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Dissident Ecclesiologies in Early Fourteenth Century Languedoc

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Abstract

At the beginning of the fourteenth century, a small number of Languedoc Beguin heretics sparsely confessed dissident ecclesiological ideas that challenged the prevailing model of authority within the Roman Church. The main source of their dissent was the work of Peter John Olivi that had greatly influenced the recalcitrant Spiritual Franciscans of Narbonne. At the same period, a particular group of Waldensians presented a practical example of dissident ecclesiology by adopting a three-tier hierarchy outside the Roman Church. Overall, this article aims to present glimpses of the above-mentioned dissident ecclesiologies and then use them to comment on Lester R. Kurtz's sociological approach to heresy.

Keywords

Heresy, Ecclesiology, Beguins, Waldensians, Peter John Olivi

Introduction

The under-studied Waldensians and Beguins were popular heresies based on rigid expressions of evangelical poverty which greatly determined their concept of *vita apostolica* and subsequently their criticism of the present Church's prevailing state.¹ In general, they both belonged to a long heterogeneous tradition of religious dissent that began in the aftermath of the Gregorian Revolution and was expressed mainly by those who thought that the Church had failed to keep faith with its own recent reformatory requests (Moore, 1992: 19). In other words, they were formed around laity's desire for a simpler religiosity, in greater resemblance to the life of Christ and the Apostles according to the Gospels and away from the excesses and the corruption of a part of the higher clergy. This desire combined with disobedience to ecclesiastical authority, the essence of heresy according to John Arnold (2010: 197), led to their proclamation as heretics whose dissent was not only manifested in evangelical and eschatological terms but also in the field of ecclesiology, reconfirming heresy's complex nature and manifold identity (Merlo, 2014: 436).

According to Lester R. Kurtz the heretic is a "deviant insider" who differentiates from the infidel. Contrary to the latter who is outside the Church, the heretics are

¹ For a brief introduction to *vita apostolica* and its connection with medieval heresy, see Grundmann (2002: 219-235).

within the circle or the institution from which they deviate and in which they are close enough to be threatening. Still, they are distant enough to be considered in error and therefore, their religious life represents an intense union of “nearness” and “remoteness” (Kurtz, 1983: 1087). The need for a more precise conception of this generally accepted insider status of the heretic² has been remarked by Jacques Berlinerblau (2001). The present article will try to use the dissident ecclesiologies of the Beguins and the Waldensians as specific criteria to support his claim. Schematically, we are going to argue that each presented ecclesiology reflects a different “position” in the spectrum of the heretic’s insider status and that this “positioning” is greatly related to the typical route of medieval heresy from a stage of reformative effort (“nearness”) to that of rejection of the descent Church (“remoteness”).

As it will be shown below, in the case of a few Beguins, the confessed ecclesiological ideas originally place them closer to the “nearness” point in Kurtz’s theoretical scheme, since they employed reformative ecclesiological arguments that had wide currency within the Church for centuries, betraying that this was a time when few among them seemingly still had the hope of a reformative role for themselves inside their own Church. On the other hand, the Waldensian group through the practical adoption of an internal hierarchy, next or against to the Catholic one, had apparently – and after years of suppression and failures – left behind the early Waldensian longing for reform of the Church, possibly having now a much stronger sense of themselves as the true Christian Church. Therefore, in their case, “remoteness” is more evident. But the union of the two remains vivid in both cases. The Beguin eschatology and its ecclesiological connotations, which will prevail over the next years of persecution, move them away from reformative “nearness” to “remoteness” and rejection of the Church. However, the shift happens without completely abandoning their Catholic religiosity as expressed in their worship for the Gospel and especially the Book of Revelation. Inversely, the resemblance of the three-tier hierarchical Waldensian model to the Roman Catholic one betrays traces of their fading “nearness”.

Eventually, the idea of “deviant insider” who combines elements of “nearness” and “remoteness” applies in both heretical cases. Furthermore, this combination, as evidenced in the dissident ecclesiologies, also betrays the gradual alienation of the heretic from his descent orthodoxy mainly under the pressure of suppression and time. The fading off elements of “nearness” in favor of elements of “remoteness” reconfirms an ordinary route of religious deviance from the stage of reform to that of rejection.

The effect of “nearness”: examples of Beguin reformative ecclesiology

The small heretical sect of the Beguins has been introduced in modern medieval historiography mainly by the work of Raoul Manselli (1989) in the mid- 50s. Since then, a number of scholars have studied their case and especially their

² For example, see Erikson (1966); Zito (1983).

eschatology.³ The Beguins were laypeople, men and women alike, who are not to be confused, despite the common name,⁴ with the more famous Beguines of Flanders and Germany. In their vast majority, they were members of the Third Order of St. Francis in the south of France and at the same time outspoken followers of Peter John Olivi's theology (Biget, 1999: 282-285). Olivi, in his turn, was an influential Spiritual Franciscan friar who had died in 1298 and was infamous for his doctrine of the "usus pauper", especially as it was later integrated in the Joachimite eschatological program of his last treatise, *Lectura Super Apocalypsim*. This work was banned by the leaders of the Order and eventually by papacy itself in 1326 but was worshipped by the Beguins as a divinely expression of the Holy Spirit.⁵

The Beguins, who preferred to call themselves Poor Brethren of Penitence, were discovered during the inquisitorial procedures that took place in Languedoc following the execution of four recalcitrant Spiritual Franciscans in Marseille in 1318 who had defied the papal bull *Quorumdam exigit* of the previous year. For almost a decade from this point, the inquisition, especially the ones of Toulouse and Carcassonne, prosecuted a number of cases and commanded the execution of almost one hundred Beguins in various places in the south of France (Burnham, 2008: 189-193).

