

Waldensian and Catholic Theologies of History in the XII-XIV Centuries: Part II

Gonzalo L. Pita
Johns Hopkins University
Baltimore, MD

I. Introduction

The first paper of this two-part series surveyed the Roman Catholic theological milieu in the High Middle Ages from which the inquisitors and polemicists drew their arguments to identify and refute Waldensians.¹ It was seen there that two main Catholic theologies of history advanced a theocratical conception of history, especially since Constantine, and an economy of salvation centered in the Papal office. With that ideological background clearly delineated we now turn to address the main objective of this study which is better understanding the Waldensian theology of history from the 12th to 14th centuries. This paper examines the elements that undergirded the Waldensian theology of history and the authority they afforded to the Scriptures. In order to achieve this we have surveyed and translated key texts from Waldensian, inquisitorial, and polemical origin. The considerations of the geographical location of Waldensians and other specific aspects, although very important, are outside the scope of this paper.²

¹ G. Pita, "Waldensian and Catholic Theologies of History in the XII-XIV Centuries: Part I," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 25/2, (2014), 65-87.

² I want to especially thank Prof. Gabrielle Spiegel of the Dept. of History at Johns Hopkins University (JHU) for kindly reading a draft of the papers and for providing extremely valuable comments and suggestions. I also thank the insightful observations provided by Yonatan Glazer-Eytan and Dr. Chiara Valle of the Dept. of History of JHU. Thank also to Prof. Jim Harrison from Southern Utah University for kindly providing

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The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In the next section we examine the elements of the Waldensian theology of history. Secondly we outline the role that the Waldensians attributed to Scripture as the sole ground of belief. The next section describes the fundamental concepts that undergirded the Waldensian understanding of the ordering of prophetic history. A brief comparison between the Waldensian and Catholic views follows. Finally the remarks are given in the last section. Additional texts that further depict the controversies between both groups are presented in the Appendix.

II. Waldensian Theology of History in the 12th to 14th Century

In what follows we explore the key theological aspects that undergirded the Waldensian understanding of the flow of historical events; namely, the idea that the Church of Rome had betrayed its purpose since the times of Constantine, the uninterrupted existence of a small religious remnant that embodied the apostolic succession, the understanding of history in terms of an eschatological viewpoint, and lastly, the role of Scriptures as the exclusive source of theological authority.

The Waldensian Tenet of the Church of Rome's Apostasy

Waldensians and Catholics alike recognized that the alleged Donation of Constantine (*Donatio Constantini*) to Sylvester, bishop of Rome (d. 335), in the 4th century contained paramount political, theological, and eschatological significance.³ The legend had it that Constantine upon being cured of leprosy by Sylvester, who was escaping from the persecution, decided to surrender his imperial power to the bishop of Rome. This alleged act brought about momentous theological consequences which the Church of Rome invoked to support the Papal prerogatives as will be detailed below.

material on the Annolied. I also want to thankfully recognize the valuable feedback and encouragement provided by Herbert Douglass who kindly read both papers. Thanks also to Belén Menucci, David Livergood, Percy López, Erika Piekarek, and Steve Willsey for their help.

³ For a thorough survey of the variants of the Donation of Constantine and the Actus b. Sylvestri, see W. Levison, *Konstantinische Schenkung und Silvester-Legende*, 1924. Miscellanea Francesco Ehrle: Scritti di storia e paleografia. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. Roma, 159-247.

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From an intellectual and political point of view, the Donation of Constantine was not unanimously accepted in all the secular and religious circles of the Middle Ages.⁴ In fact, some held that the *Donatio* was either a clever political maneuver of the Roman Curia, or a contradiction to an alleged imperative of poverty. There seems to be no documentary evidence indicating that the Waldensians objected to the historic veracity of the *Donatio* [see quot. (2) and quot. (3)]. Nevertheless, they saw in the acceptance of the imperial power by Sylvester, a sign that the Church had fallen into apostasy, for it signified an illegitimate union of the spiritual and political realms which betrayed the essence of the original Christian mission. As a result, Waldensians held that the acquisition of power turned the Church of Rome into a persecutor. The bishop of Rome and most of the Church after him abandoned the truth and entered into a historical phase of apostasy as a result of accepting what the *Donatio* entailed. In other words, for the Waldensians, the defection of the Bishop of Rome represented the birth of a Church distinct from the Church of God.

In the next section we survey the theological elements of the Waldensian idea of Roman apostasy.

Accounts in Waldensian Documents

It is likely that the Waldensian literature had reached a considerable volume by the 14th century,⁵ but few texts survived the inquisitorial activity as it is stated in this Waldensian fragment:

... we have suffered innumerable persecutions from which many times
our books were reduced almost to nothing, so much so that we barely
were able to save the Sacred pages.⁶ (1)

⁴ For instance by Otto I in 999, C. Papini, (2001) *Valdo di Lione e i «poveri nello spirito»*. (Claudiana Editrice), 439 n.700 and Arnold of Brescia (c. 1090 - 1055) and his followers the Arnaldists. See the description of their tenets by Buonnaccorsi around 1184-1190 in *Adversus arnaldistas qui pro malitia clericorum sacramenta ecclesiae dicunt esse vitanda. Enchiridion Fontium Valdensium*, EFV I, 54ss.

⁵ A. De Stefano, "L'Attività Letteraria dei Valdesi Primitivi," *Rivista Storico-Critica delle Scienze Teologiche*, IV, (10), (1908), 740-754, especially 751.

⁶ The *Epistola Fratrum* reads "Ratio vero magis principalis est propter persecutiones innumeras, quas passi sumus, unde multoties perducti sunt libri quasi in nullum, ita ut vix sacram possemus paginam reservare" *Epistola fratrum de Italia ad quosdam conversos de haeretica pravitate errore ad Sanctum Petrum in der Awe*, Döllinger, I. v., (1890) Beiträge

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Despite this irreversible scarcity, two surviving texts of the 14th century do offer a valuable exposition of the Waldensian theology of history. One is the *Liber Electorum* or Book of the Elect, and the other is the *Epistola Fratrum de Italia* or Letter of the Italian Brethren.

The *Liber Electorum (Justorum)*, also known as *Regula Waldensium* (Rule of the Waldensians), is a succinct letter that ponders on the ultimate theological meaning of the Waldensian religious experience and draws comfort from the salient events that happened and would happen to the Church of God since the times of Abraham, through the Apostles and Waldensians themselves, until the end of the world.⁷ Originally written around 1335-1340 by a Waldensian who probably was from Southern Italy, there are two extant versions of the *Liber*, one in Occitan and one in Latin.⁸ This is a translation of an excerpt of the *Liber Electorum*:

. . . [the] Holy Church at the time of the Apostles grew by the thousands in saintly order around the world [Ac. 16:5] and remained in the virtue of the holy religion for a long time. The leaders of the Church, according to ancient stories, lived in poverty and humility for about three hundred years, that is, until the Emperor Constantine Caesar.

While Constantine reigned being a leper, the rector of the Church was a man named Sylvester from Rome. He lived as a poor man with his brethren, as we read, in mount Soratte near Rome because of the persecution. (2)

But it is referred that Constantine having received an answer in dreams, sent for Sylvester, and upon being baptized by him in the name of Christ, he was cleansed of leprosy. Seeing himself healed of such a miserable condition in the name of Christ, Constantine resolved to honor the one who had cleansed him and bestowed on him the crown and dignities of the Empire. He [Sylvester] did accept; however, his associate did not consent to these things and, as I have heard say, departed from him, holding the way of poverty. Afterwards Constantine departed to a

zur Sektengeschichte des Mittelalters, Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung. Vol. II: Dokumente vornehmlich zur Geschichte der Valdesier und Katharer, 359.

⁷ Döllinger, II, 351-355.

⁸ C. Papini, (2004), *Il «Libro degli Eletti» (1335-1340) e i valdesi delle Puglie*. Bollettino della Società di Studi Valdesi. Torre Pellice. 3-30. See also A. Patschovsky, (1993), *The Literacy of Waldensianism*. In Biller and Hudson (eds.) *Heresy and Literacy*, 1000-1530. Cambridge U.P., 123-125.

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transmarine region with a multitude of Romans and there, as it is said, he built Constantinople and named it after himself.

Hence, from that time on the heresiarch ascended in honors and dignity and evils multiplied on earth. However, we do not believe that the Church of God suddenly went out of the way of truth in its entirety, but just a part fell, and as it usually happens, the major part precipitated into evil. The other part, as should be recognized, remained for a long time in the truth that they had received. And thus the sanctity of the church gradually declined and the iniquity increased.

Eight hundred years after Constantine, a man named Peter rose, as I heard, but was called Waldis after a certain region. He, as our men said, was wealthy and very honest, and either reading himself or listening from others he accepted the words of the Gospel, sold what he had, gave to the poor [Mt. 19:21], adopted the way of poverty, went on preaching, made disciples, and entering in the city of Rome he argued before the heresiarch of faith and religion.

At that time there was a certain Cardinal of Apulia which was his friend [of Peter] that approved of his words, deeds, and, as I heard, he loved him. Eventually he [Peter] received an answer from the curia to the effect that the Church of Rome could not bear his ideas, that it would not leave the way already started, and subsequently decreed that he was expelled from the Synagogue.

Nevertheless, he preached in the city [of Rome], made many disciples, and passing through the regions of Italy established a congregation, so much so that in many parts either he or his followers drew many to their way of life and were multiplied exceedingly. People listened to them gladly because they spoke words of truth and showed them the way of salvation. And they multiplied in such a way that their gatherings and Councils were sometimes attended by 700 people, sometimes 1,000, sometimes more and sometimes less, and as I have heard from truthful people, God did marvelous things for them.

