Introduction

The Contours of Authority in Medieval Christendom

Reflecting on events that occurred in southern France around the year 1022, a monk named Adémar of Chabannes penned a brief account of "Manichaean" heretics "who appeared throughout Aquitaine leading the people astray. They denied baptism and the Cross and every sound doctrine. They abstained from food and seemed like monks; they pretended chastity, but among themselves they practiced every debauchery. They were ambassadors of Antichrist and caused many to turn away from the faith."1 A century and a half later, in the 1160s, the famous Rhineland abbess and prophet Hildegard of Bingen preached thunderously against *Cathars* who hypocritically appeared pale, chaste, and austere, but were "scorpions in their morals and snakes in their works."2 Over fifty years after Hildegard's death, the Italian Franciscan friar James Capelli wearily remarked: "We know that they [heretics] suppose their behavior to be virtuous and they do many things that are in the nature of good works; in frequent prayer, in vigils, in sparsity of food and clothing, and—let me acknowledge the truth—in austerity of abstinence they surpass all other religious." Yet he warned his reader that "under this cloak of good works" their sweet words steal away the hearts of the foolish.3

These three short accounts should provoke some questions, and probably different questions for different readers. One might ask, for example, "Who were these people, these Manichaeans, Cathars, and heretics? Where did they come from, and what did they believe and practice? And why were they so upsetting to contemporaries as to draw comparison to scorpions, snakes, and even Antichrist?" Some might wonder why these authors were so invested in and angry about the beliefs of ostensibly pious people. Others might pose slightly different questions that focus less on the story of what happened, and more on the credibility and usefulness of the accounts themselves (in other words, on the method, or *how* we piece the story together). For instance, "How relevant are similarities between reports from the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries? Is it good reporting to lump together accounts from such different regions as the lands of modern-day France, Germany, and Italy? Are the writers here actually talking about the same group? How accurate is their information, and how slanted are their particular points of view?" Such questions have kept many a medieval historian awake at night, as have the kaleidoscopic, even conflicting, array of responses generated over the past century of scholarship.

Before moving on to sketch a bird's-eye view of the landscape of medieval Europe and the contours of religious, political, and social authority during these centuries, we should begin with the heart of the matter and confront three key challenges. For despite the apparently straightforward title of *A History of Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, this volume actually argues that heresy and inquisition were anything but simple or uncontested categories (either among medieval contemporaries or modern scholars).

CHALLENGE NUMBER ONE: DEFINING HERESY

First, the peculiar challenge of studying heresy is that, as John Arnold put it, "heresy only exists where there is an orthodoxy to name it. The two are an inseparable binary, and 'heresy' is forever both a boundary and a fluctuating category."4 To put it another way, "heresy" is an artificial category designed by authorities who regarded themselves by definition as "orthodox" or "not-heretic." It is a category that developed over the course of the medieval centuries as the Church itself became a more sophisticated administrative institution, and a framework by which an endless variety of beliefs could be uniformly condemned, contained, and thus controlled. From one point of view, however, heresy was even necessary: after all, St. Paul had warned, "There must also be heresies among you," so that the righteous can be known by contrast.5 Indeed, the early Christian world was fraught with struggles for authority and disputes about the proper way to follow the model of Christ and his apostles. Doctrinal arguments abounded over issues such as the nature of Christ, the meaning of God's words, and the best means for implementing them in the material world; and each group labeled the others as heretical.

Thus the process of establishing Christian authority and the scriptural canon laws was lengthy, controversial, and finalized only in the great early councils such as Nicaea in 325 C.E. Over time, "orthodoxy" was established in contrast to such heresies as Arianism, Donatism, or Pelagianism—but only once there was sufficient organization and hierarchy for councils to rule on the acceptability of hitherto circulating doctrines. From these earliest Christian centuries were birthed a set of lurid and remarkably enduring stereotypes of heretics as not only hypocritical and secretive foes but even as orgiastic, bestial, murderous baby eaters—ludicrous and baseless accusations that would nonetheless echo painfully across the medieval centuries.

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Figure I.1. St. Matthew the Evangelist, Gospel of Ebbo, Archbishop of Reims, from the Monastery of Hautevilliers, Before 823. Bibliothèque Municipale, Epernay, France. Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

Between approximately the fifth and tenth centuries, as small and scattered communities struggled daily for survival, local priests and Benedictine monks sought to embed Christian practice in their pagan or only lightly Christianized flocks. Heresy was not much of a concern during these years: vibrant lay religiosity was not a potent historical force in the West, canon law was in its infancy, and Church hierarchies and structures were still largely occupied with the challenge of conversion and implementation of basic Christian observance. Only in the eleventh and twelfth centuries (for reasons discussed below) did the medieval clergy begin to encounter uncomfortably novel forms of preaching and lay piety; for guidance, they turned to ancient Church fathers such as Saints Augustine and Jerome and absorbed their descriptions of early Christian heresy. Thus clergy encountering what they began to deem religious dissent in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries presumed that these were simply new outbreaks of old heresies. However, authorities became increasingly aware of new spiritual expressions and practices once the floodgates of lay piety opened in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

This is not, however, to suggest that anyone at any time was liable to end up accused of

heresy. Clergy of all ranks recognized that laypeople often held uninformed or mistaken beliefs about Christian doctrine and its apparently paradoxical theology of incarnate divinity, virgin birth, and resurrection from the dead. Religious training for the rank and file in medieval Christendom was generally limited to a few prayers or points of doctrine, and up until the late twelfth century, scripture was the sole domain of Latinate clergy. Moreover, the clerical task was always to save souls, to restore lost sheep to the pastoral flock. As a consequence, the theologically ignorant or confused were not at risk of condemnation for heresy, so long as they accepted the corrected teaching provided by their spiritual supervisor.