The fundamental primary sources are volumes 27 and 28 of the *Collection Doat* in Bibliotheque Nationale de France together with the *Liber Sententiarum Inquisitionis Tholosanae*.⁶ The two *Doat* volumes are related to the Dominican Inquisition of Carcassonne covering the years 1323 to 1329, while the *Liber Sententiarum* was composed by the Dominican inquisitor of Toulouse, Bernard Gui, and contains data from his long-lasting inquisitorial career from 1307 to 1323. Next to these, Gui's *Practica Inquisitionis Hereticae Pravitatis*⁷ must be mentioned, since – written at the end of his inquisitorial career – it contains some of his most perspicuous conclusions. After all, Gui was the first inquisitor to record Beguin cases and it is in his work that the Beguin ecclesiology makes its first appearance. On the contrary, the *Doat* volumes offer very little on the subject, despite the inclusion of almost seventy Beguin cases.

The nineteen Beguins who were included in *Liber Sententiarum* in general confessed the typical millenarian and evangelical tenets that described the small

³ A thorough introduction to the Beguin case and their beliefs concerning Franciscan poverty and eschatological millenarianism must include Manselli (1989: 122-212), Burr (2003: 213-237) and Burnham (2008).

⁴ The etymology of the words *beguinus* and *beguina* has been the subject of a long debate and quite a few hypotheses have been cited. Of the most convincing is that of the Flemish philologist Maurits Gysseling, who suggested the derivation from the Indo-European root *begg-*, that meant someone who was speaking indistinctly as when reciting prayers. So, it might have originally stood for a person involved in private prayer, albeit incomprehensible or even hypocritical. In any case, the terms ended up having clear pejorative connotations and as such were widely used by the inquisitors – and not only – in order to describe a variety of dissenting phenomena both in northern and in southern Europe. See, Simons, (2001: 121-123).

⁵ In the last three decades, a large number of studies have been published enriching our knowledge concerning the prolific Franciscan. Two of the most up to date collective volumes are Bourreau & Piron (1999) and König-Pralong et al. (2010). The works of Burr (1976; 1989) are fundamental.

⁶ The *Liber Sententiarum* (London, BL, Ms. Add. 4697) has been edited by Philipp van Limborch (1692) and hereafter will be referred to as *Liber Sententiarum*. Specifically, for its Beguin cases, see Given (2003).

⁷ *Practica Inquisitionis* has been edited by Celestine Douais (1886) and hereafter will be referred to as *Practica Inquisitionis*. Also see, Pales-Gobilliard (1981); Hill (2019: 30-45).

heretical sect. In brief, they rejected the authority of Pope John XXII because of his decrees against Spiritual Franciscans,⁸ and being prone to the Olivian eschatology of *Lectura* they used it to identify John XXII as the Mystical Antichrist who was persecuting the faithful. But next to their millenarian dreams, a small number of them also confessed ecclesiological points that they recollected from the Spiritual Franciscans' sermons which they had heard mainly in the convent of Narbonne questioning John's XXII power to alter previous papal or conciliar decisions. These inflammatory sermons were the outcome of a long history of dissent which had begun as an internal dispute between the Conventual and the Spiritual Franciscans, escalated with pope John's XXII intervention and led to the Spirituals' declaration as heretics.

Without going into exhausting details of the well-known internal Franciscan conflict, we should mention two milestones that will greatly affect the course of events. The first one is the issue of *Exiit qui Seminatur* in August 1279 by pope Nicholas III, which probably remains the best-known papal clarification of the Franciscan Rule. Its importance lay in the fact that it gave official sanction to the Franciscan doctrine of the absolute poverty of Christ and the Apostles, aiming to settle once and for all the disputes around it. It's the same exact bull that pope John XXII will later try to revise, causing the reaction of the Spirituals and their lay supporters of the Third Order. Among the latter, some had already been labelled as Beguins in the Provincial Council of Beziers in 1299, where the term had been used in order to describe tertiarys who propagated into their conventicles the imminence of the coming of Antichrist.⁹

The second milestone is the Clementine settlement at the Council of Vienne in 1312. There were discussed, among other crucial issues, the proper observance of *Exiit qui Seminatur* within the order along with Olivi's own orthodoxy. In the bulls of 1312, *Exivi de Paradiso* and *Fidei Catholicae Fundamento* respectively, Clement tried unsuccessfully to compromise the two sides on both issues, while his decisions on Olivi resulted in further misunderstandings.

With the election of Pope John XXII in 1316, accusations against the Spirituals made their appearance once more and in late 1317 John XXII decided to summon by name to Avignon sixty-two Spirituals from the convents of Narbonne and Beziers. The Spirituals who arrived at the papal court faced a predetermined John XXII, who in less than four months issued three consecutive bulls, *Quorundam exigit*, *Sancta Romana*, and *Gloriosam Ecclesiam*, leading to the condemnation of the southern French Spiritual Franciscans, while on May 6, 1318 in Marseille, Michael Monachus, the Franciscan inquisitor of Provence, condemned four Spirituals who persistently denied to obey the papal decrees to death as heretics. At the end of the inquisitorial sentence, Michael Monachus stated that the *poisonous fountain* of the heresy was the doctrine of Peter John Olivi (Mansi, 1761: 254). His writings

⁸ For John's XXII actions against Spiritual Franciscans, see Nold (2007: 140-177).

⁹ "Quam plures utriusque sexus ad novae superstitionis cultum pertracti fuerunt, Beguini seu Beguinae vulgariter appellati, qui conventualia prohibita facientes", (Mansi, 1780: 1216). However, in a letter of 1295, Olivi himself had already used the verb *inbeguiniri* to express the fears of Charles II, King of Naples, regarding the relationship between the Spiritual theologian and Charles' three captive sons in Catalonia. "Nam et michi a fide digno aliquo dictum fuit, quod etiam dominus pater vester timuerat vos inbeguiniri seu ut proprius loquar in divinis infatuari per eloquia oris mei". (Ehrle, 1887: 539).

were condemned and burned by his own Order. In addition, sometime during the same year, the body of Olivi was removed from his tomb and disposed somewhere secretly, while the tomb itself was ruined. From this point onwards, the Holy Inquisition took over to discover the rest of the dissenters in Languedoc, friars and laypeople alike.¹⁰

However, the recalcitrant friars continued in their sermons, at least for a bit longer, to propagate their criticism of Pope John XXII. The Beguin ecclesiological ideas that were confessed in front of Bernard Gui were in truth recollections from these sermons that were mainly held in Narbonne, as it is clearly indicated by phrases such as “*ut dixit, audivit predicari in Narbona per fratres Minores* or *Item dixit quod audivit a quibusdam de dictis fratribus ordinis Minorum vocatis Spiritualibus* or *Dixit etiam se audivisse in sermonibus factis per fratres Minores de Narbona*” (*Liber Sententiarum*, 325-329).