These fruitful seasons lasted for about two hundred years, as I heard from the elderly. But then Satan's envy and the malice of the impious manifested and raised no small persecution against the servants of Christ who were banished from region to region. The cruelty against us has continued until this day.

And to see why things are as they are, let us consider yet those times that preceded the coming of Christ, which were shadow and figure of these times which will last since Christ until the end of the world. Nowhere we find in the Old Testament that from Abraham to Christ the light of truth and sanctity had been extinct in any time, but rather that many or few have

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always remained in holy living. Nor do we read that all apostatized. Therefore we are certain that because from the times of Christ until today thus happened, in like manner we believe it will happen until the end of times, that is, the Church of God from when it was founded until the end of the world will never falter in its entirety, so that either in all the orb, or in any region of the world, there will always be some saints. In fact, their sound hath gone forth into all the earth [Ps. 19:5] . . .

In the beginning the Church of God largely grew in the region across the sea [in Israel]. How could we assume that in both sides of the sea in any time the light of sanctity was extinguished completely? In fact, our brethren of ancient times having crossed the sea because of persecution, found brethren in that region. But because they did not know the language of that region, they could not associate with them or strengthen ties of friendship as they would have gladly done, and they departed from each other.

In regards to these things let us consider the prophecy of Jeremiah [33:18]: Neither shall there be cut off from the priests and Levites a man before my face to offer holocausts, and to burn sacrifices, and to kill victims continually. This promise of God applies to the Church. In fact, the words of the prophets referred to Christ and the Church. Let us see why it says therefore that from Christ to the end of time, neither shall there be cut off from the priests of Christ to offer holocausts, and to burn sacrifices, and to kill victims continually. In fact because until today by the sanctity of their lives they are truly the members of the High Priest that offer spiritual sacrifices to God on the altar of faith [1 Pet. 2:5]. And if these were not many, does not fail for this the prophecy, because it does not say: shall there be cut off men, but rather says neither shall there be cut off from the priests and Levites a man that does this and that. . . .

. . . Therefore if on account of Satan's hatred, the arrogance of the impious, the negligence of the pious, many and grave tribulations and persecutions, the Church in some parts almost falls, we still believe that in other regions of the world, despite the paucity of saints, it continues in good life and holy conversation [Tob. 14:17]. . . . Consequently you certainly should know that Christ is the principle of this Order and that Jesus, the Son of God, is the head of his Church. . . .⁹

⁹ For the complete Latin text see Döllinger, II, 351-355. For the *Actus Sylvestri* see Migne, J. P., (1844), *SS Sylvester I-Vita Operaque. Notitia Historica Ex Libro Pontificali Damasi Papae*, (Notae Severini Binii) Patrologia Latina, VIII, 0795-0814A, 795-848. See also Canella, T. (2006), *Gli Actus Silvestri. Genesi di una leggenda su Costantino imperatore*. Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo. Spoleto.

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The *Liber Electorum* presents an interpretation of history in which the Waldensian movement was seen as a link in the continuous chain of the people of God that goes from Abraham to the end of the world. Essentially, the Waldensians interpreted their movement as belonging to that uninterrupted group of people and consequently their hardships were understood within the background of persecutions that the saints in the Bible had suffered and would suffer until the end of the world.

The narrative of the *Liber* begins in the book of Acts,¹⁰ but traces the origins of the movement back to Abraham. The letter implies the existence of two Churches operating in history.¹¹ The leaders of the Roman Church, the letter asserts, sought riches and power and persecuted the saints. Posterior events involve the preaching of the revealed truth under the continuous persecution of the leaders of the Roman Church. The emergence of Peter Valdès is interpreted as an instance of the biblical assertion that the church of God will never completely apostatize but will resurface from time to time with renewed vigor.

The other extant document, the *Epistola Fratrum de Italia*, was written about 1368 by the Italian Waldensians Johannes Girardus and Petrus Symon answering a now lost letter from their Austrian brethren in Sankt Peter in der Au.¹² The *Epistola Fratrum* is an apologetic theological treatise, longer than the *Liber Electorum*, which defends the Waldensian claims of apostolicity against the Catholic arguments to the contrary, and in doing so it adds interesting details to the account of the defection of Sylvester:

When they infer that we are deprived of authority¹³ saying that we do not have a true foundation or principle for our order, and that it is not⁽³⁾

¹⁰ P. Biller, *The Waldenses, 1170–1530: Between a Religious Order and a Church* (Ashgate, 2001), 200.

¹¹ The same account is given by Jean Leser, a former Waldensian, that echoes the tenet of the Church of Rome's apostasy in an anti-Waldensian tract saying: [Waldensians say that] . . . the major part of the church at the time of Sylvester defected (“ . . . *dicendo quod ecclesia tempore Silvestri pro maiori parte defecit. . .*”) *Epistola II Iohannis Leser in In Kaeppli, T. and Zaninovic, A. (1954) Traités anti-vaudois dans le manuscrit 30 de la bibliothèque des Dominicains de Dubrovnik (Raguse)*. *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 24, 301n22.

¹² Kaeppli and Zaninovic, 299.

¹³ See the first paper of this two-part series for the background of the ecclesiastic idea of *auctoritas*.

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derived from the Apostles for we do not administer all the sacraments, they make recourse to Mat. 16: *I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven*, and also Titus [1:5] *For this cause*. . . , etc. [. . . *shouldest ordain elders*]. . . .

However, to see that such Order [i.e. Waldensians] is [indeed] derived from the Apostles, observe that at the time of Constantine the Great when Sylvester received a treasure, his partners declined saying: “this precept we have from the Lord, that we have no worldly possessions.” Sylvester verily said “unless you abide with me, I will deprive you of the land.” They gladly replied: “we give God thanks for this, if you deprive us of our lands because we observe his commandments, heaven will exhibit our reward.”

The following night that these had argued with Sylvester, a voice from heaven was heard saying: “venom has been spread out today in the Church of God.” Hearing the word of God, the poor of Christ audaciously persevered in their resolution, and thus were expelled from the Synagogue fulfilling the word of God in John 16[:2].

And they were scattered throughout the orb saying to Sylvester and to his followers, “we leave the land unto you, because we seek Heaven.” Sylvester let them go, and these in departing and cultivating the way of poverty were greatly multiplied for a long time. After some time the envy of false Christians raged against them, and sought most resolutely to destroy them. . . .

. . . [T]here is no doubt that until the end of the world the saints will suffer persecution from their own, and yet they are not destroyed entirely by them for they cannot be destroyed.¹⁴

¹⁴ *Cum inferunt nos privari auctoritate, dicentes, quod non habemus verum fundamentum seu principium ordinis nostri, et quod non derivatur ab apostolis quia non ministramus omnia sacramenta inducunt enim Matth. 18: tibi dabo claves regni coelorum, et ad Titum: Hujus rei gratia, etc. . . . quod autem ordo iste derivetur ab apostolis, notate quod tempore Constantini M. cum Silvester Papa thesaurum reciperet, socii Silvestri renuerint, dicentes: hoc praeceptum a domino habemus, ut nulla terrena possideamus. Silvester vero dixit nisi mecum manseritis, ego terram vobis prohibebo. Illi autem laetantes dixerunt: de hoc Deo gratias agimus, quia si ob observantiam mandatorum ejus terram nobis prohibes, coelum nobis merito exhibebis. . . Istis vero altercantibus cum Silvestro, eadem nocte sequenti audita est vox de coelo dicens: hodie diffusum est venenum in ecclesia Dei, quam vocem Christi pauperes audientes audacius cepta perficiunt. . . Et sie per orbem dispersi sunt dicentes Silvestro suisque sequentibus: terram vobis relinquimus, nos vero coelum appetimus. Silvester autem dimisit eos abire, ipsi vero abeuntes viam paupertatis exercentes multiplicati sunt valde per multa durantes tempora. Postmodum invidia pseudochristianorum contra eos saeviens usque ad extremum conata est eos disperdere,*

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The *Epistola Fratrum* is much longer than this excerpt and contains extensive apologetic arguments with numerous biblical references that touch upon apostolic authority, administration of sacraments, the defection of Sylvester, the reason why the Waldensians were few and abode in hiding, and persecution. Many of these arguments will be examined below. Both preceding texts provide a valuable account of the theological understanding that the Waldensians of the 1300's had of religious events in history. Neither text was intended to be a scholarly account, but rather to be memorized and serve as a source of encouragement and reference as it is apparent from the allusions about enduring persecution. Yet, these texts reveal that the Waldensians had exercised by that date a profound theological reflection that encompassed history, doctrine, and pragmatics as a whole.

We should note that in the Waldensian theology of history just referenced the concept of truth gives unifying meaning to the idea of the Church of God. The Holy Church as interpreted by the Waldensians was subservient to the truth and its imperatives including the preaching of the gospel and their own confrontation with the Church of Rome was seen as a continuation of the Biblical scheme. Truth constitutes the sacred deposit of the Holy Church that: “. . . remained for a long time in the truth that had received” echoing “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jud. 1:3).

Since the truth emanates from Christ, the *Liber Electorum* resolutely affirms that Christ is “the principle of this Order and [. . .] the head of his Church,” and not any man. Naturally, this was the boldest statement to make in the High Middle Ages. It is also implied that truth effects changes in the life of people resulting in their sanctity, wise living, endurance of persecution, and servanthood.

We now turn to examine more elements of the Waldensian theology of history as registered in the inquisitorial and polemical documents.

