vices – the evil separating men from God and the Church – and, therefore, an archetypical feature of a heresiarch. Early on, Grundmann pointed out the prominent use of *superbia* in the polemical treatment of Waldensians, considering it striking how similar lifestyles and inner motivations became opposites in descriptions of the

10 Herbert Grundmann, "Der Typus des Ketzers in mittelalterlicher Anschauung," in *Kultur- und Universalgeschichte: Walter Goetz zu seinem 60. Geburtstage* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1927), 91–107; more easily available reprint in Herbert Grundmann, "Der Typus des Ketzers in Mittelalterlicher Anschauung," in *Ausgewählte Aufsätze* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1976), 313–327; the references in this article are to the recent English translation, Herbert Grundmann, "The Profile (Typus) of the Heretic in Medieval Perception," in *Herbert Grundmann (1902–1970): Essays on Heresy, Inquisition, and Literacy*, ed. Jennifer Kolpacoff Deane (York: York Medieval Press, 2019), 16–29.
11 See the previous footnote.

Franciscans and Waldensians, "representing the most extreme *humilitas* (humility) on the one hand and the most extreme *superbia* on the other."[12] In the following, I revisit Grundmann's typology and expand his analysis to demonstrate how successive generations of polemicists used this profile of a heretic to deal with the dangerous similarity of Waldensian and Catholic teachings to reaffirm the dividing line between heresy and orthodoxy. A secondary goal of this chapter is to demonstrate the ongoing validity of Grundmann's methodological essays and encourage new generations of scholars to take up and read his works.

1 *Superbia:* Pride and Vainglory

One of the arguments against the Waldensians repeated over the centuries was that, out of pride, the group presumed clerical authority without being ordained and sent. Alain of Lille wrote the first full-scale, medieval, anti-heretical polemic, *De fide catholica contra haereticos*, in 1199 – 1202.[13] One of the four books is dedicated to Waldensians, whose representatives – perhaps even Valdes himself – Alain had met in the Third Lateran Council. From the very beginning, Alain's goal was to undermine the legitimacy of Valdes's lifestyle and mission:

> They are called Waldensians, from their heresiarch, who was called Waldus. He invented a new sect, led by his spirit, not sent by God. Namely that he presumed to preach without a prelate's authority, without divine inspiration, without knowledge and without learning. He is a philosopher without sense (*ratione*), a prophet without vision, an apostle without mission, a teacher without instruction, whose disciples – or rather mousetraps (*muscipuli*) – seduce simple people in different parts of the world: they turn them away from the truth, not convert them to it.[14]

Alain of Lille, a contemporary of Valdes, directed his attack against Valdes's person, who had presumed to invent a new sect. Alain offered few particulars about Valdes's conversion, focusing on two aspects of *superbia*. First, Valdes assumed

12 Grundmann, "The Profile (Typus) of the Heretic," 20.

13 L. J. Sackville, *Heresy and Heretics in the Thirteenth Century: The Textual Representations* (York: York Medieval Press, 2011), 13.

14 Alain of Lille, "De fide catholica contra haereticos," in *Patrologia Latina* 210, 377C–377D: "Hi Waldenses dicuntur, a suo haeresiarcha, qui vocabatur Waldus, qui suo spiritu ductus, non a Deo missus, novam sectam invenit, scilicet ut sine praelati auctoritate, sine divina inspiratione, sine scientia, sine litteratura praedicare praesumeret. Sine ratione philosophus, sine visione propheta, sine missione apostolus, sine instructore didascalus, cuius discipuli, imo, muscipuli, per diversas mundi partes, simplices seducunt, a vero avertunt, non ad verum convertunt."

the role of a prophet and apostle without legitimate authority. Second, he ventured to teach the Scriptures despite being uneducated and, thus, without learning or a sense of argumentation.