Consequently, it was under the Spirituals’ influence, determined as they were to protect the favourable for their cause *Exiit qui seminat* of 1279, that the lay Beguins became interested in ecclesiological theories that questioned Pope John’s XXII jurisdiction to revise older ecclesiastical decisions on his own and acknowledged a higher source of authority inside the Church.

For example, Petrus Tort,¹¹ a literate cutler and tertiary from Montréal, who was imprisoned in Carcassonne on July 1322, presented an ecclesiological theory which he had heard in Narbonne and he himself considered to be true, reminiscent of later conciliarism¹² since it declared that the Pope could not by himself alone revoke or go against any decision made in a general Council. That was possible only in cooperation with the latter since the Council had never erred in matters of faith in the past. In any other occasion, the papal decisions were to be considered null and void.¹³ The Beguins, Petrus Moresii and Matheus Terreni, who were both immured in Carcassonne on July 1322, apparently also agreed.¹⁴ Another Beguin, Bernardus de Na Jacma, from the small town of Belpech, who was imprisoned and finally executed in Toulouse in 1323, further corroborated Tort’s thinking by declaring that the Council of the Church could never err and that consequently pope John XXII had erred by condemning the Olivian doctrine, which according to them had been approved in the Council of Vienne in 1312.¹⁵

The Beguin, Petrus Gastaudi, a notary’s son from Belpech, who was immured in Toulouse on July 1322, speculated on the same subject but reached a different conclusion. According to his confession, in the case of a heretical pope, the authority

¹⁰ For a thorough description of the Spiritual Franciscan struggle, see Burr (2002: 159-212), and Lambert (1998: 14-156).

¹¹ I will be using the Latin names of the heretics trying to avoid translation problems in modern English.

¹² For the conciliar movement of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, see Black (2005).

¹³ “[...] dominus papa per se non poterat revocare aliquid quod esset statutum in concilio generali nec contrarium ordinare [...] et si faceret dicta ordinatio sua vel statutum, nulla essent, set cum concilio generali poterat ordinare contrarium [...] quia, ut dicebant non inveniatur quod aliquod concilium erraverit” (*Liber Sententiarum*: 326).

¹⁴ “Item credidit et credebatur quod papa per seipsum vel etiam concilium generale posterius non possit condemnare vel etiam revocare doctrinam [...] que in priori concilio generali fuerunt approbata vel etiam confirmata [...] et si faceret constitutio vel statutum ejus nulla essent” (*Liber Sententiarum*: 306, 320-321).

¹⁵ “[...] dominus papa non posset condemnare vel reprobare doctrinam dicti fratris P. Johannis [...] fuisset aprobata in concilio Viennensi, et credebatur quod concilium errare non posset” (*Liber Sententiarum*: 308). As already mentioned above, the Council of Vienne neither condemned nor sanctioned the Olivian writings, at least explicitly. A point that created further dissent inside the Order (Burr, 2003: 137-158).

in charge of deposing the head of the Church was the College of the Cardinals. Gastaudi declared that the College of Cardinals could act against a pope whose previous erroneous decisions had stripped him of the power of binding and loosing or of conferring the sacraments. In that case the Holy See was to be considered vacant and unless the Pope was willing to annul his previous decisions and publicly repent, then, canonically, the cardinals had the power to depose him and elect a new one.¹⁶

Next to the self-evident influence of the Spirituals of the convent of Narbonne, the confession of Petrus Gastaudi further reconfirms the Olivian intellectual background of the small sect which apparently was not limited to eschatology and the doctrine of ‘*usus pauper*’ but also extended into ecclesiological ideas. Olivi was a truly prolific writer who had composed biblical commentaries, theological *quodlibeta*, scholastic treatises and even an exposition on economics (Flood, 2000; Piron, 2020). One of the most important Olivian writings for alternative ecclesiology was *Quaestiones de perfectione evangelica* that included a group of seventeen questions written in different times.¹⁷

More specifically, in question number thirteen Olivi had tried to depict the perfect administrative structure of the Church. He combined Aristotelian elements with the canonical corporate theory that recognized head (*caput*) and members (*membra*) in corporations (*universitates*) (Bartoli, 1999: 190). This Olivian synthesis offered an ecclesiological model reminiscent of Hostiensis (Pennington, 2005: 424-453; Tierney, 1968: 149-153) that acknowledged a special role in the College of the Cardinals, as the true expression of the faithful’s congregation. According to Olivi, it was the Cardinals who secured the unhindered continuity of the Church in cases of papal irregularities through the privilege to elect by their own a new head of the Church or to summon the Council for the exact same purpose,¹⁸ just as the Beguin Petrus Gastaudi had confessed to Gui.

The Olivian ecclesiological points of *Quaestiones* may be spotted in other parts of the Beguin confessions as well. Specifically, three Beguins explicitly invoked two of the four criteria that Olivi had set in question number fourteen of *Quaestiones*, where he discussed the limitations of ecclesiastical and papal power. The first concerned the incapability of its use for destruction and the second the impossibility of its diminution.¹⁹ More specifically, the Olivian principles were confessed by Petrus Tort and Mattheus Terreni, who were mentioned above for their peculiar conciliar ideas, as well by Maria de Serra.²⁰ Furthermore, Petrus

¹⁶ “[...] et extunc vacavit papatus, et nisi predictus papa desideret a predictis aut revocaret ea canonice requisitus, cardinales poterant ad electionem alterius pape procedere” (*Liber Sententiarum*: 323-324).

¹⁷ The number and order of the questions varies in different manuscripts, and it is difficult to say which arrangement represents Olivi’s final redaction (Burr, 1989: 43).