What, then, constituted heresy in the eyes of contemporaries? Derived etymologically from the Greek *haeresis* ("choice"), the core of heresy as defined by the Church was disobedience rooted in pride and the willful rejection of orthodoxy *after* correction: the deliberate choosing of error over truth. In the mid-thirteenth century, for example, the bishop of Lincoln, Robert Grosseteste, defined heresy as "an opinion chosen by human perception contrary to holy Scripture, publicly avowed and obstinately defended." Although not all victims of inquisitorial condemnation matched this description, choice represented the kernel of the matter for the clergy: a heretic obstinately refused correction, pridefully choosing instead his or her own interpretation of religion, and thus boldly usurping the spiritual authority of the holy Church, of scripture . . . challenging even God himself. Discerning right from wrong was never a simple matter and usually devolved ultimately into a negotiation over authority—particularly over the institutional Church and its claimed responsibility to interpret scripture, dispense sacraments, and channel God's will on earth. The dialogue over what constituted heresy, therefore, was never simple; multiple voices emerged in an archipelago of diverse contexts and environments that varied enormously over time and place. Because the categories of "heresy" and "orthodoxy" lay very much in the eye of the beholder, they present a vexing but invigorating challenge for historians whose task is to reconstruct the past. Whose past? And according to which sources?

CHALLENGE NUMBER TWO: QUESTIONING SOURCES

Historians rely upon a variety of primary sources (i.e., materials close at hand to the events in question) in order to understand what individuals in the past thought, did, and believed, what their world was like, and what it meant to them. For the topic of medieval constructions of heresy, a range of sources exists for studying the topography of belief deemed heretical by the medieval Church. Orthodox literature includes conciliar decrees and records, treatises, canon law, annals, chronicles, histories, and even letters. In addition, specifically inquisitorial sources generated by the burgeoning record-keeping apparatus of such tribunals in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries make up an extensive trove of documents. However, these are of course largely hostile accounts driven by an orthodox agenda. So what are the possibilities and pitfalls of such material for historians? On the one hand, inquisitorial sources frequently incorporated the assertions, claims, or defenses of the accused into the work itself,

which provide tantalizing scraps of evidence as to their own points of view. On the other hand, the layers of intimidation, threat of violence, and textual intervention by scribes combine with the inquisitors' ideological and institutional biases to render such materials unusually problematic. A historian must resist assuming that any individual voice can be easily or accurately understood through such intrusively filtered reported speech. Thus, as Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero put it, "even as he snitches on the dead, the historian's fundamental obligation is to respect them in their own terms rather than in those of the judicial record that brings their experiences to view."6 Historians have paid particular attention to this central problem in recent years, and we will consider it throughout the volume.

But how, then, can we hope to learn about the spiritual ideas and practices from the perspective of people who rarely wrote texts, those termed "heretics" by others but who believed themselves truly religious and righteous? Due largely to the scrupulous editing and translation work of nineteenth-century scholars, historians now have access to a wide variety of spiritual and theological sources that, although still penned by elites, represent a sympathetic rather than hostile perspective: collections of biblical sources; vernacular translations; creeds, rituals, and professions of faith; treatises and doctrinal discussions; and sermons. Town records, chronicles, letters, and other indirectly related materials also provide insight to the world of those accused of heresy. Where possible, these may all be triangulated with inquisitorial records and other sources of information to reconceptualize the spiritual landscape of the high and later Middle Ages.

Emphasizing the complexity and diversity of the medieval past, therefore, I draw in this volume upon a variety of types of sources while acknowledging that none of them is exclusive, inclusive, or necessarily any more "true" than others. Peter Novick has characterized the challenge of determining objectivity and truth in history as "nailing jelly to the wall," and it is an apt image.7 Readers are thus urged to ask themselves continually, "How do we know?" and "Where does this information or interpretation come from?" Historians must be able to defend their arguments based on primary source evidence, and it is my hope that readers will critically analyze and question this material along the way.