Accounts in Inquisitorial Documents

The documents written by inquisitors and controversists, some of which predate the *Liber Electorum* and the *Epistola Fratrum* by more than

juxta psalm. 2, 3: . . . ergo non est dubium quin usque ad finem mundi sancti a suis patiantur persecutionem, et tamen per eos non penitus deletur vel deleri possunt” Döllinger, II, 355ff.

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a century and a half, provide further valuable insights that help to delineate the Waldensian theology of history and other beliefs. An early account is provided by Alain de Lille (c.1116–1202) a renowned Cistercian scholar who attended the 3rd Lateran Council in 1179 where Valdès was received by Alexander III.¹⁵ Alain offers an early extant reference of the Waldensian questioning of the official use of the power to bind and loose:

... Perhaps the heretics say¹⁶ that only the good prelates to be obeyed are those who are the representatives of the Apostles in life and office, but not those who neither have the life of the Apostles or retain their office, for these are mercenaries, not pastors.

Furthermore say the mentioned heretics, that the merits are of more help for consecrating and blessing, binding and loosing, than the order or the office. Hence themselves, who although are not ordained, because they consider themselves to be just and to have the merits of the Apostles, they dare to bless in the sacerdotal manner. They also say that they are able to consecrate, to bind and loose, because it is the merit which gives the power, not the office, and for that reason those who call themselves the vicars of the Apostles by merits must have their office.¹⁷ (4)

The inquisitorial interrogation of the merchant Bernard-Raimond Baragnon, a Tolosan Waldensian, who recalls that by 1224¹⁸ he had already

¹⁵ See C. Thouzellier, *Catharisme et Valdésisme en Languedoc à la fin du XIIIe et au début du XIVe siècle*. 2me ed. (Louvain, Nauwelaerts, 1969), 81ff.

¹⁶ On the “perhaps the heretics say” formula of representing heretical statements as a rethorico-dialectical device see L. Sackville, *Heresy and Heretics in the Thirteenth Century: the Textual Representations* (York Medieval Press/Boydell Press, 2011), 37.

¹⁷ “. . . Forte dicent quidam haeretici, quod bonis praelatis obediendum est, qui apostolorum vicarii sunt vita et officio; non vero iis qui apostolorum vitam non habent nec officium eorum retinent, quia hi mercenari sunt, non pastores...Aiunt etiam praedicti haeretici quod magis operatur meritum ad consecrandum vel benedicendum, ligandum et solvendum, quam ordo vel officium. Unde ipsi quamvis ordinati non sint, quia se iustos esse fingunt et merita apostolorum habere, modo sacerdotali benedicere praesumunt. Dicunt etiam se posse consecrare, ligare et solvere, quia meritum dat potestatem, non officium: et ideo qui se dicunt apostolorum vicarios, per merita debent habere eorum officia.” *Alanus de Insulis, Liber secundus: Contra Waldenses*, Chap IV, vi, VIII. EFV I, 107, 108.

¹⁸ An earlier reference to the Waldensian theology of history is afforded by Ardizzo of Piacenza (c. 1192–1199) who connected the concept of ‘venom’ and the beast in Rev. 13, in a rebuttal that could have been a reversal of the Waldensian argument referred in the *Liber Electorum* [quot. (2)] and the *Epistola* [quot. (3)]. Ardizzo accused the Poor of Lyons of

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heard about Sylvester being the first Pope, provides an early extant reference to the Waldensian tenet of Sylvester defection:

Interrogated whether he [Baragnon] has ever said that the blessed [Apostle] Peter, to whom the Lord gave the power to bind and loose, has not been Pope, said that he supposes he said so because he heard it from somebody else. Asked by whom, he answered that he did not remember. He also said that he had heard it said that the blessed Sylvester was the first Pope, but could not recollect from whom he had heard it.¹⁹ (5)

An important source for understanding the Waldensian theology of history is provided in the writings of Moneta of Cremona,²⁰ a Dominican inquisitor and professor of Philosophy at Bologna who was a close acquaintance of Dominic of Guzmán.²¹ Moneta, writing around 1221, sought to refute Waldensians, and in so doing, he meticulously registered many of their beliefs. As was already mentioned, the Waldensians objected the legitimacy of the apostolic succession and the subsequent privileges claimed by the Church of Rome proposing instead that it had initiated when

being: “. . . the beast which in Revelation “stood upon the sand of the sea” and whose venom contaminates the Church. . . they scorn the solemn masses, prayers, and alms for the (deceased) faithful. (They hold) that nobody will be purged (from sins) after this life.” “*Haec est bestia quae in Apocalipsi «ascendit de arena maris», suiis veneno sancta contaminatur ecclesiae. . . missarum solemnias pro fidelibus de elemosinis necnon et orationes spernant. Neminem post hanc vitam purgari concedunt. . .*” EFV II, 14.

¹⁹ “Item interrogatus si unquam dixit quod beatus Petrus, cui Dominus dedit potestatem ligandi et solvendi non fuerit Papa, dixit quod credit quod dixit quod non fuit Papa, quia audiverat ab aliquibus ita dici. Interrogatus a quibus, dixit quod non recordatur. Dixit etiam quod audivit dici quod beatus Sylvester fuit primus Papa, sed non recolat a quibus audivit.” J. Duvernoy (1993), *Registre de L’Inquisition de Toulouse (1273–1280)*, (Ms Fonds Doat t. XXV et XXVI), 135.

²⁰ Venerabilis patris Monetae Cremonensis (1743) *Adversus Catharos et Valdenses. Libri quinque*. Ed. Tommaso Agostino Ricchini. Roma. Moneta’s work may have been known to Aquinas, and his ideas might have influenced the famous philosopher. See F. Kerr, *Thomas Aquinas: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford U. P., 2009), 52. See also, J. Inglis, *Freiheit, Liberté, Free Choice: the recovery of Aquinas after 1848 as Interpretation or Misinterpretation?*, in P. van Geest, H. J. Goris, and C. Leget, Eds. (2002). *Aquinas as Authority* (Utrecht: Peeters Publishers), 109ff.

²¹ See EFV II, 83. Moneta was a friend and one of the first disciples of Dominic of Guzmán. Dominic died in Moneta’s bed. See V. O’Daniel, *The First Disciples of St. Dominic* (The Dominica/Pustet, 1928).

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Pope Sylvester accepted the temporal power from Constantine the Great. These arguments Moneta tried to refute.

. . . excited by the poison of perfidy, the heretics [i.e. Waldensians] try to demonstrate that the Roman Pontiffs and his adherents are not the successors of Peter but of Constantine, and that the Church [of Rome] has not begun in Peter, but in Constantine or in Sylvester. They say furthermore that when Paul came to Rome, there were saints at Rome, because by the Roman Emperors they were captured, derided, and imprisoned, they were opposed nearly by all, and slaughtered. At that time Rome ruled the world. Julius Caesar claimed the Empire for himself with great arrogance and rapine, tearing it from another Emperor. That absolute power had Rome up to the time of Constantine, to which he arrogantly succeeded. As he had it, he bequeathed it over to Sylvester, who was Pope of this Church of Rome. He also delivered to him all the imperial insignia, namely, the imperial crown, the scarlet robe, the Lateran Palace, as well as the power and dominion of the world, just as he possessed it. Yet he had it by violence and rapine, just as Julius Caesar and his other predecessors. Therefore Sylvester, who accepted these unjustly, by rapine he also possessed them. Similarly with all the others who, by succession, accepted these from Sylvester. Hence, the Roman Pontiffs might not say to be the successors of Peter, but of Constantine.²²

As is clear from this account, the Waldensians objected to the spiritual legitimacy of merging the political and spiritual realms, warning that the

²² “*Adhuc etiam haeretici agitati veneno perfidiae nituntur probare, quod Romani Pontifices, & qui eis adhaerent, non sunt successores Petri, sed Constantini, nec a Petro incoepisse Ecclesiam, sed a Constantino, vel a Silvestro. Dicunt enim quod cum Paulus venisset Romam, Sancti, qui tunc Romae erant, quia & ab Imperatoribus Romanorum capiebantur, deridebantur, carcerabantur, & contradicebatur eis fere ab omnibus, & occidebantur. Tunc autem Roma imperium mundi tenebat. Illud autem imperium Julius Caesar vindicavit sibi, in superbia multa, & rapina, auferens illud ab alio Imperatore. Istud imperium tenuit Roma usque ad tempus Constantini, qui in eodem imperio superbe successit, & sicut habebat tradidit Silvestro, qui fuit Papa hujus Romanae Ecclesiae, & omnia insignia imperii illi tradidit, scilicet coronam imperialem, Chlamidem coccineam, Palatium Lateranense, & potestatem, atque dominium mundi, sicut ipse habebat, sed ipse habebat hoc per violentiam, & rapinam, sicut Julius Caesar, & alii praedecessores sui; ergo Silvester, qui illa accepit injuste, & per rapinam illa possedit; Similiter & omnes alii qui a Silvestro per successionem acceperunt; non dicant ergo Romani Pontifices se esse successores Petri, sed Constantini.*” Moneta, 409.

Church had accepted a political power that had been acquired and maintained by violence and political intrigues. Moneta justifies the Church's temporal power by means of a lengthy discussion which affords valuable insights into the concepts of *translatio imperii* and *translatio sacerdotii* [see Appendix quot. (37)].