¹⁸ “Qua ratione collegium cardinalium quo ad quid participat vim superioris in substituendo papam [...] in hoc iudicio habent quo ad quid rationem superioris” (Bartoli, 1999: 190).

¹⁹ The other two were 1) its constant dependence upon Christ’s power and therefore its subjection to divine law and 2) its inability to extend to areas – such as the evangelical vows – in which God wished men to freely follow their will. Olivian ideas on human freedom influenced his interpretation of religious practice as well of human agency and greatly shaped his politically loaded ecclesiological theories that were mainly developed in *Quaestiones*. In general, Olivi argued in favour of the freedom of human will in every internal and external human action therefore in political relations too (Pasnau, 1999; Toivanen, 2016).

²⁰ “potestas pape est ad constitutionem et non ad destructionem [...] potestas papalis non erat ad destructionem sed ad edificacionem[...] potestas papalis erat ordinate ad augmentum et profectum virtutum et non ad diminucionem vel

Moresii argued in favour of lawful resistance against an unlawful ecclesiastical authority whose decisions were violating its divine mission,²¹ strongly reminiscent of the lawful resistance of the faithful that Olivi had analysed in questions number eleven and twelve of the same work and which were also preoccupied with the matter of obedience to an arbitrary ecclesiastical power (Burr, 1989: 184-185).

The knowledge of Olivian ecclesiological ideas among the Beguins is further proved in the case of his doctrine of papal infallibility. It has been argued in the past, mainly by Brian Tierney, that Olivi was the first theologian to actually suggest this doctrine as a means to limit papal authority (Tierney, 1972: 93-130). Indeed, in question number twelve of *Quaestiones*, Olivi had argued that the true Pope could never err in matters of faith in public and with persistence. Were he to fail in this, he could not be considered the true Pope but only a pope in name and appearance, whose deposition was legitimate since he was not acting as the unerring *regula fidei*.²² The Beguin Raymundus de Buxo, who was executed in Toulouse in 1323, similarly declared that in contrast with the Holy See as office, which was unerring at all time, the Pope as individual could make wrong decisions and thus fall into heresy, acknowledging Pope's probable deficiency as an officer.²³

From the above analysis, it may be suggested that the lay Beguins, despite their vast illiteracy, managed to become transmitters of elaborated subversive ecclesiological arguments that they had heard in the Spirituals' sermons in Narbonne. These arguments circulated in the Catholic theological and canonical circles since at least the twelfth century (Pennington, 2005: 443-453; Watt, 1957)²⁴ and some Spirituals may have incidentally come across them during their theological training or even had deliberately looked for in their quest for delegitimization of the recent arbitrary papal decisions. Of course, the main source for these alternative ecclesiologies must have been, once more, the multifaceted work of the intellectual leader of Spiritual Franciscans in late thirteenth century (Congar, 1975). In fact, Olivi was unofficially venerated in Narbonne and his feast was celebrated with splendour on March 14 by the people and the clergy at his tomb in the local Franciscan convent (Burnham, 2008: 7).

After all, the Beguin confessions further witness the Spiritual Franciscans' Olivian intellectual background by the circulation among them of Olivian works, both in Latin and in Provençal editions.²⁵ Parts of these works were read aloud in Beguin congregations, so as to overcome the majority's illiteracy. Many copies were actually specifically created for them in various scriptoria of lay Spiritual

defectum" (*Liber Sententiarum*: 320-326).

²¹ "credidit quod dominus papa faciendo hoc peccavit et fecit contra Evangelium Christi [...] decretalis super hoc facta iniusta est et iniqua [...] non debent nec tenentur eidem pape in hoc obedire" (*Liber Sententiarum*: 304).

²² "[...] aut quod papa existens verus papa et verum capud ecclesie non potest errare; et talis impossibilitas est secundum quid, et de hac clarum est quod nec papa nec sedes romana potest in fide pertinaciter errare [...] habet potestatem benedicendi et maledicendi in ecclesia, quia omnis fidelis maior est eo" (Tierney, 1985: 321-322).

²³ "ipse Raymundus credidit quod dominus papa in quantum est quidam homo singularis erravit et factus fuit hereticus, set quia potestas papalis errare non potest [...] dictam constitutionem non fecit potestate papali a Deo [...] set propria malicia voluntatis" (*Liber Sententiarum*: 300).

²⁴ In a series of articles as well as in *Foundations of Conciliar Thought*, Brian Tierney was probably the first scholar who argued in favor of the early circulation in orthodox debate of alternative ecclesiologies based on canon law. See Tierney (1951; 1954; 1968).

²⁵ See for example the confession of Bernarda de Antusano or that of Petrus Gastaudi (*Liber Sententiarum*: 313-314, 323-325).

supporters, such as Arnaud de Villanova, offering one of the earliest incidences in western Europe of using vernacular propaganda for the support of religious dissent and resistance, as R. Lerner has proposed (Lerner, 1996: 186). It must be added that these works had reached the Beguin communities through the relentless actions of individuals, like Petrus Trencavel,²⁶ who was overseeing a clandestine literary exchange network (Burnham, 2008: 161-177).

Naturally, it is not necessary that Olivi was the only ecclesiological source for the Spirituals and the Beguins. In fact, as Sylvain Piron has showed, the Beguins had knowledge of other Spiritual Franciscan works as well, as for example the radical *Postilla super Danielem* of Barthelemy Sicard (Piron, 2003: 80-85). This variety of sources may also be assumed from the confessed conciliarism of the literate Petrus Tort and of others. Although it is very difficult to trace the sources for these premature conciliar ideas it is quite certain that they were not of Olivian origin, since Olivi had not been preoccupied with Council's role in his writings. A suggestion would be the possible knowledge of the writings of William Durant the Younger, who had presented in the Council of Vienne a coherent program of conciliar reform (Fasolt, 1997; 2002) and at which Council Spirituals from Narbonne took part in order to defend the Olivian orthodoxy. But this is just wild speculation that has no further evidence (at least for the time being!).