Some 40 years later, around 1240 in Lombardy, the Dominican Moneta of Cremona, a Catholic polemicist very well versed in dissident teachings, wrote his massive treatise against Cathars and Waldensians. While certainly writing from the Church's perspective with a basis in an earlier and contemporary polemical tradition, Moneta nevertheless wrote in a time when the descriptions of these two 'sects' were not solid but still emerging. His description of the origins of the Waldensians was probably based on sources from within the movement itself.[15] Like Alain, Moneta knew Waldensians were a new group founded by 'Valdesius' in Lyon some 80 years before – a remarkably accurate dating by medieval standards, missing Valdes's conversion and preaching in Lyon by only a decade.[16] Moneta also presented a Waldensian legitimation of Valdes's disobedience to the prelates of the Church: the Roman Church had fallen into corruption when Pope Sylvester I accepted temporal power with the Donation of Constantine. In their modern days, the Waldensians, of which Valdes was the first, had restored the Church.[17] Moneta, a subtle rather than demonising polemicist, then wove together two central aspects of the heresy *topos:* pride and ignorance. He recounted:

> And they want this through this [passage] in Matthew 17:11, where it says that "Elias indeed shall come, and restore all things," by which they understand Valdesius, and they say that the Church which had faltered in Sylvester is restored by him. To them it is to be said that in them this word of David in Psalm 118:85 is implemented: "The wicked have told me fables," these who wish to be doctors of law not understanding neither what they talk about, nor through which they assert it.[18]

15 L. J. Sackville, "The Textbook Heretic: Moneta of Cremona's Cathars," in *Cathars in Question*, ed. Antonio Sennis (York: York Medieval Press, 2016), 219 – 221, 228; Peter Biller, "Moneta's Confutation of Heresies and the Valdenses," in *Identità valdesi tra passato e presente*, ed. Susanna Peyronel Rambaldi, *Bollettino della società di studi valdesi* 219 (2016): 27 – 42.

16 Moneta (Cremonensis), *Monetae Adversus Catharos et Valdenses: Libri quinque*, ed. Tommaso A. Ricchini (Rome: Ex Typographia Palladis, excudebant Nicolaus, et Marcus Palearini, 1743), 402.

17 Moneta (Cremonensis), 412.

18 Moneta (Cremonensis), 412. "Idem etiam habere volunt per illud Matth. 17:11. ubi dicitur 'Elias quidem venturus est, et restituet omnia'; per quem intelligunt Valdesium, et ab ipso dicunt restitutam Ecclesiam, quae defecerat in Silvestro. Quibus dicendum est, quod impletum est in eis illud David verbum Psalm. 118:85: 'Narraverunt mihi iniqui fabulationes,' isti qui volunt esse legis Doctores non intelligentes, nec quae loquuntur, nec de quibus affirmant." Quotes from the Bible translated according to Douay-Rheims Bible.

Whether interpreting Valdes as Elias was originally a Waldensian statement or Moneta's polemical exaggeration, the conclusion of this passage was clear to a medieval reader: ignorant heretics bypassed the words of the Gospel affirming John the Baptist as the promised Elias, and, in their vainglory, elevated their own founder to the role reserved for the precursor of Christ.

Another Dominican, Stephen of Bourbon, wrote a popular *exempla* collection, *Tractatus de diversis materiis predicabilibus*, in Lyon in the 1250s. In it, he included an important description of the origins of the Waldensians based on local eye-witness accounts he had heard decades earlier.[19] Stephen retained the memory of the rich man Valdes as the founder of the movement, and, like Moneta, he explained Valdes's actions as vainglory born out of ignorance and obstinacy.[20] Regarding Valdes's clash with the archbishop of Lyon, Stephen asserted:

> Now, when they had spread error and scandal everywhere as a result of their rashness and ignorance, they were summoned before the archbishop of Lyons, whose name was John, and were forbidden by him to concern themselves with expounding Scriptures or with preaching. They, in turn, fell back on the reply made by the apostles. Their leader, assuming the role of Peter, replied with his words to their chief priests: "We ought to obey God, rather than men" – the God who had commanded the apostles to "Preach the gospel to every creature." He asserted this as though the Lord had said to them what He said to the apostles.[21]