Another element in the theological controversy between the Waldensians and the polemist was the issue of the Church continuity in view of the biblical promise that the Church would never completely fall into apostasy. The Waldensians considered that the Church of Rome descended from that defection from the simple way of truth. In this vein, the decision of Sylvester to fuse the spiritual with the State functions, Moneta indicates, was understood by the Waldensians as the initial manifestation of the "man of sin, the son of perdition" (*Homo peccati, filius perditionis*) about which Paul had prophesied. And consequently, the same Pauline text ". . . as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God" was applied by the Waldensians to the papal office.²³ Therefore, both the controversists and the Waldensians coincide that there was continuity in the Church of Rome, but whereas Moneta viewed it as the continuation from Peter (*translatio* and *successio*) and quite independent of the character of the ministers, the Waldensians viewed it as a chain of apostasy.

Confutation to the Apostle Peter Ever Being at Rome

It was already examined in the preceding paper the importance that medieval theologians allocated to the function of the Apostle Peter, and how he was considered the center of confluence of the *translatio imperii* and the *translatio sacerdotii*. As such Peter embodied the inauguration of a new Roman phase in sacred history in which his successors would concede the *regnum* to the Emperors and administer the *sacerdotium* by virtue of apostolic succession. Yet the Waldensians, and also the Cathars,²⁴

²³ 2 Tes 2:3-4 in Moneta, III, IV, § ii, 263-264.

²⁴ The Cathars also held a similar view concerning apostolic succession after Peter left the Church, ascended to Heaven, and his authority ceased after he left, so, the Popes *Petri postestam non habent* [they do not have Peter's authority]: "*Petro autem dimisit ecclesiam. Et ascendit in coelum, et tunc ipsi Apostoli praedicaverunt per mundum universum, et, ut dixit, potestas Petri, cui Christus dimiserat ecclesiam cessavit post Petrum, ita quod Romani Pontifices, qui post Petrum venerunt illam potestatem non habent, quam habuit Petrus. . .*

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called into question the validity of those notions as discussed in the previous section.

Moneta of Cremona registered yet another objection made by the Waldensians directed against a dialectical bottleneck in the Church of Rome's logic:

To demonstrate that the Church of Rome has not received the rule from Christ or his successor the blessed Peter, they [Waldensians] say that the Church of Rome was neither serene nor certain about its succession. And this they wish to demonstrate by saying that, as stated in Church of Rome writings, almost three hundred years after the death of Peter, the Church of Rome searched his bones in order to legitimize her claim of succeeding Peter. Furthermore, they say that Peter was never at Rome, and accuse us for the search of his bones at Rome, because in the New Testament there is no testimony that Peter had been in Rome. They also blame the Church of Rome arguing that the Church ignores whether the bones may have belonged to other dead man, maybe a pagan. They believe and maintain that the Church of Rome began in that dead man, not in Christ or Peter.²⁵ (7)

Thus, the validity of the notion of the Roman preeminence above all Christendom, the Waldensians observed, depended uniquely upon the plausibility of a single historical fact, the presence of Peter at Rome. But they were the first to observe²⁶ that there were neither Scriptural nor solid

.” Confession of Raymond Valsiera in Döllinger, II, 166. See also the confession of Johannes Maurini, in Döllinger, II, 194, and the confession of Guglielmo Bavili, *ibid.* 242.

²⁵ “*Ad probandum etiam, quod Romana Ecclesia, non habuit regimen a Christo vel successore ejus B. Petro, dicunt quod Ecclesia Romana non erat pacata, nec secuta de ejus successione; & hoc volunt probare dicentes, quod Romana Ecclesia post mortem Petri fere trecentis annis secundum scripta Ecclesiae Romanae, inquisit ejus ossa, quasi per hoc volens ostendere se Petro succesisse. Praetera dicunt, Petrum nunquam fuisse Romae, unde arguunt nos de inquisitione ossium ejus Romae, cum in Novo Testamento, nullum testimonium habeatur, quod Petrus fuerit Romae. Arguunt etiam Ecclesiam Romanam de ossibus illis dicentes Ecclesiam nescire an ejus ossa fuerint vel alterius hominis mortui, forte Pagani, quod ipsi credunt, & ab illo mortuo dicunt Ecclesiam Romanam sumpsisse exordium, non a Christo, vel Petro*” Moneta, 411.

²⁶ A. Molnar (1976), *A Challenge to Constantinianism: the Waldensian Theology in Middle Ages*. WCSF, Geneve, 54 states that the Waldensians were the first to postulate this argument. See also, Gonnet and Molnar, (1974) *Les Vaudois au Moyen Âge*. (Claudiana, Torino), 414.

historic evidences to grant that. The only evidence presented to sustain the claim that Peter was at Rome and founded the Church consisted of some human bones identified around the 4th century in the Vatican Necropolis which according to the Roman Church were the remains of the Apostle.²⁷ But the Waldensians pointed out that the verisimilitude that the bones of an anonymous individual in a random cemetery identified almost three centuries after his death could actually belong to Peter was nil. Therefore, they concluded, the story of the bones had been simply invented to defend the claim that Rome was the heir of Peter.

There is another aspect that is entailed by the objection. The Church of Rome was led to search the remains of the Apostle because they believed that the transferences of priesthood and empire were true, and therefore they required that Peter had been at Rome. Afterwards, when the bones were “found” they were considered conclusive evidence that the transferences were true. Therefore, in some sense the argument was circular and hence self-defeating. The Waldensian overall conclusion according to this statement was dramatic: the Church of Rome descended historically from a random man and doctrinally, as described before, from Constantine, while they themselves represented the Church that had existed uninterruptedly since the times of the Apostles. The Waldensian thesis that Peter never visited Rome achieved wide diffusion and caused great commotion in the 15th and 16th centuries.²⁸

The Waldensians as the Remnant and their Ideal of Mission

It was already mentioned when examining the *Liber Electorum* and the *Epistola Fratrum* that the Waldensians considered their movement to be the remnant of God since the time of the Apostles. Moreover, they were imitators of the Apostles’ life, and therefore they considered themselves the depositaries of the evangelical message. These characterizations stemmed from their eschatological creed. Moneta of Cremona offers another outline of the Waldensian idea that there were two Churches:

²⁷ For a discussion of the authority assigned to the Ancient writers see I. Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability* (Cambridge U.P., 1975).

²⁸ Especially due to the book by Ulrich Velensky (Velenus) *Apostolum Petrum Romam non Venisse* published in Basel in 1519. Matthias Flacius translated it into German and Italian by 1566.

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. . . you come against the article: “I believe in the Holy Catholic Church” which you do not believe as you ought, nor you believe that such is the Church of Rome. . . Perhaps they might say that their congregation and the congregation of the Church of Rome are one, holy and Catholic, although they are divided in two parts: one part is malign, which is called the Roman Church, the other part benign, which is the Waldensian congregation.²⁹ (8)

The concept of being a small remnant appears in the early 15th century Occitan poems *Novel Sermon*, in which the Waldensians saw themselves as a “small company” (*petita compagnia*),³⁰ and also in the *Lo Novel Confort* where it says that “Jesus Christ calls them his small flock” (*Yeshu Xrist li apella lo seo petit tropel*).³¹

This self-perception within the eschatological scheme propelled the Waldensian zeal for missionary action. The Acts of the Inquisition of Carcassonne afford interesting details about a strategy that the Waldensians developed to preach in order to avoid being discovered by the inquisitors.

. . . these things they teach, that they are the successors of the Apostles, and that they are teachers and confessors of others. They wander through lands visiting and confirming their disciples in error. . . when they begin to speak [preach] these do not release the errors of their sect immediately, but they start teaching from the Gospels and Epistles what kind of people the disciples of Christ ought to be, saying that the successors of the Apostles are only those who have and imitate their mode of life. From this reasoning they conclude that the Pope, Bishops, prelates, and priests who procure the riches of this world and do not imitate the sanctity of the Apostles, are not the true pastors and leaders of the Church of God, but rapacious wolves and devourers. To these, Christ would not (9)

²⁹ “. . . tu venis contra illum articulum: Credo Sanctam Ecclesiam Catholicam, quia non credis sicut debes, non enim credis Romanam Ecclesiam illam esse... Forte dicerent, quod eorum congregatio & congregatio Romanae Ecclesiae est Una, Sancta & Catholica, licet duae sint ejus partes, una est pars maligna, quae dicitur modo Romana Ecclesia; alia benigna scilicet congregatio Valdensium” Moneta, 407.

³⁰ *Lo Novel Sermon*, v. 426-427. See *Les Poèmes Vaudois d’après le manuscrit inédit de Dublin*, Bulletin de la Société d’Histoire Vaudoise, 1906, No. 23, p.52. See also Molnar, *Historia del Valdismo Medieval*. Ediciones La Aurora (Buenos Aires, 1981), 289.

³¹ *Lo Novel Confort*, v. 174ss. See *Poèmes Vaudois*, p. 10ss.

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deign to entrust the Church, His Wife, and that consequently it is not necessary to obey them.³²

A similar statement was registered by the Franciscan inquisitor David of Augsburg (d. 1272) in which the Waldensians questioned the authenticity of the Orders of the Church:

. . . they claim to be the successors of the Apostles, and to have and serve the spirit of the Gospels and of the Apostles, hence they are making themselves equal to them in their life, perfection, and merits. . . they do not regard the Orders of the Church of Rome to be from God, but rather by traditions of men. Likewise, they fallaciously deceive saying and making others believe that they are the Holy Church.³³

The Waldensians repeatedly denounced the Church of Rome for the constant persecutions that were launched against them. The Piacenzian lay controversist Salvo Burci, writing about 1235, registered how the Waldensians denounced the persecutions framing themselves in the sequence of martyrs from the New Testament, and the eschatology expounded by Christ:

Roman Church you have your hands full of the blood of the martyrs. O people you may not marvel at this which is said because they fill up the measure of their possession [1 Tes. 2:16]. Their fathers have killed Christ, and anguished with diverse tortures Stephen, James, and the other

³² *“Hi docent, se esse apostolorum successores et sunt magistri aliorum et confessores, et circumeunt per terras visitando et confirmando discipulos in errore... Non autem statim in principio aperiunt eis errores suae sectae, sed prius dicunt, quales debent esse Christi discipuli ex verbis evangelii et apostolorum, dicentes illos tantum esse apostolorum successores qui vitam eorum imitantur et tenent, et ex hoc argumento concludunt, quod Papa et episcopi et praelati et clerici qui habent divitias hujus mundi, et sanctitatem apostolorum non imitantur, non sunt ecclesiae Dei veri pastores et gubernatores, sed lupi rapaces et devoratores, nec talibus Christus dignatur committere ecclesiam, sponsam suam, et ideo eis non est obediendum.”* Döllinger, II, 12. EFV II, 57-58.