The source-critical problem of the inquisitorial records along with inquisitors' tendency to produce their own made-up truths constructing "confessing subjects" (Arnold, 2001: 74-110; Biller, 2006: 5-9) forces us to raise the question of whether Gui himself actually dictated the above confessed ecclesiological arguments, in an effort to track down Olivian viewpoints in the laity. There is no easy answer to this question but we must always bear in mind that Gui is historiographically acknowledged as one of the most professional and veracious inquisitors whose attitude towards his suspects can perhaps best be defined as proper and circumscribed (Hill, 2019: 137). Furthermore, ecclesiological ideas are confessed by only six out of nineteen Beguins that Gui interrogated. The rest of them simply confessed their denial to comply with John's XXII *Quorumdam exigit*, just like the first four executed Spirituals in Marseille. So, the formulated inquisitorial question must have been related to the acceptance or rejection of the papal bull and not to elaborated Olivian ecclesiological ideas found on *Quaestiones* or elsewhere. After all, neither *Quaestiones* neither Olivi's ecclesiology had ever really been at the center of the persecution. On the contrary, *Lectura* and its eschatological millenarianism was the subversive Olivian background that Gui was interested to uncover as evidenced by the multitude of the relevant questions.

At this point we need to make two important remarks. The first one concerns the fact that the omnipresent Beguin eschatology is far more subversive than the confessed ecclesiology and as we shall briefly argue is towards this eschatology that the Beguins move – ecclesologically too – with increasing intensity, proof of the typical heretical route from the stage of reforming "nearness" to that of

²⁶ For his truly exceptional case also, see Troncarelli (1999).

“remoteness”; to that of rejection of the Carnal Roman Church and its replacement by the new Spiritual Church of the Age of the Holy Spirit.²⁷

The second point concerns the number of Beguins that originally confessed these sparse ecclesiological ideas. As already mentioned, these were only six out of nineteen Beguins of *Liber*. If we take in mind the complete absence of ecclesiological issues in the seventy Beguin confessions of the later *Doat* records (for the years 1323 to 1329) then it seems right to strongly argue that in truth it was only a small group of Beguins who actually were interested in ecclesiological matters. This argument does not contradict the structure of heresy as we know it, since the Beguins were organized into heretical circles which communicated loosely with each other thus being able to develop particular views, either in subgroups or individually (Biget, 1999: 299-306). Thus, for example, Na Prou Boneta confessed extreme visionary ideas and Petrus Trencavel developed a relentless activism (Burnham, 2008: 140-177), actions that did not characterize the rest of the sect. Therefore, it seems plausible to suggest the existence of a small group with reformative ecclesiological interests within the sect and under the influence of the Spirituals of Narbonne, while the fact that these interests seem to be completely abandoned in the course of the decade of persecution and suppression of heresy, strengthens our concluding argument regarding the typical heretical route.

Eventually, the six Beguins’ ecclesiological interests, as recorded by Gui, reveal their original “nearness” to the Church according to Kurtz’s sociological analysis, since the heretics coming literally from within the Church employed the “same language” as the parental group (Zito, 1983: 125), meaning ecclesiological ideas of a wide Catholic current, in order to express their dissent. In other words, Gui recorded a time when some – even few – Beguins still found themselves extremely near to the core of their descent Church and exactly because of this “nearness” their dissent ecclesiological ideas remind more of a reformative effort and less of a complete rejection.

On the other hand, and as the executed Beguins increased in numbers, victims of the Church’s coercive power during the 1320s, whatever few such reformist voices might once existed, were abandoned in favor of the much more aggressive eschatology²⁸ that gradually led to “remoteness” and rejection of their descent Catholic Church. This route is witnessed especially in the later *Doat* incidents,²⁹ with the omnipresent confessed idea of an imminent new Spiritual Church founded on the “viri Spirituales”, meaning the persecuted Spiritual Franciscans, that would replace the Roman Carnal Church. Therefore, it seems that the Beguins moved quickly towards “remoteness” in only a decade of rough suppression by the coordinated action of the inquisitorial tribunals of Toulouse and Carcassonne.³⁰

²⁷ Both *Liber* and *Doat* volumes are full of eschatological references concerning the Carnal Roman Church and the Spiritual Church of the Third Age of the Holy Spirit that would be founded on the “viri spirituales”, namely the disobedient Spirituals: “in fine secundi status ecclesie, qui durat usque Anti-Christum, fiet iudicium de ecclesia carnali, quia persequitur vitam Christi in viris spiritualibus, qui volunt tenere paupertatem Christ secundum regulam sancti Francisci, et destructa ecclesia carnali, post mortem Anti-Christi erigetur ecclesia tercii status in viris spiritualibus” (*Liber Sententiarum*: 298).

²⁸ For the subversiveness of medieval eschatology in general, see Cohn (2004).

²⁹ For the prominent eschatology in the *Doat* years, see Manselli (1989: 181-212).

³⁰ James Given’s quantitative studies converge in favor of the Beguins harsher punishment, at least from Gui, than their contemporaries Waldensians or even Cathars, see Given (2001: 67-71).

Still, “nearness” remained in the eschatology that they used in order to attack the Church since it was heavily based on one of the most prominent books of medieval Catholicism, the Book of Revelation. In other words, and despite the fact of the abandonment of reformatory ecclesiological ideas in later Beguin confessions, elements of “nearness” continued to exist, namely their eschatological origin, but they were now lagging behind the elements of “remoteness”.

Distancing from orthodox embrace: the Waldensian “remoteness” of a new hierarchy

Contrary to the Beguin confessions, those of a contemporary Waldensian group in Languedoc do not reveal ecclesiological theories with reformatory features regarding the administration of the Church. However, four cases recorded by the bishop of Pamiers, Jacques Fournier, later pope Benedict XII, reveal the existence of an internal hierarchical organization which will be used as an example of dissident ecclesiology in practice. This hierarchy was also schematically recorded in Bernard Gui’s *Practica Inquisitionis Heretice Pravitatis*, that was written around 1325.