CHALLENGE NUMBER THREE: LANGUAGE AND LABELS

What's in a name? For those concerned with membership in "the ferment of heretical wickedness" (as Pope Innocent III expressed it in 1215), a great deal. Labels are sticky—they linger and cling, particularly the names and categories that institutions assign to assess, control, and supervise human beings. Perhaps obviously, no one ever called herself a "heretic," for the term implies obstinate deviation from the truth, and as of the thirteenth century, actual treason from righteousness. For a modern equivalent, one might consider the term *terrorist* and the ideological, political, legal, and authoritative gaps between those who wield it and those to whom it is attributed. Even the most radical dissenters of the Middle Ages typically considered themselves reformers, adherents of a more austere, pure, and true tradition, one

from which the Church itself had deviated. For that reason, I avoid using the term *heretic* except as employed by clerics and inquisitors, as well as their broad (and broadly derogatory) names for groups such as the Cathars, Waldensians, and Free Spirits. Such terms not only convey a false sense of uniformity but also bear the uncanny power to manufacture out of whole cloth communities that never existed as such—in some cases because they imply conscious association and affiliation between what may only be superficially similar practices and people, in others because (as in the case of "Free Spirits") the movement was largely imaginary in the first place. Thus, when presenting issues from the point of view of adherents, believers, and leaders, I adopt the nomenclature they chose for themselves: often the simple terms of Good Christians, Poor Men, or the Known. Any confusion that may result is, I believe, a reasonable price to pay for avoiding the forced categorization of medieval people into historically distorted and reductive labels.

It should also come as no surprise that the label *Inquisition* is equally problematic, suggesting an institutional coherence and official unity that never existed in the Middle Ages. Avoiding the looming capitals of "The Inquisition," we will instead refer to inquisitors, the inquisitorial process, or inquisitorial tribunals (one example of a specifically deputized but nonetheless decentralized approach to combating heresy). As we trace the birth and transformation of the category of medieval heresy, therefore, we will simultaneously pursue the reemergence and consequences of *inquisitio* as a legal process in the West.

SCHOLARLY PERSPECTIVES ON HERESY AND INQUISITION

So one person's wicked heretic was another's pious Christian; and between the ever-shifting sides of the debate emerged a complex array of theories, texts, and techniques for claiming righteousness. What does that mean for historians of medieval religion? It means that we have a lot to argue about, particularly in the recent burst of scholarship influenced by interdisciplinary studies and methods including anthropology, sociology, gender studies, and literary theory. Some of the most influential studies and arguments, however, are classics rooted in the traditional historical exercise of scrupulous research and analytical insight. In 1972, for example, Robert E. Lerner published *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages*, which demonstrated that the so-called Free Spirit heresy (long considered by medieval and modern scholars alike as an organized and dissenting league of deviants) was instead a nebulous array of individuals whose spiritual ideas were closely related to popular contemporary interest in apostolic poverty and the mystical joining of God and humanity. Lerner also drew attention to the recurring medieval stereotype of heretics as depraved lechers and ritual murderers, observing that "just as fearful children imagine the most lurid shapes in the dark, so can grown men believe in patent fables concerning movements that they fear and do not understand."8

Having inspired decades of subsequent scholarship, Lerner's study in particular has provoked medieval historians across multiple disciplines to ask whether, how, or to what

extent various heresies actually existed. It is a matter of serious debate in the field today, the stuff of vibrant conference sessions and pointed book reviews. At one extreme are those who perceive heresy as an imaginary construct manufactured by medieval clerical elites and perpetuated by modern historians; at the other, those who study heretics and emphasize the experience of self-consciously dissenting communities. These two poles are separated by a wide terrain of plausible arguments and interpretations, fertile historical territory enriched by bold new scholarship on inquisitorial perspectives, theories of Christian violence, and microstudies of local persecuting contexts. It is in this scholarly middle ground in which I have rooted my own research. And although some scholars will no doubt take issue with the approach set forth in this volume, this is as it should be: an argument that provokes no response is unlikely to be a very interesting or useful one. Readers will therefore find a variety of scholarly perspectives reflected in the short bibliographies following each chapter and are encouraged to continue to grapple with these questions as they see fit.

It is the purpose of this volume to trace the main themes and issues at the heart of current debates over heresy and inquisition, to chart the process by which new central medieval ideals and institutions transformed the legal and social order, and to convey the extent to which, for all parties involved, proper order and salvation itself was on the line. We do the past a disservice if we simply dismiss the medieval Church and its inquisitorial history as a grotesque relic of a barbaric era. Far from popular conceptions of a dark age, central medieval Europe (c. 1050–1300 C.E.) witnessed a cultural efflorescence of universities, cathedrals, literature, urbanization, and long-distance trade. So how do we square that with the fact that Christians scrutinized the hearts and minds of other human beings, consigning many to die in agony at the stake? We might start by committing ourselves to approaching the past on its own terms, setting aside preconceptions we may have about the morality or justice of religious persecution and scrutinizing instead the "how" and "why" behind the encounters themselves. But before we can unpack the logic behind medieval heresy and inquisition, it will be useful to take a closer look at these centuries and orient ourselves in the historical terrain of western Europe between 500 and 1500 C.E.