Stephen continued that even the Apostles did not preach before the Holy Spirit gave them power, understanding, and the gift of tongues; meanwhile, the simple layman presumed to take up this endeavour. Stephen, apparently well aware that Valdes and his early followers were orthodox save their disobedience against the Church's authority, focused his attack on the unthinkable arrogance of the idea that someone could assume the apostolic mission and legitimate their obstinacy with the steadfastness of St Peter.

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19 Peter Biller, "Medieval Waldensians' Construction of the Past," in *The Waldenses, 1170–1530: Between a Religious Order and a Church*, Variorum Collected Studies Series (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 197; Pekka Tolonen, "Medieval Memories of the Origins of the Waldensian Movement," in *History and Religion: Narrating a Religious Past*, ed. Bernd-Christian Otto, Susanne Rau, and Jörg Rüpke (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), 175.

20 Grundmann, "The Profile (Typus) of the Heretic in Medieval Perception," 19.

21 English translation according to Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans, eds., *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 210; Latin text in Étienne de Bourbon, *Anecdotes historiques, légendes et apologues tirés du Recueil inédit d'Étienne de Bourbon dominicain du XIIIe siècle publiès pour la Société de l'histoire de France*, ed. A. Lecoy de La Marche (Paris: Librairie Renouard; Henri Loones, 1877), 292.

The claim refuted by Moneta – that Valdes had restored the early Church that had fallen in error – probably originates from the Waldensians themselves. The assertion appears in the writings of a remarkably learned early Waldensian – later a Catholic convert – Durand of Huesca. In his anti-Cathar treatise *Liber antiheresis*, Durand justified the Waldensian mission by stating that, after the clergy had fallen into vice, Christ once again chose simple men to fight errors and heresy in the way he had chosen unlearned fishermen in the beginning of his own ministry.[22] Durand made a forceful and learned argument for Waldensians but did not claim any direct descendancy from the early Church. This idea seeped into the story in the generations following Durand of Huesca, Moneta of Cremona, and Stephen of Bourbon, when the details of the Waldensians' origin were lost to both the Waldensians themselves and the majority of Catholic polemicists and inquisitors. According to the late medieval Waldensian historiography, a small group of true Christians had actually split from the Church when Pope Sylvester I accepted the Donation of Constantine. Valdes simply assumed the leadership of this true Church, which had lived clandestinely for centuries; ergo, he was not a founder of a new movement.[23] Catholic polemicists responded to the claim. The Anonymous of Passau wrote that this ancient origin was one of the reasons why the Waldensians were so dangerous: "They say that [their sect] has endured since the time of Sylvester. Others say that since the time of the Apostles."[24] Consequently, this heightened the importance of proving the Waldensian Brethren were not on a mission authorised by the Church or divine truth.

At the end of the fourteenth century, a man unusually well informed of Waldensian beliefs, practices, and their own texts, attacked the group both as an inquisitor and as a polemicist. In 1395, Celestine provincial Petrus Zwicker wrote his treatise *Cum dormirent homines*, which became one of the most popular anti-heretical polemics of the Middle Ages.[25] Familiar with Waldensian history,

22 Durandus von Osca, *Die ersten Waldenser II: Der Liber antiheresis des Durandus von Osca*, ed. Kurt-Victor Selge (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1967), 8; Tolonen, "Medieval Memories," 180.
23 Biller, "Medieval Waldensians' Construction of the Past," 201–206; Tolonen, "Medieval Memories," 179–181.
24 Patschovsky and Selge, "Auszüge aus dem Sammelwerk des Passauer Anonymus (um 1260)," 73: "Dicunt enim, quod duraverit a tempore Silvestri; alii dicunt, quod a tempore apostolorum."
25 The fundamental work on Zwicker's treatise is Peter Biller, "The Anti-Waldensian *Treatise Cum dormirent homines* of 1395 and Its Author," in *The Waldenses, 1170–1530: Between a Religious Order and a Church*, Variorum Collected Studies Series (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 237–269; for an updated view on the work, especially its manuscript tradition, see Reima Välimäki, *Heresy in Late Medieval Germany: The Inquisitor Petrus Zwicker and the Waldensians* (York: York