More specifically, in the second chapter of the fifth part that was dedicated to the Poor of Lyons,³¹ Gui observed that the French Waldensians had installed in the past a superior over themselves, whom they called *majoral* and whom all were bound to obey exactly just as all Catholics were obliged to obey the Pope.³² He furthermore certified the existence of two distinct ranks within the sect: the *perfecti*³³ on the one hand and the *discipuli* together with the *credentes* on the other one. The former, after the successful completion of a novitiate were dedicated to a life of strict poverty as the true successors of the Apostles. They served as teachers and confessors of the faithful who were their disciples and they were further separated into three distinct orders, namely the diaconate, the priesthood and the episcopate, while according to Gui, they had claimed their own independent authority apart from the Roman Church.³⁴ Similar deductions had been also presented in his *Liber Sententiarum*, based on the confessions of Johannes de Vienna and his wife, Huguete, who both witnessed a Johannes Lotharigo as their superior *majoral* and to whom they owed obedience instead of the Roman Pope.³⁵ The couple had been arrested in the summer of 1318 in Pamiers together with Raymundus de Sancta Fide or de la Costa, whose confession brings us to the famous inquisitorial

³¹ This is the name of the French Waldensians after the sect’s division in the conference of Bergamo in early thirteenth century (Wakefield & Evans, 1991: 278-289). In general, the term *Waldensian* was coined by their persecutors and they themselves never used it. On the contrary, they distinguished themselves from other Christians by saying they were *Brothers*, *Poor of Christ* or *Poor of Lyons* (Audisio, 2003: 3).

³² “[...] Valdenses habent et constituent sibi unum superiorem super se, quem vocant Majoralem suum, cui omnes tenentur obedire sicut omnes catholici sunt sub obedientia domini pape” (*Practica Inquisitionis*: 248).

³³ Gui uses the term *perfecti* very few times, mentioning that the right term would be *Waldenses*: “Duo si quidem sunt genera secte ipsorum; quidam enim eorum sunt perfecti, et isti vocantur proprie Valdenses” (*Practica Inquisitionis*: 251). At another point he confirms that they themselves preferred to be called *Brothers* or *Poor of Christ*: “aut fraternitate illorum quos appellamus Valdenses seu Pauperes de Lugduno; ipsi autem inter se vocant se Fratres seu Pauperes Christi” (*Practica Inquisitionis*: 276).

³⁴ “Item, tres esse ordines in sua ecclesia asserunt et fatentur, videlicet, dyachonum et presbiterum et episcopum, quorum et singulorum potestas ab eis solum dependet et non ab Ecclesia Romana” (*Practica Inquisitionis*: 247-248).

³⁵ “Item credit et credidit magis esse obediendum predicto Johanni Lotharigo, majorali dicte secte Valdensium, quam domino pape” (*Liber Sententiarum*: 291).

record of Jacques Fournier.³⁶ Of the four Waldensian cases in Fournier's *Register*, his is the most enlightening concerning the alleged Waldensian hierarchy.

Raymundus, a Waldensian deacon himself, in multiple confessions that he gave, until his execution in the spring of 1320 in Pamiers, verified Gui's above-described tri-partite hierarchy and further presented the Brothers³⁷ ceremonial ordination, that in general followed that of Mathias by the Apostles. Every Brother was to be unanimously elected by an assembly of other Brothers based on his wisdom, his theological knowledge and his general Christian conduct. After his election he was bound to obey both God and men. The ordination was confirmed by the laying-on of hands on the scriptural pattern³⁸ and the only difference between the three orders' ordinations came from the simple choice of whether one was being elected bishop, priest or deacon.

This tri-partite hierarchy of the sect was clearly described by Raymundus and equally clearly recorded by the inquisitor. But things get somewhat confusing when we reach the parts that concerned the alleged existence of a superior in the sect. This is greatly due to the indiscriminate use of the term *majoral* for both the description of the Waldensian bishops³⁹ in general and the reference to an obviously higher authority inside the sect.

For example, Raymundus argued in various points of his confession that the *majoral's* authority was uncontested, deriving directly from God as true successor of the Apostles Peter and Paul. Also, that he had to live in strict poverty and constant wandering preaching as the perfect example of *vita apostolica*; features that each and every Waldensian bishop had to possess. On the other hand, there exist parts where the term *majoral* quite obviously refers to someone of a more unique identity. For example, when he confessed that the *majoral's* authority was not restricted to a particular diocese and was limited only by the divine precepts.⁴⁰ In fact, there is one very particular passage where he explicitly declared the uniqueness of the *majoral* in the sect,⁴¹ while at another one emphasized the

³⁶ The register of the famous from Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *Montaillou* bishop of Pamiers can be found in manuscript Vat. Lat. 4030 (Vat. Lat. 4030 found on https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.lat.4030). The latin citations on this article are based on Jean Duvernoy's transcription (1965) and hereafter will be referred to as *Fournier Register* citing the folio's number slash Duvernoy's pages.

³⁷ Fournier, in contrast to Gui, never really used the term *perfecti* and usually referred to the Waldensian Brothers as *socii* whose *statum suum* [...] *vocatur Pauperes Christi* (*Fournier Register*: ff. 12^o v./ 98). A curious exception, possibly a copier's error, is the use of the term for Huguet: "*Confessio Huguet uxoris Iohannis Iohannis de Vienna heretice perfecte secte Valdensium seu Pauperum de Lugduno*" (*Fournier Register*: ff. 109^o v./ 519). Also see Shahar (2001: 136, 138)

³⁸ "Tu es concorditer per fratres electus si Deo placet [...] tandem precipitur ei quod obediat et servet hobedienciam quam promisit Deo et hominibus [...] Et post electionem orantes super eum et imponentes manus super capud eius, ut acciperet Spiritum sanctum [...] quemadmodum apostoli fecerunt de Mathia" (*Fournier Register*: ff. 3^o v./ 55-56).

³⁹ "Item dixit sunt tres ordines in ecclesia, scilicet dyaconatus, presbiteratus, et episcopatus, et episcopus apud eos vocatur maioralis vel minister" (*Fournier Register*: ff. 14^o r./109).