LANDS AND LEADERS IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE

The contours of medieval Europe were decisively shaped by both geographical conditions and the blended historical legacies inherited from its Roman and Germanic predecessors. After the dissolution of the Roman imperial structure by the end of the fifth century, the lands we call Europe were inhabited by a wide range of peoples, including Visigoths, Ostrogoths, Lombards, Franks, and Anglo-Saxons, all increasingly accustomed to encountering Romans through trade or war. Although the Romans had established city outposts such as Londinium (London), Colonia (Cologne), and Corduba (Córdoba) and linked them to the Mediterranean center with both roads and administrative representatives, urban life and long-distance contact slowed, faltered, and eventually disappeared for most of the early Middle Ages. Local rulers such as

the Frankish Clovis (c. 500 C.E.), Pepin (c. 750 C.E.), and Charlemagne (c. 800 C.E.) sought to extend their rule and influence through alliances with the pope in Rome. By the ninth century, the pope had accrued the authority to make kings and crown emperors (much to the disgust of the Greek emperors in cosmopolitan Constantinople, who regarded Western rulers as uncouth backwater upstarts).

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Map I.1. Europe c. 1250. Reprinted from Barbara Rosenwein, A Short History of the Middle Ages Third Edition. Copyright © 2009 by University of Toronto Press Incorporated. Reprinted with permission of the publisher.

Meanwhile, Benedictine monks and missionaries sworn to poverty, obedience, and chastity had set themselves to the task of founding spiritual communities in distant, often dangerous communities. By the tenth century, European lands from Italy to England were dotted with agriculturally productive monastic foundations that served as vital community service centers. Often the only literate people west of Rome, Benedictine monks meticulously copied books in their writing rooms or *scriptoria*, not only preserving the practice of literacy in the West but also rescuing in the process much ancient Latin literature for posterity. Some missionaries, such as St. Boniface (c. 750 C.E.), headed into uncharted territory in what is now Germany, preaching and persuading, often by superimposing Christian concepts on local beliefs. Conversion is hard to quantify or verify, however, and scholars disagree about the extent to which the various peoples of early medieval Europe actually embraced or practiced Christianity as such.

By the ninth century, this fusion of secular lordship, papal authority, and Benedictine dynamism had forged a distinctively Christian political matrix across the central western lands. Thus the inherited legacies of Roman, Germanic, and Christian influences were crystallized in a potent alliance of lords and popes, which laid the foundations of later medieval Europe. That said, the historical terrain was as diverse as its geography. For example, the northern islands of modern-day Ireland and England developed distinct linguistic, cultural, and political patterns and were shaped by their proximity to the increasingly aggressive Scandinavians; in contrast, fiercely independent and wealthy trading city-states emerged in the Italian peninsula, deeply influenced by the ancient trade routes linking China, the Middle East, and India to the Mediterranean. In the eighth century, invading Muslim Arabs joined the older communities of Romans, Germanic peoples, and Sephardic Jews to foster uniquely diverse cultural contexts in the Iberian peninsula and Sicily. The fertile lands bordering the northern Mediterranean (modern-day southern France) embraced both walled cities and defensive mountain fortresses, decentralized and proud communities in which aristocratic influence was firmly embedded in local culture and custom.

Finally, the geographically diverse lands of what is now northern France, Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia found themselves under increasingly powerful royal or noble control; secular leaders tried to maximize their economic position by milking taxes from the peasantry from the villages of coast, mountain, and plain and, as we will see, vigorously sought to wrest political authority away from their erstwhile partner, the Church. Regions such as the Rhineland provinces of Mainz, Strasbourg, and Trier found themselves in yet different circumstances, as both urban and rural centers occupied ecclesiastical lands under the political

sway of a prince-archbishop. Given this extraordinary regional diversity, it should come as no surprise that we will pay particular attention to specific local geographies and how the unique political, religious, and cultural environment of each region nurtured distinct flavors and shades of spiritual controversy.

MEDIEVAL COMMUNITIES

If one can generalize about the vast majority of people inhabiting the western lands of early medieval Europe (perhaps a hazardous venture in itself), it might be to suggest that their lives were shaped by several overlapping spheres of influence. The first would be their immediate household, consisting not only of blood kin (i.e., children, spouse, siblings, or grandparents), but also other kinds of members—adopted kin, servants, helpers of one sort or another—and even animals, all living together in various types of dwellings, particularly during cold winter months. Beyond the household was the village, ranging in scale from tiny to large, and usually consisting of houses, fields, local vendors, and perhaps a market center and a church. Villages were often linked to one another with well-trod paths (sometimes following ancient Roman roads), which were in turn connected to cities and shrines, ports and pilgrimage destinations.

A third sphere of influence that intersected with both household and village, particularly in the lands of England, northern France, and Germany, was the manor—noble lands on which free peasants or unfree serfs (who were bound to the land) lived and worked. Residents of manorial villages served the noble by producing crops and paying taxes and were subject to his legal authority. And finally, the parish or Christian administrative unit overlapped with all of these, staffed with a more or less capable local priest who led services, provided sacraments, heard confession, and generally instructed the laity as to the proper path to salvation. Invested with the authority to mediate between God and humanity, clergy were thought to hold the keys to salvation and divine will, a power explicitly and exclusively wielded by the men of the Church. In terms of daily responsibilities, however, such lofty ambitions often translated (for motivated priests) into grueling local service, just as in many circumstances it devolved into lax or nonexistent spiritual supervision by uninterested or poorly trained clergy.