³³ *“. . . se ipsos vitae et perfectioni apostolorum comparantes et meritis coaequant, dicunt, se esse successores apostolorum, et se tenere et servare evangelium et apostolorum spiritum. . . . Ordines Romanae Ecclesiae non reputant esse a Deo, sed a traditione hominum. Ideoque fallaciter decipiunt dicentes et facientes se credere esse in sancta ecclesia. . .”* Ibid. EFV II, 53.

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disciples [1 Tes. 2:15]. Therefore you see that this [Church of Rome] rightly holds that inheritance, and no wonder why Christ said by John: “*the hour cometh, that whosoever killeth you, will think that he doth a service to God*” [Jn. 16:2].³⁴

In the Waldensian theology there was a connection between the imperative to missionary work, an unbroken succession from the Apostles in terms of a continuous evangelic endeavor, and the Scripture as the corroborator of continuity and of authority. For them the apostolic succession was based on the continuity of a religious remnant furnished with a mission, rather than with a succession of persons (*successio personarum*) or a transference of authority (*potestas*) as in the Church of Rome. These conflicting ideas were embodied, according to the Waldensians, in two groups, or parts, the malign and the benign (e.g. quot. (3) and quot. (8)). In this regard, the community of the Poor Lombards, another name given to Waldensians, elected their leaders, and this was considered the succession.³⁵ Moneta registered the rationale for the ordination of Valdès:

. . . they have said that Valdesius received the succession from the community of his brethren. The author was a heresiarch of the poor Lombards, called Thomas, a perverted doctor. . . .³⁶

Yet for the Church of Rome, the Waldensian tenet was unacceptable on the grounds of the Roman jurisdiction:

³⁴ “*Ecclesia romana, omnes habes plenas manus de sanguine martirum. O populi, non miremini de hoc quod dictum est; quia ipsi complent mensuram possessorum suorum; patres eorum interfecerunt Christum et Stephanum et Jacobum et alios discipulos cruciaverunt variis tormentis. Potestis igitur videre quod isti bene tenent hereditatem; nec mirum, quia Christus dixit per Johannem: ‘Quia venit hora, ut qui interficit vos, arbitretur se ob sequium prestare Deo.’”* Ilarino da Milano, (1945) *Il «Liber supra Stella» del Piacentino Salvo Burci contro I Catari e altre correnti Ereticali*. Aevum, 19, Fasc. 3/4, 327; EFV II, 70, Bruschi, C. (2002), *Salvo Burci Liber Suprastella*. Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo. Antiquitates 15. Roma, 280-1.

³⁵ Tocco, F., *L'Eresia nel Medio Evo* (Sansoni, Firenze, 1884), 199.

³⁶ “. . . dixerunt quod Valdesius ordinem habuit ab universitate fratrum suorum. Eorum autem auctor fuit quidam haeresiarcha Pauperum Lombardorum, doctor perversus Thomas nomine” Moneta, 403.

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The Church of Rome is a congregation in itself, but you are another. The former excommunicated you and bound you in earth, therefore you are bound in heaven.³⁷ (13)

The unstated premises of this Scholastic enthymeme are naturally that the Church of Rome was considered to have had the keys to bind and loose anybody in earth and in heaven.

Having examined the statements regarding the Waldensian posture on the characteristics of the remnant and its mission, it emerges that they interpreted the existence of the Holy Church not as a *translatio*, but as an *imitatio*, an imitation of Christ. Moreover, the ordination of the ministers was granted by community election, not by *successio personarum*. Both ideas are logically preceded by the concepts of *potestas* and *veritas* in the Catholic and Waldensian theologies respectively. In the Catholic theology of history *potestas* had the character of a punctual object once bestowed by God upon the Pope, which had been transferred successively ever since from carrier to carrier (*translatio*). These attributes inherent in *potestas* are logically congruous with institutionalism which impinges in the reality from a top-down perspective. Conversely for the Waldensian theology, *veritas* had not the characteristics of an object, but rather of a dynamic principle emanating from Christ himself, which exerts a transformational effect into the life of believers (*imitatio*) and in the mission of the Church. As such the Waldensians considered the Church of God, both in history and in individuals, as the instrument of truth (*veritas*).

Waldensian Interpretation of the Symbols in Daniel and Revelation

As it becomes apparent from the preceding declarations, one of the salient aspects of the Waldensian theology of history was their recourse to a decided eschatological framework to make sense of the historical unfolding of religious events related to the history of salvation. They interpreted the whole sequence of events as having been foreseen by God and framed in a prophetic order in the Bible. The defection of Sylvester was thus viewed within an eschatological scheme and directly related with the fall of Babylon. The religious and political prerogatives acquired by

³⁷ “*Ecclesia Romana est una congregatio per se, tu es alia, ipsa autem te excommunicavit, & ligavit in terra, ergo ligatus es in Coelo,*” Moneta, 406.

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Sylvester were equated with the works of the little horn prophesied in Dan. 8, contrarily Moneta's interpretation of it as Antiochus IV Epiphanes, and the restoration of the Church of God was interpreted as prophesied by John in Rev. 18:2. Moneta refers to the Waldensian prophetic scheme in which they framed the Church of Rome in the following paragraph:

... they make recourse to Dan. 8 v.20 where he speaks of a ram, that is the King of the Medes and Persians, and in v. 21 a goat having a notable horn between his eyes, by which the chief King of the Greeks is signified. Daniel 8 says that the horn was broken and four horns came out of it, i.e. (14) its sons, and out of one of them came forth a little horn, which waxed exceeding great, which is a King of fierce countenance, whose strength shall be strengthened, but not by his own power. They understand that [little horn] to be Sylvester whom Constantine strengthened.³⁸

It is possible to infer from these assertions that the Waldensians saw a prophetic continuum between Daniel and Revelation for they found other aspects of the essence and the doings of the Roman Church in the book of Revelation. Moneta affords important insights about the interpretations that the Waldensians assigned to the prophetic symbols in Revelation to explain the operations and doctrinal system of the Church of Rome.

... [they assert that] the Church of God would depart from the Church of Rome, which is the church of the wicked. To [prove] this they bring that what is read in Revelation 18 about the condemnation of the great harlot,³⁹ which in chapter 17 v.18 is called "the great city, which hath kingdom over the kings of the earth," and in chapter 18 v. 2 is called "Babylon the great" about which John heard a voice saying "Go out from her, my people," etc. From the foregoing verses the mentioned heretics affirm that the Church of God, which they claim to be, departed in those times from (15)

³⁸ "... *Ad istud autem provandum inducunt illud Daniel. 8v. 20. ubi loquitur de Ariete, idest Rege Medorum, & Persarum; & v.21. de hirco habente cornu insigne inter oculos, per quod significatur Rex primus Graecorum ut dicitur Danielis 8 quo cornu fracto orta sunt quatuor cornua subter illud, scilicet filii ejus, de uno autem ex eis egressum est cornu unum modicum, & factum est grande, sic dicitur Rex impudens facie, cujus fortitudo roborabitur, sed non in viribus suis. Per istum autem intelligunt Silvestrum dicentes eum in viribus Constantini roboratum. ...*" Moneta next explains that the little horn to refers to Antiochus Epifanes referencing 1 Macc. 6:13, Moneta, 412.

³⁹ See also quot. (38) for a similar statement registered by Etienne de Bourbon.

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the Church of Rome, deemed the Church of the wicked, and that the Church of God allegedly defected in Sylvester, by them would be restored as attested in the aforementioned words prophesied by [the Apostle] John.⁴⁰

Ermengaud of Béziers (c. 1209), a former Cathar converted to the Poor Catholics of Durandus of Huesca,⁴¹ (1212-1215), added additional details in this same regard from his own experience from the late 12th century:

... they say about that harlot mentioned in the book of Revelation that she signifies the Lord Pope, and that the dragon symbolizes, they say, the Roman Emperor. They further say that the second beast mentioned in Revelation symbolizes the Patriarch⁴² of Jerusalem.⁴³ (16)

⁴⁰ “*Ad praedicta respondebunt praefati haeretici, Dei Ecclesiam de Romana ecclesia, quae est ecclesia malignantium exituram, & ad hoc inducunt illud quod legitur Apocalipsis 18, ubi descripta damnatione meretricis magnae, quae in capite 17 v.18 dicitur civitas magna, quae habet regnum super Reges terrae, quae & in capite 18 dicitur v. 2 Babylon magna, audivit Johannes vocem dicentem (v.4) exite de illa populus meus etc. ex quo verbo volunt praedicti haeretici, quod in ultimo tempore, de quo ibi agitur, Dei ecclesia, quam se esse dicunt, de ecclesia romana, quam dicunt Ecclesiam malignantium, exitura sit, & Dei ecclesia, quae in Silvestro, ut dicunt, defecerat, per illam tunc restituendam, & ejus restitutionem in verbis praedictis esse prophetatam a Johanne,*” Moneta, 405.