⁴⁰ "Dixit quod eorum maior accepit potestatem suam quam habet immediate a Deo, quam sancti Petrus et Paulus [...] Interrogatus super quibus et in quibus ipsi habent obedire suo maiorali, respondit quod in omnibus que sunt secundum Deum: primo Deo, deinde suo maiorali" (*Fournier Register*: ff. 6^o r./64, ff. 7^o v./74). "[...]eorum maior nullo modo posset tenere possessiones immobiles sine fractione voti paupertatis [...] non habet potestatem in aliquo certo territorio, parochial vel diocese, sed ubique potest predicare et alia sacramenta ministrare sociis suis [...]" (*Fournier Register*: ff. 7^o r./72-74).

⁴¹ "[...] quod solum quod aliquis maioralis vivat, non potest ordinary alter maioralis in gradu pontificali nisi per dictum maioralem viventem" (*Fournier Register*: ff. 4^o v./60).

overlapping reigns of two *majorales*, whom he also named.⁴² Moreover, the use of the term *gradus pontificali*⁴³ seemingly reconfirms the deductions made by Gui in *Practica* concerning a Waldensian pope, reminiscent at the same time of the creation of a powerful successor or *pontifex* that had divided the first Waldensian community since the beginning of the thirteenth century at Bergamo's conference (Roach, 2005: 127).

The best support for the former hypothesis would be the passages where Raymundus compared his *majoral's* authority with that of the Pope. In brief, he argued that the Waldensian *majoral* was exempted from Pope's authority having his own independent and divinely sanctioned power that allowed him to organize a new Church, true to the teachings of the Bible. In another point, he even stated that this Waldensian *majoral* had actually sought papal recognition in the past and it was only after the latter's decision to persecute the Waldensians that he decided to claim his own independent authority. Eventually, and after some back and forth – indications of the troubled confessing subject or deliberate ambiguities –, Raymundus asserted that in the case of a disagreement between the two the Waldensian faithful owed higher obedience to his *majoral* rather to the Pope.⁴⁴

Raymundus' confession, as recorded by Fournier, further contradicts Bernard Gui's conclusions concerning the regular holding of Waldensian councils. According to Gui, the French Waldensians held annual general chapters, seated at one of the more important Waldensian communities, during which the alleged superior was informed on a variety of issues concerning the sect's administration and activities, such as preaching missions, collection of alms and even yearly receipts and expenditures.⁴⁵ On the other hand, Raymundus stated that the *majoral* had no obligation to call a chapter or a meeting of the sect but that he could simply let his companions know his will, usually by traveling to them.⁴⁶

Raymundus' confession and its implications for the history of Waldensianism have been thoroughly discussed in modern historiography⁴⁷ especially after the work of Grado Giovanni Merlo that questioned the coherence of Waldensianism in favour of *Waldensianisms* in plural. In addition, as with the Beguins, here too we must ask ourselves for the possibility of inquisitorial construction or false and

⁴² "Et post mortem Iohannis, ipse vidit Christianum, qui fuit minister maior post Iohannem, licet vivente Iohanne dictus Christianus esset ordinatus in ordine maiorali" (*Fournier Register*: ff. 12° v./100).

⁴³ "[...] consistit in tribus ordinibus, scilicet episcopatus, presbiteratus et dyaconatus, sine eo qui debet habere ordinem maioralem, qui est gradus pontificalis" (*Fournier Register*: ff. 4° v./56).

⁴⁴ "[...] respondit quod id circo obediret maiori suo in isto articulo, et non domino Pape, quia est suo maiorali astrictus per obedienciam et non domino Pape. [...] Item dixit quod eorum maior accipit inmediate potestatem a Deo et iurisdictionem, et non a domino Papa [...] et propter hoc est exemptus a iurisdictione domini Pape, et non tenetur ei obedire [...] si contrarium declararet dominus Papa et eorum maior, sequeretur declaracionem sui maioris et non domini Pape" (*Fournier Register*: ff. 8° v./79, ff. 18° r./108). "[...] respondit quod pro tanto eorum maior non vult obedire domino Pape, quia dominus Papa dicit purgatorium esse et licitum esse iurare, que eorum maior negat, et etiam quia dominus Papa non permetteret quod teneret viam paupertatis quam elegit tenere ipse et sui, ut credit" (*Fournier Register*: ff. 9° v./85).

⁴⁵ "Item, singulis annis tenent aut celebrant unum vel duo capitula generalia in aliqua sollempni villa occulte quantum possunt [...] et in illis capitulis maior omnium ordinat et disponit [...] et audit et recipit rationem de collectis et de expensis factis" (*Practica Inquisitionis*: 249).

⁴⁶ "Interrogatus si dictus maior aliquando congregat capitulum, in quo socii congregentur, dixit quod non, sed, ut dixit, minister noticatur sociis voluntatem suam" (*Fournier Register*, ff. 12° v./100).

⁴⁷ The secondary bibliography for the Waldensian movement is vast and covers a variety of issues. See for example, Merlo (1984; 1991), Biller (2001), Audisio (2003).

incorrect labelling, as has been suggested by Yves Dossat in other cases where the so-called Waldensians might actually have been Poor Catholics (Dossat, 1967: 214-216). However, Fournier, just like Guy, was also characterized for his veracity and professionalism and despite the above issues which instruct us to be extremely careful in our interpretations concerning Waldensian cases in early fourteenth century Languedoc, the Waldensian complexion of the particular heretical group seems to be undoubted. After all, Raymundus confessed the basic binary structure of medieval Waldensianism between Brothers who took religious vows and lived in secrecy and their followers who lived within the Catholic Church while they secretly received Waldensian instruction. However, the chances of inquisitorial predisposition do truly exist in the case of the alleged superior *majoral*; a point where Fournier might have been prejudiced by Guy's descriptions, which in their turn were considerably based on earlier works such as Stephen of Bourbon and *De inquisitione hereticorum* (Wakefield & Evans, 1991: 374). However, despite this issue of leadership, the existence of a hierarchically organized sect that was moving further and further away from the Roman Church is undeniable. In fact, Raymundus even claimed that the Papal Church had to follow the model of their own Waldensian Church in order to recover its lost apostolicity.⁴⁸

This adopted hierarchical model is an example of ecclesiology in practice that places the under-study Waldensian group to the “remoteness” area of Kurtz’s “deviant insider”. Raymond and his affiliates did not express ecclesiological theories concerning the Roman Church but were occupied with the ecclesiological construction of their own organization. In contrast to the six Beguins that Gui recorded, they were not interested in issues of the Catholic administration and apparently, they no longer wished to reform the Catholic Church, abandoning one of the main goals of Peter Valdes himself.