To guide their pastoral work, early medieval clergy frequently used manuals compiled by colleagues that listed various sins and the appropriate penance suitable for cleansing the sinner's soul and reconciling him or her back into the pious fold. These early penitentials suggest that clergy were more worried about sins such as murder, assault, drunkenness, sexual misbehavior, and magical practices than they were about doctrinal observance. In striking contrast to the blaring urgency of late medieval antiheretical manuals, the seventh-century *Penitential of Theodore*, compiled by an English priest and archbishop, treats heresy more as an administrative problem among clergy than a lurking, secret evil: "if one, without knowing it, permits a heretic to celebrate the Mass in a Catholic church, he shall do penance for forty days. If [he does this] out of veneration for [the heretic], he shall do penance for an entire year." And

if the clergyman allowed a heretic to celebrate Mass "in condemnation of the Catholic Church and the customs of the Romans, he shall be cast out of the Church as a heretic, unless he is penitent; if he is, he shall do penance for ten years."9 Theological disputes among clergy in these early centuries tended to focus on issues such as the nature of the Trinity and calendrical timing rather than matters of scriptural interpretation and pious observance.

No sketch of medieval European spiritual topography is complete, however, without considering one more vital point of intersection and influence: namely, the belief in sacral joinings of heaven and earth that underpinned Christian theology. Peter Brown wrote that "the genius of late antique men lay in their ability to map out, to localize, and to render magnificently palpable . . . those few, clearly delineated points *at which the visible and invisible worlds met on earth*" (emphasis added).10 Across the subsequent medieval centuries, these joinings of the visible and invisible—precise coordinates fusing the mundane and sublime, the corrupt and perfect, the temporal and eternal—became increasingly contested sites, ranging from relics and saints' shrines to Christ's blood, the sacraments, and scripture. This certainty in the spiritual efficacy of particular places, practices, and people, represents a vital undercurrent in medieval culture and a crucial factor in later disputes over religious authority and heresy. We will return to these joinings throughout the volume, particularly in the form of bread and wine, sacraments, and the scriptural Word of God.

INTENSIFICATIONS IN THE CENTRAL MIDDLE AGES (1050–1300 C.E.)

Scholars have long noted that the mid-eleventh century opened a dramatic new phase in European history, one that can be summarized in terms of a broad and deep intensification along numerous historical axes, all of which are directly relevant to the issue of heresy and inquisition. After centuries of monastic and peasant agricultural labor, for example, extensive new lands had been claimed and cleared by the eleventh century. New farming techniques and practices produced an agricultural boom that in turn sparked a population explosion. Within a few centuries, the population of western countries had multiplied by factors ranging from two to seven or eight. By 1300, the overall population of medieval Europe had doubled, an astonishing increase in less than two hundred years.

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Figure I.2. Plowing in the Middle Ages, 1028 C.E. From "De Universo" by Rabanus Maurus. Cod. 132, Photo by Alfredo Dagli Orti. Library of the Abbey, Abbey, Montecassino, Italy. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz/Art Resource, NY

Spurred by this growth and the consequent revival of trade networks (both local and long distance), urban centers were revitalized for the first time since the Roman centuries. Although there were no rivals to the rich and cosmopolitan eastern cities of Constantinople, Baghdad, Samarkand, or Hangzhou, medieval cities such as Oxford, Marseilles, and Bologna began to incorporate expanding populations and commercial prospects. Forever complicating the traditional Christian order of "those who fight, those who pray, and those who work,"

merchants entered the socioeconomic scene, linking rural and urban communities to the vast trade networks in and beyond Europe.

One particularly visible and enduring consequence of this new commercial vitality was the outpouring of funds into two particularly Christian
institutions: cathedrals and universities. This was the age of Gothic architecture, the stunning (and stunningly expensive) investments in soaring, light-filled urban cathedrals, seats of local episcopal authority and scripture in stone to be read by an awed, largely illiterate laity. Requiring vast economic resources and decades to construct, urban cathedrals represented a joining—not only of heaven and earth in a sacred architectural space, but also between the local community and Christendom, linked through the commanding ecclesiastical authority of bishops, canons, clergy, and monks. Small schools emerged under the wings of the cathedrals, many of which blossomed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries into full-fledged universities dedicated to the study of medicine, canon law, theology, and the liberal arts. The University of Bologna took an early lead in law, producing an unsurpassed generation of scholars whose work set the stage for later European legal, constitutional, and even inquisitorial frameworks. Graduates of the University of Bologna also ended up on the papal see, applying their legal training to the ecclesiastical problems and challenges of the day. The University of Paris would become the preeminent institution (followed by the Rhineland University of Cologne) in theological studies, its faculty and graduates profoundly shaping late medieval intellectual and political discourse.

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Figure I.3. The Foire du Lendit (Fair on the Plain of St. Denis); Miniature from the Grandes Chroniques de France, fol. 122 verso. France, late 14th c. Musée Goya, Castres, France. Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

After the twelfth century, popes, kings, bishops, nobles, civic councils, and inquisitors began to draw routinely upon the concentrated brainpower and cultural influence of university faculty; not surprisingly, connections between university academics and inquisitors would also become stronger and more complex over time. Thinkers pondered new ideas with colleagues and students, though their paths could lead them in very different directions. By the fifteenth century, not only did some of the Church's greatest inquisitorial experts come from faculty ranks, but so too did several of their most bitter foes. As we will see, the universities in Oxford and Prague would become particular sites of controversy over heresy, orthodoxy, and spiritual authority.