Zwicker was very confident in dismissing all claims of their divine mission and origins in the times of the early Church.[26] Although the details he gave regarding Valdes's name, city, and time of conversion were somewhat incorrect, he quite accurately narrated Valdes and his group's path to heresy: from a conversion experience to an imitation of apostolic life, the will to preach, and its prohibition as well as excommunication when disobeying this prohibition.[27] Zwicker also provided a perfect example of how, in the eyes of a medieval clergyman, heresy was born out of vainglory, obstinacy, hatred of the clergy, and a combination of old and new errors:

> And because they resisted stubbornly, they were condemned by the Church. And because they did not presume to preach openly, they nevertheless preached secretly. From there they started to destroy, condemn and reject everything, in their hatred of priests and the true priesthood, with the sole exception of sacraments, taking from ancient errors of old heretics and from new and ruinous articles added on top [of the old].[28]

Waldensianism was thus reduced to the pride, malice, and insubordination of one modern man. If there was anything ancient in it, it came from old heresies – not an apostolic way of living.

Closely related to *superbia* were accusations of ignorance and illiteracy. Herbert Grundmann's monumental influence in medieval studies is also felt in these concepts. His classic essay traces the development of the opposites *litteratus* and *illitteratus* from antiquity to the late Middle Ages. In high medieval Europe, *illitteratus* referred to a person not trained in Latin and grammar and thus excluded from clerical education.[29] This is the frame through which we must understand

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Medieval Press, 2019), 64–103, 262–289; on Zwicker's argumentation, recently Adam Poznański, "Means of Persuasion in Medieval Anti-Heretical Texts: The Case of Petrus Zwicker's *Cum dormirent homines*," in *Inquisition and Knowledge, 1200–1700*, ed. Peter Biller and L. J. Sackville (York: York Medieval Press, 2022), 178–194.

26 Välimäki, *Heresy in Late Medieval Germany*, 250.

27 Petrus Zwicker, "[Pseudo]-Petri de Pilichdorf contra Haeresin Waldensium Tractatus [Cum dormirent homines]," in *Lucae Tvdensis episcopi, Scriptores aliqvot svccedanei contra sectam waldensivm*, ed. Jacob Gretser, Maxima Bibliotheca Veterum Patrum, et Antiquorum Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum 25, ed. M. de La Bigne (Lyon: Anissonios, 1677), 278B–F.

28 Zwicker, *Cum dormirent homines*, 278E: "Et ipsi resistentes contumaciter ab Ecclesia condemnati sunt. Et quia iam in palam praedicare non praesumebant, occulte saltem praedicabant. Vnde in odium Clericorum et veri Sacerdotij ex antiquis erroribus veteranorum haereticorum, et superadditis nouis et damnosis articulis, inceperunt, solis exceptis Sacramentis, omnia destruere et condemnare, et reprobare."

29 Herbert Grundmann, "*Litteratus – Illitteratus*. Der Wandel einer Bildungsnorm vom Altertum zum Mittelalter," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 40 (1958): 1–65. Translated in Grundmann, *Essays on Heresy, Inquisition, and Literacy*, 56–125.

references to unlearned and illiterate heretics.[30] A lack of education in theology and canon law was related to *superbia* in a circular way. First, ignorance caused the heretic to misinterpret the Bible and then teach others. Second, interpreting the Bible was *superbia* precisely because the heretic was not formally educated.