If anything, the hierarchy that Raymundus confessed proves that they eventually chose independence and further distancing and “remoteness”. Still, the ecclesiological model which they adopted indicates their enduring – although fading – “nearness” to the Church, since it was heavily inspired by the prevailing Catholic one, imitating its basic principle of the three holy orders. Moreover, they seemingly continued to accept a number of Catholic sacraments,⁴⁹ a crucial detail that additionally defuses the older arguments of Gordon Leff and Scott H. Hendrix who suggested a more thoroughgoing abandonment of Catholicism (Hendrix, 1976: 352; Leff, 1967: 75). In sum, despite the adoption of their own independent hierarchy which underscores the rejection of the established Church’s clerical hierarchy and thus their further distancing from its embrace, they still maintained elements of “nearness”.

Eventually, and in contrast to the confessed ecclesiological theories that place the six Beguins closer to the “nearness” point of the “deviant insider”, the uncovering of a separate hierarchy puts the particular Waldensians closer to the “remoteness” point of the spectrum. The basic reason for this “remoteness” must

⁴⁸ “si romana Ecclesia reverteretur ad fidem et statum Ecclesie eorum in omnibus et per omnia, tunc ipsa esset ecclesia quam Christus elegit et quam Apostolus in dicta auctoritate describit” (*Fournier Register*: ff. 10^o r/86).

⁴⁹ “ipse et alii qui sunt de statu suo credunt et dicunt quod episcopi subiecti romane Ecclesie ordinantes episcopos, presbiteros et dyaconos iuxta formam et modum quem tenet romana Ecclesia in ordinando predictos bene faciunt” (*Fournier Register*: ff. 10^o r/86).

have been the long history of suppression and failures, as Gabriel Audisio and John Arnold have suggested (Audisio, 2003: 110-117; Arnold, 2010: 203). As more effective persecution developed, and the once enthusiastic support in the region for wandering Waldensians ebbed away to the benefit of the Franciscans, organization seemed to be the only way to avoid extinction. These Waldensians had to renounce the Poor of Lyons' older rigid tenets of a more egalitarian religiosity between members – or even gender – and accept a clandestine structure to ensure that their essential tenets would be preserved and passed on. The alternative would be to return to the embrace of the Roman Church, as quite a few of their companions had done in the past.

As already mentioned, this road towards “remoteness” was to be soon followed by Beguins as well, not with the creation of a separate hierarchy but with the abandonment of reformative ecclesiological arguments in favor of a much more radical eschatology with subversive connotations that completely rejected the Catholic Church. So, does this route apply in other medieval heretical cases as well? The answer to this question presupposes an extensive study whose conclusions would go slightly beyond the scope – but more importantly transgress the limits set – of the present article. Still, and leaving aside the Cathars with their dualist uniqueness, we can hastily argue that a number of other medieval heretical phenomena do indeed apply to the above route of medieval heresy. For example, most of the itinerant preachers of twelfth and thirteenth centuries, like Henry of Lausanne or Tanchelm of Antwerp, who started as ardent reformers and ended up being notorious outsiders, or even the late medieval evangelical heresies of Lollards and Hussites, that were inspired by alternative Catholic theologies and ended up inspiring the creation of new Churches.⁵⁰ Schematically, all of them began from a point of reformative “nearness” and ended up to a point of rejecting “remoteness” exactly like the Waldensians and the Beguins that were presented in this article.

Conclusion

Not long ago, Alexander Patschovsky suggested that properly understood heresiology should be applied sociology (2003: 41). Taking this as a starting point, this article tried to employ two dissident ecclesiologies of the early fourteenth century as criteria for a more precise conception of Kurtz's sociological approach of the heretic as a “deviant insider” whose religious life represented an intense union of “nearness” and “remoteness”, in reference to a typical route of medieval heresy from the point of a reformative effort to that of ascending rejection of its descent Church under the pressure of persecution and punishment

As depicted in the Beguin example, heretics articulated – even sparsely – reformative ideas concerning the administration of their Church. Ideas that they abandoned under suppression and punishment, moving towards the eschatological rejection of their descent Church. Similarly, the Waldensian hierarchical internal structure against the Catholic one betrays the fact that they too had rejected the Church after years of suppression and punishment. Still, in both examples, elements of “nearness” continue to exist at the point of “remoteness”. Therefore,

⁵⁰ See Lambert (2002: 43-96, 239-349); Leff (1999: 559-707).

both sects combine “nearness” and “remoteness”, since glimpses of “nearness”, meaning their orthodox parental language and values, were still visible when they reached “remoteness” (Zito, 1983: 125-126).

But despite this survival of “nearness”, under the suppression that each medieval heresy experienced at a point of its existence, eventually and inevitably they were both moving towards “remoteness”, reaffirming that heresy tends to move away from its twin sister, the reform (Lambert, 2002: 415) and end up in more radical stances that if allowed to survive can lead to the creation of new Churches, of new orthodoxies, as will be the case with Reformation. Finally, it is exactly this union of close resemblance to orthodoxy with the simultaneous desire to reform it and eventually substitute it that makes heresy so potent (Kurtz, 1983: 1088).

List of abbreviations:

Liber Sententiarum

Limborch, van P. (1692). *Historia Inquisitionis cui subjungitur Liber Sententiarum Inquisitionis Tholosanae ab anno Christi MCCCVI ad annum MCCCXXXIII*. Amsterdam: H. Wetstenium.

Practica Inquisitionis

Douais, C. (1886). *Practica inquisitionis heretice pravitatis (auctore Bernardo Guidonis)*. Paris: A. Picard.

Fournier Register

Duvernoy, J. (1965). *Le Registre d'inquisition de Jacques Fournier, évêque de Pamiers (1318–1325)*. Toulouse: É. Privat.

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