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Figure I.4. The Classroom of Henricus de Allemania at the University of Bologna. Last folio from the Liber ethicorum by Fra Henricus de Allemania. Illuminated manuscript page by Laurentius de Voltolina. Parchment, 18 cm × 22 cm. Inv. Min. 1233. Photo by Joerg P. Anders. Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Germany. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz/Art Resource, NY

Beyond the universities, however, the central Middle Ages also experienced a flourishing of intellectual life and an explosion of new vernacular literary forms, ranging from heroic epics and short romances to courtly love poetry, mystical treatises, rules, manuals, parental guides to life, and even bawdy student accounts of drinking and debauchery. Shortly after the thirteenth-century courtly allegorical poem *The Romance of the Rose* was set down in French, Dante Alighieri penned his *Divine Comedy* in fourteenth-century Italy, and the Flemish mystic

Hadewijch recorded her visionary experiences in Middle Dutch. Little wonder that this was also the age of vernacular translations of scripture, texts outlawed by the Church but of enormous spiritual significance to eager lay readers and listeners. Vernacular communication also extended to preaching, as invigorating speakers from all walks of life set aside impenetrable Latin for the homey familiarity and humility of the native tongue. Interest in the art of preaching not only spawned a huge literature of guides and *exempla* but also prompted vernacular communication between clergy and laity that would prove vital to certain disputes over heresy, particularly in regions such as Bohemia, where fierce linguistic and ethnic rivalries between Czechs and Germans added bitter fuel to the fire.

During the high medieval centuries, secular leaders intensified their grasp on local communities: in centralizing kingdoms such as France and England, among the fragmented principalities in the German lands whose nobility fended off weak imperial authority, and within the feuding oligarchies of Venice, Florence, and the other northern Italian city-states. Political intensification in the secular realm was mirrored—and eventually provoked directly—by an expansion of papal power at the end of the eleventh century. Heir to St. Peter, the rock upon whom Jesus built his church, the pope had over the preceding centuries wielded increasingly more spiritual *and* political authority; early medieval popes crowned kings and emperors, commanded armed forces, and even possessed a wide strip of central Italian lands known as the Papal States. Although evidence suggests that the papacy had fallen into disarray by the ninth and tenth centuries, frequently occupied by disaffected sons of wealthy Roman families, a series of vigorous and capable pontiffs ascended the see beginning in the mid-eleventh century. Among the many consequences were religious intensifications ranging from a consolidation of papal power, the successful and wide-ranging implementation of Church reform, and the igniting of lay religious enthusiasm across Christendom.

The reformer pope whose influence irrevocably set the stage for later notions of heresy and inquisition was Gregory VII (r. 1073–1085 C.E.), who embarked upon a passionate campaign to correct what he saw as unacceptable failings within the clergy and to restore the spiritual credibility of the Church. Particularly troubling to him was secular influence over the church: the buying and selling of church positions, for instance, or the granting of ecclesiastical offices by lords on whose lands the churches lay. Equally galling was the endemic sexual activity of clergy, either with wives or mistresses. Thus Gregory and his curia initiated a wide reform, not only issuing new spiritual policies prohibiting both practices but alternately commanding and inviting lay Christians to hold local priests to higher expectations. Although the reforms were met in many places with entrenched resistance, papal insistence and pressure from newly involved local laity gradually turned the tide. Priestly behavior became an object of scrutiny, and laypeople (influenced by the many other intensifications of their day) began to take greater notice of spiritual matters. Although the Church still held the keys to the kingdom, its priestly gatekeepers were being held to a new standard.

Pope Gregory's reformist agenda to purify Christendom and enhance papal authority was continued under the pontificates of his successors, notably Urban II (r. 1088–1099 C.E.) and Innocent III (1198–1216 C.E.). Both men employed the concept of armed pilgrimage (later

termed “crusade”) to battle infidels and heretics, sought to heal relations between the increasingly alienated Greek and Latin Churches, and to seize the holy city of Jerusalem, that supreme geographical umbilicus joining heaven and earth. Both also shared Gregory’s commitment to building the papal monarchy, dominating secular authority, and ensuring proper social and spiritual order within Christendom. Yet they faced significantly different conditions: Urban II actively encouraged, even agitated, the stream of new lay piety prompted by the Gregorian reforms (directing it toward crusade and penitential pilgrimage); in contrast, Innocent III found himself a century later trying to build a dam against the rushing floodwaters of Christian enthusiasm and innovation, for by the end of the twelfth century, Christian women and men across Europe found themselves inspired by the freshly repopularized words of the scripture to express and enact its apostolic model.