⁴¹ Ermengaudus Biterrensis. See A. Dondaine, (1959) *Durand de Huesca et la polémique anti-cathare*. Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum 29, 228-276; C. Thouzellier, (1960) *Le ‘Liber anti-heresis de Durand de Huesca et le ‘Contra hereticos’ d’Ermengaud de Béziers*. Revue d’Histoire Ecclésiastique, 55, 130-141.

⁴² For a short analysis of the unusual mention of the Patriarch of Jerusalem see C. Papini (2001) *Ivaldesi medievali, il miracolismo, le reliquie e gli esorcismi*. Bollettino della Società di Studi Valdesi. Torre Pellice, p. 79-84.

⁴³ “. . . dicunt de meretrice illa de qua in Apocalipsi fit mentio quod ipsa significat Dominum Papam et draconem significat, dicunt, imperatorem romanum. Dicunt etiam de secundam bestiam de qua loquitur in Apocalipsin significare patriarcam Jherosolimitanum” Ermengaudus, *De erroribus Valdensium*, EFV I, 156. Eberard of Bethune (c. 1212) applies the second beast of Rev. 13:11 to the Waldensians: “you are the beast that has two horns, similar to a lamb, but that speaks as a dragon: that causes the earth to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed, i.e. the devil, or the Antichrist” “*Vos quidem estis bestia habens duo cornua, similia agni, loquens sicut draco: et facitis adorare bestiam primam, cuius curata est plaga mortis, id est, diabolium, sive Antichristum.*” Eberardus Bethuniensis, *Liber Contra Valdenses*, XXIII, In Max. Bibl. Veterum Patrum, saecul. xii, part III, vol. II, p. 1569. However, Eberard shows no systematic account and rather makes an ad-hominem application to the Waldensians.

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Salvo Burci provides more Waldensian arguments which exhibit several references to the imagery in the book of Revelation:

... [the Cathars] increase their void discretion by saying blasphemies against the [Roman] Church herself. They consider her a harlot and a nest of serpents and the beast. And you [Waldensian] fools say the same. . . We [Waldensians] are separated from the shameful harlot, that is, from the Church of Rome, and we consider their prelates the beast [Rev. 17]. These (17) have about thousands marks of their essence, for as you may see in what manner they behave, in committing adultery, fornication, and eating so much that they vomit. Therefore, how could we believe in the nest of serpents? Their stench ascends up to God and his saints.⁴⁴

A statement made by Bonacursus, a former Cathar himself who wrote sometime around 1176 and 1190, provides insight about the beliefs that Burci mentioned in the preceding text:

They say that the Cross is the mark of the beast of which it is read in Revelation [13 and 14], and is the abomination standing in the holy place [Mt. 24:15]. They say of the blessed Sylvester to have been the Antichrist (18) of whom it is read in the Epistle, *the son of perdition, who is lifted up above all that is called God* [2Tes. 2:3]. They say that from that time the Church is lost.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ “*Hoc modo crescentes eorum inanis discreptionis blasphemias dicunt contra ipsam Ecclesiam, sicut eis videtur, dicentes eam esse meretricem et nidum serpentium et bestiam. Et vos stulti illud idem dicitis...Nos sumus partiti a turpi meretrice, scilicet ab ecclesia Romae, et videamus de praelatis ipsius bestiae. Ipsi habent mille marchas de reddenta et plus et minus, et videatis, qualiter ipsi expendunt ipsas, adulterando, fornicando, etiam quia tantum comedunt quod ipsi evomunt per ore extra; igitur quomodo credere debeo ad nidum serpentis? etiam foetor ascendit coram Deo et ipsius sanctis,*” Döllinger, II, 62; EFV II, 63, 64; Bruschi 70, 72, 73. Note that this statement somewhat echoes the language Rev. 14:11 which hinges around: smoke (*fumus* in the Vulgate vs. *foedor* in Burci), ascendeth (both *ascendit*), beast (*bestiam* vs. *bestiae*), receiveth the mark (*acceperit caracterem* vs. *habent marcha de reddenta*).

⁴⁵ “*Crucem dicunt caracterem esse bestiae, quae in Apocalypsi esse legitur, et abominationem stantem in loco sancto. Beatum Sylvestrum dicunt Antichristum fuisse, de quo legitur in Epistolis: ‘Filius perditionis’ est, ‘qui extollitur supra omne quod dicitur Deus (II Thess. II). A tempore illo dicunt Ecclesiam esse perditam.’*” Bonacursus, *Manifestatio Haeresis Catharorum*. Migne, Patrologia Latina 204, 0777C.

Moneta offers a longer account than Burci of the symbology in Rev. 17:

Out of hatred to the Church of Rome the heretic posits that Rev. 17:3 where John says to have seen “*a woman sitting upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy;*” and to put it briefly, all or almost all that is read in chapters 17, 18 and the first part of 19 until verse 3 where it says “. . . *and her smoke ascendeth for ever and ever;*” the Cathars and Leonists believe was said against the Church of Rome.

They interpret that the beast and the woman refer to the Church of Rome in 17 v. 3. It reads that the beast was scarlet, likewise in verse 4, the woman was “*clothed round about with purple and scarlet, and gilt with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand.*”⁽¹⁹⁾ This they say fits to the Lord Pope, who is the head of the Church of Rome. Likewise, the woman drunk with the blood of saints, they ascribe to the Church of Rome because it commands that they are killed, for they claim to be saints. At the end of the chapter it is read in v. 18: “. . . *the woman which thou sawest is the great city which hath kingdom over the kings of the earth,*” there is no doubt that the Church of Rome ruled over the kings of the earth. In like manner they wish to prove that the above woman is called Babylon at the end of chapter 16, and 18 v.2 “*Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen. . .*”⁴⁶

From the very fragmentary evidence that we have reviewed in this section it emerges that the Waldensians from at least the late 12th century

⁴⁶ *Ad detestationem etiam Romanae Ecclesiae induxit haereticus illud Apocal. 17. v.3 ubi Johannes dicit se vidisse “mulierem sedentem super bestiam coccineam plenam nominibus blasphemiae,” & ut brevius comprehendam, totum, vel fere totum quod legitur Apocal. 17,18, & 19 circa principium, ubi dicitur v. 3. “Et fumus ejus ascendit in secula seculorum,” contra Ecclesiam Romanam dictum credunt tam Cathari, quam Leonistae; per bestiam enim Ecclesiam Romanam intelligunt, & per mulierem; ibi enim capite 17. v. 3. Legitur bestia fuisse coccinea; ibidem etiam legitur v. 4. quod mulier inducta sit “coccino, & purpura, & inaurata auro, & lapide pretioso, & margaritis, habens poculum aureum in manu,” & haec dicunt convenire Domino Papae, qui est caput Romanae Ecclesiae. Eodem etiam capite dicitur mulier ebria de sanguine Sanctorum, quod Ecclesiae Romanae adscribunt propter hoc, quia occidi eos jubet, se enim Sanctos credunt. Et in fine ejusdem capituli legitur v. 18. “Et mulier quam vidisti est civitas magna, qua habet regnum super Reges terrae; non est autem dubium, quod Romana Ecclesia tunc dominium habebat super Reges terrae. Idem etiam volunt habere propter hoc, quod mulier ista dicitur Babylon 16. capite circa finem, & 18. v.2.” “Cecidit, cecidit Babylon magna.” In Moneta, 397. Also EFV II, 86.*

onwards saw a continuum conformed by the prophecies in the books of Daniel and Revelation that revealed the historical unfolding of events in which the apostasy was embodied by the Church of Rome, and the remnant by themselves. It is also possible to see that they made recourse to a historicist method in order to make sense of that prophetic map as opposed to methods used by Catholic theologians. Naturally, both the differing interpretations and the methods employed to interpret the historic events as expressed by the prophecies emanated from their radically different attitudes towards the level of authority conferred to the Scriptures. Consequently, we now turn to examine the role and authority that the Waldensians attributed to Scriptures in their overall theological system.

III. Waldensian Appraisal of Scriptural Authority

At the core of the Waldensian thinking was an unremitting commitment to Scripture. The gravitational element of the Waldensian theological system was the conviction that all things related to belief, practice, social issues,⁴⁷ and even historiographical aspects, must of necessity conform to Scripture,⁴⁸ or at least not contradict it. Moreover, the Waldensians considered that only a literal reading of Scripture was legitimate.⁴⁹ As Ann Brenon remarks in her study of the 14th to 16th centuries Waldensian literature, “it would be fair to say that the entire corpus of Waldensian literature is rooted in eschatology. . . The fundamental originality of this literature is its profound commitment to Scripture.”⁵⁰ The Waldensian authoritative exclusivity ascribed to Scriptures was necessarily accompanied by a practical rejection of the other official sources of

⁴⁷ The Waldensians also resorted to the authority of the Scriptures to contest the prerogatives of the Church of Rome in social issues like the use of the “temporal sword” quoting Rm. 12:19, Mt. 5:38-40, Jn. 16:2, and 1 Cor. 10:32.

⁴⁸ The Poor Lombards disliked some of the apocrypha and in general for the Waldensians, in dogmatic matters, only the Hebrew canon was normative according to A. Molnar, *A Challenge to Constantinianism: the Waldensian Theology in Middle Ages* (WCSF, Geneve, 1976), p. 21.

⁴⁹ Eberard of Bethune (c. 1212), 1570-1571 states that Scripture is to be read and understood spiritually, not literally. “*Scripturae spiritualiter debeant intelligi non ad litteram.*”

⁵⁰ A. Brennon, *The Waldensian Books* (1994). In Biller and Hudson (eds.) *Heresy and Literacy, 1000–1530*. Cambridge U.P., 137-159.