Ignorance, illiteracy, and a lack of education were attributes associated with the Waldensians from the very beginning. We may again take Alain of Lille as an example:

> How do the illiterate preach, who do not know the Scriptures? Is not their preaching more for the ruin of many than their resurrection? Also, how have those learned the letters, who have not studied? We see that those who are holier than them, those who have knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, like many Cistercians, do not preach, because evidently, they are not sent. If it is dangerous to preach for the wise and the holy, it is most dangerous for the unlearned who do not know what to preach, to whom to preach, how to preach, when to preach, and where to preach.[31]

Like preaching without a superior's permission, preaching without learning relates back to the sin of pride: unlearned heretics presume to take up a task that much wiser men shun.

A special form of such a presumption was that Waldensians permitted women to teach. There is a grain of truth in the repeated Catholic accusation of preaching Waldensian women. At least in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, there were female Waldensians who were religious authorities and teachers.[32] In polemics, this turned out to be another proof of the Waldensians' heresy: had not Paul the Apostle himself told women to keep silent?[33] The treatise *De inquisitione hereticorum*, written in the second half of the thirteenth century, is a good

30 Peter Biller, "The Topos and Reality of the Heretic as *Illitteratus*," in *The Waldenses, 1170–1530: Between a Religious Order and a Church*, Variorum Collected Studies Series (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 169–190.

31 Alain of Lille, *De fide catholica*, 379C–D: "Quomodo etiam praedicabunt illitterati qui Scripturas non intelligunt? Nonne eorum praedicatio potius est in ruinam multorum quam resurrectionem? Item, quomodo litteras noverunt, qui non didicerunt? Videmus etiam sanctiores iis non praedicare, qui intellectum sacrae Scripturae habent, ut multos Cistercienses, quia nimirum missi non sunt. Si sapientibus et sanctis periculosum est praedicare, periculosissimum est idiotis, qui nesciunt quod praedicandum, quibus praedicandum, quomodo praedicandum, quando praedicandum, ubi praedicandum."

32 On Waldensian women, see esp. Jörg Feuchter, "Waldenserinnen im Mittelalter," in *Fragmenta Melanchthoniana 1. Zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Günter Frank and Sebastian Lalla (Heidelberg, Ubstadt-Weiher, and Basel: Regionalkultur Verlag, 2003), 47–68; Marina Benedetti, *Donne valdesi nel Medioevo* (Torino: Claudiana, 2007).

33 Alain of Lille, *De fide catholica*, 380A.

example of attacking the female ministry: "Not only men but also women teach among them, because women have greater access to [other] women to corrupt them, so that through them also their men would be subverted, just like through Eve the serpent allured Adam."[34]

In the polemics, heretics were habitually referred to as seducers of innocents, and this image is particularly powerful with the gendered allusion to Eve, as in the excerpt above. Over a century later, the inquisitor Zwicker ridiculed the Waldensian Brethren, stating they did not introduce anyone to their sect "but while you hide in a corner or travel through the world, old crones and little women are you ministers, and so they have accustomed to pour into others the venom they have drank from you." These *vetule et muliercule* were also the ones leading 'new little sheep' to the heresiarch.[35]

2 *Species Pietatis:* The Outward Appearance of Piety

The second core accusation in anti-Waldensian polemics was the group's hypocrisy and outward appearance of piety. Grundmann noted that, if anti-heretical polemicists had only exaggerated the worst aspects of heresy, they would have failed in their mission: "One had to recognise the heretics' pious appearance as zealous for the faith and pleasing to God, and then emphasise rather than obscure these traits – for therein lay the danger."[36] The inquisitors and preachers fighting heresy faced the fact that ascetic, poor Waldensian Brethren genuinely appeared holier to laypeople than their local priests (who were often disinterested in pastoral care) – and especially their haughty bishops and abbots. The Brethren's holy reputation is well-attested in late medieval German inquisitions.[37] Even some inquisitorial sources describe the Waldensian Brethren in ways that make the reader doubt their heresy. There is an intriguing, short description of the Waldensian Brethren entitled *De vita et conversacione*, which was most likely constructed after several German Brethren converted to Cathol-