LIVING CHRISTIAN IN THE WORLD

How is one to live well in the tempting, troubling, turbulent material world? This has never been an easy question to answer, but it loomed particularly large in the hearts and minds of medieval Christians after the twelfth century. The answers provided by the early medieval Church no longer satisfied, particularly as the urban and commercial intensifications of the age fostered growing literacy, textual production, and circulation of ideas. Illegal vernacular translations of scripture began to appear by the end of the twelfth century, and small, like-minded groups formed “textual communities” to hear the Word in their own tongue.11 Sometimes these clusters formed unique ideas, as reflected in accounts of the first significant group accused of heresy in the medieval West—the community at Orléans in 1022 (recounted by Adémar of Chabannes above).

According to sources, a group of perhaps twenty men and women (including clergy, nuns, and members of the nobility) developed a belief in a secret and spiritual *gnosis* or *knowing*, transmitted by the laying on of hands. Immediately purged of all sin, members were said to believe that they received the Holy Spirit and its gift of utter scriptural understanding and rejected sacraments and the theological paradoxes of incarnation, virgin birth, and resurrection. Orléans was an important educational and political center, and neither its local nor royal potentates could tolerate such a scandal; after resisting interrogation and considerable pressure to recant, all but two of the members were locked in a cottage outside the city walls and burned alive. It was the first capital condemnation for heresy in over seven centuries, and it would become the opening salvo in a quickly escalating European dialogue over proper faith, order, and authority.

Some new eleventh-century religious expressions took itinerant form, as charismatic preachers wandered the western roads to preach penitence and personal salvation, often provoking a defensive stance among local clergy. In the early twelfth century, for example, an ascetic renegade Benedictine known as Henry the Monk appeared in Le Mans, where he preached Gospel-based penitence (and, according to clerical records, may also have

challenged the Church's institutional and sacramental authority). Henry married off repentant prostitutes to local young men, seemingly inspiring a type of individual *and* communal conversion rooted in the scriptural call to moral rehabilitation and spiritual rebirth. As his teachings spread through southern France, Church authorities pursued and eventually imprisoned him—though not before the renowned abbot and mystic Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153 C.E.) challenged him to a public disputation.

As some solitary individuals and scattered communities began to emphasize the rule of the Gospel in various ways, others sought to develop forms of life or even religious orders that, although appearing novel to the Church, were deeply rooted in the apostolic model of both the active and contemplative life. We will encounter many of these in the following chapters, ranging from preachers, masters, and followers to adherents, men and women who would ultimately be sorted and classified into the categories of "heretical" and "orthodox." Urban centers in particular exhibited a centripetal religious force, drawing to them not only mendicant friars eager to serve underrepresented populations, but a dazzling variety of organizations, institutions, and inspired individuals. Christian devotionalism would soon crescendo among some, manifesting in intense Eucharistic piety (involving extremely frequent communion and adoration of the elevated host), prayers by rosary or proxy, pilgrimage, penance, emotional contemplation of Christ's suffering, ecstatic mystical longing for union with the divine, and so on. Each of these practices evolved out of earlier traditions, yet their efflorescence in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries represents yet another consequence of the central medieval transformations.

New pious expressions and opportunities were not limited to men: by the fourteenth century, women had long been joining formal nunneries under official rules and entering informal lay religious communities for a (perhaps temporary) stint of prayer and service, also seeking visionary or mystical connections with God, studying scripture, teaching or training children, serving the poor, and writing or even preaching about their experiences. Complex and often contradictory notions of gender were of course deeply enmeshed with ideas about piety; none remained static over the millennium prior to 1500. Due to the powerful legacy of Greco-Roman and Christian misogyny in Europe, gender has proven a particularly illuminating axis of analysis in the study of medieval religious history, and much work remains to be done. For example, whereas medieval scholarship of the past century first drew attention to the outpouring of religious enthusiasm among women and posited a particular affinity between women and heresy, recent research has challenged that assumption and offered nuanced new approaches to the workings of sex and gender in medieval religion.

As we will see, the central and later medieval centuries were marked by a deep intensification of hostility toward women. By the thirteenth century, elite thinkers had not only codified long-standing Western notions of feminine inferiority but also theologically articulated the unique danger of women's weakness. Strategically deploying a new understanding of female minds and bodies as potential channels of demonic power, scholars simultaneously undermined existing possibilities for feminine authority and cast them as literal joinings of hell and earth. Throughout the following chapters, we will consider how medieval gender

assumptions were wielded and challenged over time, noting in particular key fourteenth- and fifteenth-century anxieties about women and mystical authority.

Intensification of other hostilities and anxieties also pervade the centuries between 1050 and 1500. As political leaders articulated new theories about the sovereignty of states in the face of earthly opponents, theologians began to consider, in increasingly precise ways, the sovereignty of Christendom in the face of spiritual opponents—namely, the devil. Anxieties about demonic and satanic influence had sharply escalated by the later medieval centuries, as did apocalyptic expectation and fear of the looming End of Days foretold most famously in the book of Revelation.

One particularly brutal consequence was that Jews were targeted with increasing frequency and brutality from the late eleventh century on, vulnerable scapegoats for local Christian fear and fury. Despite centuries of largely uncontroversial coexistence in early medieval European communities, the cultural intensifications after the eleventh century birthed the bitter legacy of anti-Semitism. Crusading armies robbed and murdered local Jews on the way to battle "the infidel," and neither secular nor sacral authorities were able to put a stop to the violence. Rumors circulated for generations about Jewish murders of Christian children or theft and desecration of the Eucharist host, entirely fictive stories paralleled by the ancient stereotypes of cannibalistic and baby-eating heretics.