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authority. As Ardizzo, bishop of Piacenza (1192-1199) pointed out, the Waldensians:

. . . reject the Pontifical decrees, and despise the Orders of the Church. They do not accept any of the writings of the orthodox church doctors, that is Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Gregory and others.⁵¹ (20)

This statement clearly indicates that the Waldensians attributed no religious authority to the *Magisterium*, the Church Fathers, and the hierarchy of the Church. Moreover, it involves a more radical position towards the authoritative value attributed to any writing other than the Scriptures. It was the authority that they denied to the Fathers, and the primacy they assigned Scripture that put them into a difficult situation with the Church of Rome. In this regard, the Passau Anonymous⁵² referred around 1260 that:

[w]hatever a Doctor of the Church teaches that he cannot prove by text of the New Testament, all of it they consider a fable.⁵³ (21)

An anonymous inquisitor registered something similar:

They took no heed to the sayings of the Holy Doctors except to back the sect's beliefs, but observed the whole of the New Testament to the letter.⁵⁴ (22)

⁵¹ “. . . decreta pontificum respuunt; ordines ecclesiae contempnunt. Dicta orthodoxorum ecclesiae doctorum, videlicet Ambrosii, Ieronimi, Augustini, Gregorii et aliorum per omnia non recipiunt. . .” (EFV II), (1998) Claudiana Editrice, 14. Moreover, Bonacursus asserts of the Cathari “*Doctores autem damnant omnes; videlicet Ambrosium, Gregorium, Augustinum, Hieronymum, et alios universaliter damnant*” in *Patrologia Latina* 204-0777D.

⁵² See H. Grundmann, H. (1935), *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 170-172. See also WE 636.

⁵³ “*quidquid ecclesie doctor docet, quod per textum novi testamentum non probat, hoc pro fabulis totum habent,*” Passau Anonymous, in EFV II, 114.

⁵⁴ “*Item dicta sanctorum doctorum nihil curant, nisi quantum pro secta confortanda retinent, sed tantum novum testamentum ad literas observant,*” Döllinger, II 340. Translation from Patschovsky, 125 n 44.

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We must note in passing that the foregoing statements were at variance with the confession of faith that Peter Valdès made in 1180 approving the theological relevance of the Fathers.⁵⁵ Moreover, the *Rescriptum Heresiarchum*, written around 1230, details the conversations at a colloquium on doctrinal issues held in Bergamo in 1218 between the followers of Valdès, i.e., the Poor of Lyons, and the Poor Lombards.⁵⁶ This document registers agreements and disagreements between the mostly-orthodox Poor of Lyon and the Lombards. Of special interest to this discussion are the attitudes shown by each group towards the normative role of Scripture. The next transcription presents three excerpts that clearly show the adherence of the Lombards to the *Sola Scriptura* principle:

. . . we [Lombards] ask whether you [Poor of Lyon] still adhere to this tradition or that doctrine that you could not openly justify by Scripture that the divine Church of Christ has held or should hold. . . [concerning transubstantiation]. . . this is an impious thing to say because it will be proved by no valid authority or reasoning. . . . (23)

Therefore, beloved brethren, we earnestly appeal to your discretion, to not forget the following: “*Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my paths.*” and “*the testimony of the Lord is faithful, giving wisdom to little ones*” and “*He that believeth in me, as the scripture saith, Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.*”⁵⁷

This being said, and even though these writings of the Fathers were considered devoid of theological authority, yet in certain circumstances the Waldensians did profit from them for homiletical and missionary purposes, as the Acts of the Inquisition in Carcassonne remark:

⁵⁵ W. Wakefield, and A. Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (Columbia University Press, 1991), 396-397. WE hereafter, 207.

⁵⁶ J. Gonnet and A. Molnar. *Les Vaudois au Moyen Age* (Claudiana., Torino, 1974), 85-97; Döllinger, II, 42-56; EFV I, 169-183; WE 279-289.

⁵⁷ *Quaerimus de aliqua consuetudine vel credulitate vestra, quam non possetis aperte per scripturam probare divinam Christi ecclesiam habuisse et habere debere. . . quod omnino nefas est dicere, quia nulla authentica probari unquam auctoritate poterit vel etiam ratione. . . Unde carissimi prudentia vestra perorando deposcimus, quatenus sententiarum subsequantium non immemores:* [verses follow]. Döllinger, II, 46, 47, 51; WE, 282, 283, 288-289.

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When they preach, [they do it] from the Gospels and Epistles, or even the examples or sentences of some saints alleging: “such is said in the Gospel or in the Epistle of St. Peter, or of St. Paul, or of St. James, or so said such doctor or saint,” so that their listeners better accept their preaching. (24)

They have the Gospels and Epistles in common in the vernacular and also in Latin, because some among them understand and can read. At times they follow in the books what is preached, at times they follow without the books, particularly those who cannot read, but have learnt [the words of the books] by heart.⁵⁸

The reliance of the Waldensians upon the *Sola Scriptura* principle naturally led them to question the validity of Tradition as a valid source of authority.⁵⁹ Particularly, in matters of doctrine and practice, they held, anything that contradicted the spirit of Scripture should be discarded:

No other prayer they say or teach save the Lord’s Prayer. They do not esteem in any degree neither the Ave Maria, nor the Symbol of the Apostles [Creed], because they say that these were composed or prescribed, not by Christ, but by the Church of Rome. Yet, they say and teach the seven articles of Faith of Divinity, and seven of humanity, the Ten Commandments, and the seven works of mercy which they have in an abridgment composed and prescribed by them. They pride themselves much upon that and immediately offer themselves to give an answer about their faith.⁶⁰ (25)

⁵⁸ “*quando praedicant de evangeliiis et epistolis vel de exemplis et autoritatibus sanctorum dicendo et allegando: ‘istud dicitur in evangelio vel in epistola sancti Pedri aut sancti Pauli aut sancti Jacobi’, vel [imo] dicunt: ‘talis sanctus aut talis doctor’, ut magis dicta eorum ab auditoribus acceptentur; habent evangelia et epistolas in vulgari communitate, et etiam in latino, quia aliqui inter eos intelligunt et sciunt legere, et interdum quae dicunt, legunt in libro, aliquando autem sine libro, maxime illi, qui nesciunt legere, sed ea corde tenentes didicerunt.*” Döllinger, II, 13; EFV II, 58; WE 396-397.

⁵⁹ The dismissal of Tradition and the Fathers is at variance with Peter Valdès’s promise of preaching without deviating from Church Fathers. See Moneta of Cremona in EFV II, 87. See also E. Comba. *Valdès and the Waldensians before the Reformation* (Carter & Bros-Dodd, Mead, & Co., 1980), 18.

⁶⁰ “. . . nullam orationem dicunt tunc nec docent nisi orationem ‘Pater noster,’ nec aliquid reputant Salutem beatae Mariae nec symbolum apostolicum, quia dicunt illa per Romanam Ecclesiam, non per Christum fuisse ordinata seu composita, veruntamen articulos fidei Septem de divinitate et Septem de humanitate et decem praecepta decalogi et Septem

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One of the salient characteristics of the Waldensians in the High Middle Ages, was that they had and read the Scriptures in the vernacular, when such translations of the Bible had been forbidden. For instance the Council of Toulouse in 1229 under Gregory VII⁶¹ ruled that:

We forbid that lay people are permitted to have the books of the Old Testament or the New, except only the Psalter, the breviary for divine office, or the hours of the blessed Mary for those that wish to have them for devotion. But we strictly restrain their having the mentioned books in the vernacular. (26)

The same prohibition was ratified in the Council of Tarragona in 1234—but here it was added that Bibles in the vulgar should be burned,⁶²—Avignon in 1235, and Béziers in 1246. Despite the council prohibitions, the use of “*Epistles, Gospels, and other portions of the divine Scriptures*” for teaching and proselytism seems to have continued as witnessed in posterior inquisitorial interrogations.⁶³

Biblical Literacy of the Waldensians

The primacy that the Waldensians conferred to Scripture in the realm of belief manifested into an avid zeal for appropriating the sacred text through the commitment of large portions to memory. Moreover, as an antagonistic former Waldensian indicated, the intellectual work of the Waldensians was intense:

opera misericordiae sub quodam compendio et modo ab eis ordinato et composito dicunt et docent, et in illo plurimum gloriantur et statim offerunt se promptos ad respondendum de fide sua.” Döllinger, II, 11; EFV II, 55-56. The excerpt is believed to have been written by David of Augsburg.

⁶¹ “*Prohibemus etiam, ne libros veteris testamenti aut novi laici permittantur habere: nisi forte psalterium, vel breviarium pro divinis officiis, aut horas beatae Mariae aliquis ex devotione habere velit. Sed ne praemissos libros habeant in vulgari translatos, arctissime inhibemus.*” Conc. Tolosanum, ann. 1229 in EFV II, 33.

⁶² “*Item statuimus, ne aliquis libros veteris vel novi testamenti in Romanico habeat. Et si aliquis habeat, infra octo dies post publicationem hujusmodi constitutionis a tempore sententiae, tradat eos loci Episcopo comburendos: quod nisi fecerit, sive clericus fuerit, sive laicus, tamquam suspectus de haeresi, quousque se purgaverit, habeatur.*” Conc. Tarraconense, ann. 1234.

⁶³ “. . . *Similiter eos, qui didicerunt a Waldensibus epistulas et evangelia et alia de divina scriptura.*” In EFV II, 37.