34 Wilhelm Preger, ed., "Der Tractat des David von Augsburg über die Waldesier," *Abhandlungen der historischen Classe der königlich bayrischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 14 (1879): 209: "Non autem solum viri sed et femine apud eos docent, quia feminis magis patet accessus ad feminas pervertendas, ut per illas eciam viros subvertant, sicut per Evam serpens illexit Adam."
35 Zwicker, *Cum dormirent homines*, 280D.
36 Grundmann, "The Profile (Typus) of the Heretic," 24.
37 Cameron, *Waldenses*, 129.

icism in 1391, and it is their information from which this description of the ordination and lifestyle of the Brethren stems. Most versions of the text have additions and omissions that frame their piety as heretical *species pietatis:* the Brethren fast and wear humble clothing in order to appear holy in front of their followers.[38] However, a recently discovered version of the texts in a Weimar manuscript is so devoid of polemics that, at some point, a later reader of the manuscript felt it necessary to correct the phrase 'the articles of faith' to 'the errors of this heresy,' a wonderful demonstration of the fragility of the dividing line between holy men and heresiarchs.[39]

Therefore, in most texts, it was necessary to reframe the Waldensians' pious life as a façade behind which lay the true diabolical nature of heresy. This view was almost poetically expressed by Petrus Zwicker: "The heresiarchs of the sect of Waldensian heretics lethally infect the greatest multitude of Christ's believers with their perverse doctrine, the death-bringing poison of errors under the sweetness of pretended sanctity."[40] According to polemicists, this hypocrisy and pretended sanctity were features not only of the heresiarchs, but of their followers as well. The Anonymous of Passau lamented how heretics falsely (*ficte*) confess their sins, take communion, and hear sermons.[41] Passages such as this reflect the social reality of late medieval Waldensians. They lived amongst their Catholic neighbours; so, at least minimum participation in Catholic services was necessary to avoid accusations of heresy, with many Waldensian followers seeming to have been quite creative in combining Catholic and Waldensian practices in their lived religion.[42]

The Waldensian's meetings – where the Brethren preached, heard confessions, and gave penance to their followers – were, by necessity, secret, taking place in private homes often under the cover of night. Some inquisitors knew quite well that these meetings were no more scandalous than laymen preaching

38 E. Werner, "Nachrichten über spätmittelalterliche Ketzer aus tschechoslowakischen Archiven und Bibliotheken," *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Karl-Marx-Universität Leipzig. Gesellschafts- und sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe* 12:1 (1963): 265.

39 Reima Välimäki, "The Portrayal of the Waldensian Brethren in the *De vita et conversacione* (c. 1391–1393)," in *Inquisition and Knowledge, 1200–1700*, ed. Peter Biller and L. J. Sackville (York: York Medieval Press, 2022), 157–177. The Weimar manuscript's text is edited in the article's appendix.

40 Zwicker, *Cum dormirent homines*, 278A: "Haeresiarchae sectae Waldensium haereticorum plurimam Christi fidelium multitudinem suis peruersis doctrinis, sub quibusdam simulatae sanctitatis dulcedinibus errorum veneno mortifero lethaliter infecerunt."