When the Great Mortality—the bubonic plague—arrived in Europe in 1348, sweeping away up to a third of the population, conspiracy theories about Jews poisoning water supplies spread like wildfire. Although some contemporaries pointed out that Jews were also dying of the plague and therefore were probably innocent of the crime, entire Jewish communities were slaughtered by enraged mobs. Although the Church did not initiate or encourage local violence against Jews, at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) Pope Innocent III made clear the inferior, degraded status of Jews within the Western sociospiritual order, mandating that they wear special identifying markers on their clothing, forbidding them to interact with or hold any authority over Christians. By the later Middle Ages, living Christian had for many become conflated with aggression against increasingly classified and categorized out-groups.

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Figure I.5. The Jews of Cologne Burned Alive, a Consequence of the Lie Spread by Bishop Hinderbach about the Alleged Ritual Killing of a Boy Named Simon in Trent [South Tyrol] in 1475. Michael Wolgemut, colored woodcut, from the World Chronicle by Hartmann Schedel, 1493. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz/Art Resource, NY

THE FORMATION OF A PERSECUTING SOCIETY?

Twenty years ago, R. I. Moore argued for what he termed "the formation of a persecuting society" during these centuries, interpreting the central Middle Ages as a particular historical crucible of hostility against marginalized populations (including heretics, Jews, lepers, and homosexuals) that set the stage for later European discrimination and mass atrocities. At the heart of his argument is the claim that a new class of men emerged at this time, clerks (or clergy in official capacities), whose consolidation and cultural influence represent a

revolutionary transformation in the West: the development "of an administrative class whose members identified their interests with those of their patrons and not their families, [who] laid the foundation for the reshaping of European society and culture."12 Thus, the medieval social order had already become complicated by the end of the twelfth century: between those who rule and those who pray there emerged the clerical administrator, a learned, celibate, and likely ambitious man endowed with the cultural power to think, categorize, and write (always on behalf of greater authorities). We might think of these men as those who classify. Although the power to order and record may not at first glance appear as dramatic as physical violence, the pen ultimately controlled the sword in later medieval Europe. Nowhere was this truer than in the burgeoning ranks of thinkers and writers who administered the intensifying agendas of popes, archbishops, kings, and lords.

Thus when reading the following chapters, readers might keep in mind the link between this new cultural workforce and the birth of inquisitorial categories, procedures, techniques, and texts and consider whether the medieval relationship between cultural intensification and persecution might offer lessons for other times and places. Meanwhile, non-noble merchants and their noblelike wealth continued to vex the Church; laywomen and men of all conditions continued to both adopt and adapt features of the world around them; Jews inhabited an increasingly dangerous no-man's-land of economic, religious, and physical vulnerability; and the poor, dispossessed, afflicted, or otherwise marginalized eked out an existence aided only by the promise of salvation and perhaps a few coins or scraps of Christian charity.

Finally, "[a]t the centre of the whole religious system of the later Middle Ages lay a ritual which turned bread into flesh—a fragile, small, wheaten disc into God. This was the eucharist: host, ritual, God among mortals."13 The transformation of grain and grape into body and blood, the mystery of the incarnate Word, and the other astonishing joinings of heaven and earth in Christendom represent a pulsing spiritual vein linking the men and women of fortified towns of southern France, urban Rhineland, Alpine villages, Bohemian towns, the English countryside, and beyond. Such connections were not limited to sacred places, objects, or rituals but could also cohere within individual people modeled on Christ's own divine materiality. Thus living saints, or ascetic human preachers, were increasingly perceived through the high and later Middle Ages as incarnate textuality, representing a vibrant, vital conduit between the human and the divine.14 And it was within communities, through relationships with others, that their messages resonated.

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Figure I.6. Christ on the Cross, Jan van Eyck. 43 cm × 26 cm. Inv. 525 F. Property of the Kaiser Friedrich-Museums-Verein. Photo by Joerg P. Anders. Gemaeldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Germany. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz/Art Resource, NY

By recognizing the deep certainty in such saving channels linking heaven and earth, we can better understand the growing passion with which people on all points of the institutional and theological spectrum struggled to claim them. Access to and interpretation of these joinings increasingly preoccupied Christians who, more or less consciously, reflected on them as they worked, played, worshiped, listened, birthed, loved, feuded, traveled, suffered, begged, prayed, and marveled. Their multitude of voices has echoed only faintly across time to our day,

muted by the increasingly strident tones and techniques of institutional authority; Adémar of Chabannes, Hildegard of Bingen, James Capelli, and other trumpets of orthodoxy would soon be joined by many others, elite figures privileged in their power to record and shape history. Yet evidence does survive of the others if we pay careful attention. So we now begin our exploration of medieval heresy and inquisition in the first of a series of specific contexts in which dramatic controversies over Christian belief, piety, and authority erupted in the eleventh and twelfth centuries—controversies whose consequences would reverberate excruciatingly through centuries of European history to come.

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