41 Patschovsky and Selge, "Auszüge aus dem Sammelwerk des Passauer Anonymus (um 1260)," 74.

42 Kurze, "Zur Ketzergeschichte," 84–86; Cameron, *Waldenses*, 134–137.

and hearing confessions; however, this, in their eyes, was scandalous enough. Petrus Zwicker dedicated several chapters of his treatise to refute the Waldensian ministry, with the core of his argumentation being that true Christian faith must be public and manifest – not private and secret.[43] Another sharp-sighted inquisitor, Bernard Gui, likewise noted that the reason for gathering at night was quite simply for the sake of secrecy and security.[44] Not all clergymen were as sober in their judgement. As Grundmann noted, "judges of heresy and moralists of the worst sort, however, easily stoked ordinary people's horror of night-time underground gatherings of men and women into incredible fantasies."[45] This fantasy was 'Luciferan' heresy, a belief in a diabolical sect that worshipped Satan or demons in night-time orgies that included incest and child-murder. Grundmann had seen the connection between this 'Heretical Sabbath' and the early modern Witches' Sabbath,[46] and scholars following him have convincingly deconstructed the sect of Luciferans as a clerical fantasy and imagined heresy – often precisely against Waldensians.[47] Such fantasies were driven by the conviction that, if the heretics resemble good Christians in every way, there must be a hideous secret under this sheep's clothing.

3 Conclusion: Framing the Worst of Heresies

A review of two centuries of anti-Waldensian polemics reveals conflicting goals and discourses. The goal of an anti-heretical polemics was to both convince its readers of the dangers of the heresy as well as provide counterarguments against them. In the case of the Waldensians, these goals were often at odds. Many po-

43 Zwicker, *Cum dormirent homines*, 279F–281A.

44 Bernard Gui, *Practica inquisitionis heretice pravitatis*, ed. Célestin Douais (Paris: Picard, 1886), 250.

45 Grundmann, "The Profile (Typus) of the Heretic," 25.

46 Grundmann, "The Profile (Typus) of the Heretic," 27–28.

47 See esp. Alexander Patschovsky, "Waldenserverfolgung in Schweidnitz 1315," *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 36 (1980): 137–176; Alexander Patschovsky, "Der Ketzer als Teufelsdiener," in *Papsttum, Kirche und Recht im Mittelalter. Festchrift fûr Horst Fuhrmann zum 65. Geuburtstag.*, ed. Hubert Mordek (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1991), 317–334; Peter Biller, "Bernard Gui, Sex and Luciferanism," in *Praedicatores, Inquisitores I. The Dominicans and the Medieval Inquisition. Acts of the 1st International Seminar on the Dominicans and the Inquisition, 23–25 February 2002*, ed. A. Bernal Palacios (Rome: Institutum Historicum Fratrum Praedicatorum Romae, 2004), 455–470; Kathrin Utz Tremp, *Von der Häresie zur Hexerei: "Wirkliche" und imaginäre Sekten im Spätmittelalter*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica Schriften 59 (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2008), 275–353.

lemical authors – from the contemporaries of Valdes to late medieval inquisitors – were relatively well informed of the history of Valdes's conversion and early ministry. Recounting this history was in itself an argument against the Waldensians: it proved they were a novel sect. Yet, the early history of the Waldensians also revealed that, originally, there was nothing heretical in their doctrine. Another contradiction was present in descriptions of the Waldensian lifestyle: they were humble, pious, and churchgoing – and, therefore, dangerous and difficult to detect. To deal with these contradictions, the polemicists applied the sin of *superbia* and the closely related *species pietatis*. Pride and obstinacy led Valdes and early Waldensians to illicit ministry, the unavoidable conclusion of which was heresy and error. Therefore, the group's humble customs and piety were nothing more than a façade hiding its true inner corruption.

One likewise reaches the conclusion that, although polemical treatises made good use of the literary stereotype of the heretic, at least some authors possessed a nuanced understanding of the religious other they encountered. When reading the Anonymous of Passau or Petrus Zwicker, one gets the impression that, at some level, these authors acknowledged that the heretics they encountered were humbler and more virtuous than their fellow churchmen. In the polemics, however, the distinction between heresy and orthodoxy is absolute. The aim of writing anti-heretical polemics was thus to guard and enforce the boundary between *civitas dei* and *civitas diaboli* – not only in the minds of readers, but in the mind of the author as well.

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