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The brethren in Italy devote themselves to intense speculations in order to fight the good fight, protect the faith, and finish happily the course.⁶⁴ (27)

Several inquisitorial interrogations registered that it was not uncommon that Waldensian individuals knew the whole New Testament by heart and considerable portions of the Old Testament.⁶⁵ In fact, inquisitors searched people with this extensive knowledge of the Bible as a distinctive feature to identify and capture the Waldensians. As the French Dominican inquisitor Etienne de Bourbon remarked around 1250:

... how therefore their incompetent and presumptuous usurpation can be detected: they usurp for themselves the office by their incompetent preaching and erudition of the sacred doctrine, especially the Gospels and other books of the New Testament and sermons of persecutions, martyrdom, patience, and pious poverty, which they memorize in the vulgar tongue and to one another expound carefully. . .

I myself have seen a young herdsman that spent only one year in the house of a Waldensian heretic and that, by means of diligent attention and solicitous repetition, he affirmed and retained what he was hearing and in less than a year he committed to memory forty Sunday gospels, except festivities, word by word in his own language. . . (28)

I have seen some laymen impregnated of that doctrine who repeated by heart large portions from the Evangelists, like Matthew and Luke,

⁶⁴ *“Profunde speculationis fratribus in Ytalia tale bonum certamen certare, fidem servare, cursum feliciter consummare. Rex virtutum celso de solio ad praelium progressurus. . . Ministratis vero pro obediencia calumpnia[m], pro subieccione controversiam.”* From a letter sent around 1368 by Johannes Leser and Siegfried, two former Poor of Lyons, to their Italian former brethren. Kaeppli and Zaninovic, 303. See also Patschovsky, 124. Note the similarities in the structure of the text with that of Jean (Johannes) of Limoges (Joanne Lemovicensis)—who was an abbot of a Cistercian monastery in Zirc, Hungary from 1208 – 1218—: “. . . suus Johannes Lemovicensis, bonum certamen certare, cursum feliciter consummare. Rex virtutum, progressurus ad praelium adversus principes tenebrarum. . .” Incipit of *Morale somnium Pharaonis*.

⁶⁵ “. . . firmans novum testamentum corde et multa veteris” Etienne de Bourbon in EFV II, 102.

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especially the teachings and sermons of the Lord. They hardly failed a single word, but said them without interruption.⁶⁶

A document written by the Anonymous of Passau (c. 1260) offers another interesting view into the function that Scripture study had in the everyday life of Waldensian individuals:

Men and women, children and adults, do not cease to learn and teach. The laborer who is working during the day, by night learns or teaches. Thus they pray little because of their zeal [to learn]. They teach and learn without books. Even a disciple that has been with them for just seven days immediately seeks for someone he can teach. . . . If one of them excuses himself saying that he cannot learn, they say to him: “Learn just one word each day, and after a year you will know three hundred; and so you will make progress”. . . they have translated the New and the Old Testaments into the vernacular, and such teach and learn. I have seen and heard rustic illiterates who could recite Job word for word, and many others, who knew the entire New Testament perfectly.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ “. . . quomodo deprehendi possunt est eorum presumptuosa et incompetens usurpacio; usurpant enim officium sibi incompetens predicacionis et erudicionis sacre doctrinea et maxime evangeliorum et aliorum librorum novi testamenti, que cordetenus in vulgata lingua firmant et alter alteri ruminat, et sermones vel de persecuacione et martyrio et paciencia et beata paupertate. . . Vidi ego juvenem bubulcum, qui solum per annum moram fecerat in domo cujusdam heretici Valdensis, qui tam diligenti attencione et sollicita ruminacione affirmabat et retinebat que audiebat, quod infra annum ilium firmaverat et retinuerat quadraginta evangelia dominicalia, exceptis festivitatis, que omnia verbum ad verbum in lingua sua discerat. . . Vidi eciam aliquos laicos qui ex eorum doctrina imbuti, unde vel multa de evangelistis, ut Mattheum et Lucam, repeterent infra corde, maxime ea que ibi dicuntur de instructione et sermonibus Domini, ut vix ibi in verbis deficerent quin ea successive continuarent” Etienne de Bourbon in EFV II, 103.

⁶⁷ “Viri et femine, parvi et magni, nocte et die non cessant discere et docere. Operarius in die laborans, nocte discit vel docet. Ideo parum orant propter studium. Docent eciam et discunt sine libris... Item discipulis septem dierum alium querim quem doceat. . . Qui excusat se, quod non possit discere, dicunt ei: Disce cottidie unum verbum, et post annum scies trescenta, et sic proficies. . . Novum Testamentum et Vetus vulgariter transtulerunt, et sic docent et discunt. Vidi et audivi rusticum ydiotam, qui Iob recitavit de verbo ad verbum, et plures alios qui novum testamentum totum sciverunt perfecte” EFV II, 113-114. See also Peters, E. (1980), *Heresy and Authority in Medieval Europe*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 154.

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Inquisitorial records indicate that both the Waldensian laypeople and ministers were mostly illiterate. An inquisitor once described a Waldensian minister as “ignorant and without letters” (*ydiota et sine letteris*).⁶⁸ This fact points to an important ramification. We see here a tension between the written culture associated with Latin, the elite and church hierarchy, and a movement in the outskirts of society and legality mostly composed of illiterates, according to the standards of the time, but which nonetheless produced a sophisticated theological and historiographical apparatus from an oral, and vernacular framework. Furthermore, the memorization of large portions of Scripture by Waldensians reinforces the permeating commitment in their daily lives to biblicism.⁶⁹

IV. Fundamental Concepts in the Waldensian Theology of History

The surveyed documents offer a fragmentary yet insightful picture from which some characteristic notions that underpinned the Waldensian theology of history can be deduced. Some of the key elements are summarized in this section.

Scripture as the Ground of Authority

Waldensians resorted to Scripture to learn and understand their own role as an evangelical remnant, the historical role of the Church of Rome was interpreted in terms of prophecy, and their doctrinal tenets were appraised in Scriptural terms. The authority that the Waldensians attributed to the Bible, and denied to the Church of Rome, led them to dismiss the Church Decrees, Fathers Writings, and Tradition. This dismissal was underpinned by their appraisal of Scripture as exclusive in matters of belief, normative, coherent, and historically relevant. In turn these tenets derived from the Waldensians’ perception of the immediacy of God. This approach to Scripture was not compatible with the allegorical method which is absent from the Waldensian hermeneutics.

⁶⁸ See A. Patschovsky. *The Literacy of Waldensianism from Valdes to c. 1400*. In Biller and Hudson (eds.) *Heresy and Literacy 1000-1530*. (Cambridge U.P.), 112-137. Cf. Augustinus Triumphus Summa ii, vii, 25 that compares the *sacerdotium* with the laity which are “illiterate idiots.” In the Vulgate the Priests resorted to this terminology to describe Peter and John, (Act. 4:13): *videntes autem Petri constantiam et Iohannis conperto quod homines essent sine litteris et idiotae admirabantur et cognoscebant eos quoniam cum Iesu fuerant*.

⁶⁹ See also G. Duby, *L’an mil* (Paris: Julliard, 1967).

Truth

The concept of truth is the theological element that afforded meaning, historical belonging, continuity, and cohesiveness to the self-understanding of Waldensians as a movement. The *Liber Electorum* refers to truth in the three dimensions: it describes the departure of the Church of God from the *way of truth*, a remnant that *remained for a long time in the truth that had received*, and *the light of truth and sanctity* as a chain extending from Abraham to Christ that cannot be extinct [quot. (2)].⁷⁰ Truth was considered to be ascertainable only from Scripture. Moreover, everything religious or secular at odds with truth, had for the Waldensians no more authority than a fable [quot. (21)].

From the pragmatic point of view, the Waldensians believed that the truth has tangible effects in the life of believers, for the light of truth is also the light of sanctity (*lucerna veritatis et sanctitatis*) [quot. (2)]; as such, they considered, truth manifests in the quotidian acts just as in the case of the Apostles of whom they considered themselves to be the successors and representatives [quot. (9) and (10)]. In this regard, the inquisitors searched for people of different habits to identify Waldensians as the author of the *Noble Lesson* explained:

... if there is a good person that loves and fears Christ, that refuses to curse, swear, lie, commit adultery, kill, or take the thing of others, and that refuses to take revenge from his enemies; such it is called a Waldensian, and worthy of punishment.⁷¹ (30)

When reflecting upon their experience, the Waldensians found in Scriptures that the believers in truth had always experienced opposition and persecution, from the times of Abraham until the Apostles, therefore they understood that they also would suffer persecution.

Plan of Salvation and an Ongoing Conflict

The Waldensian theology of history in the period under study viewed events as laying in an ultimate framework of an eschatological

⁷⁰ According to Salvo Burci the Waldensians argued that they also had “come out of Egypt,” EFV II, 66-67.

⁷¹ *Noble Lesson* 375-380 in C. Papini, *La Nobila Lezione – La Nobla Leçon: Poemetto Medievale Valdese* (Claudiana, Torino, 2003), 91.

uninterrupted conflict between God and Satan. More specifically, they postulated that in the Salvation economy there was a conflictual coexistence between the Church of God (themselves) and the Church of Rome, between a benign and a malign part. The antagonism between both parties had always existed, since Abraham to Christ, and thus they held would also exist from Christ to the end of the world.

As it is apparent from the texts [quot. (2)], the Waldensians clung to the idea of continuity of their movement in terms of the persistence of a group of people that proclaims salvation (“*showed them the way of salvation*”), in which God himself is also involved: “*God did marvelous things for them*” says the *Liber Electorum*. This view of continuity was missionary in essence, and entailed a dynamic and proximate understanding of God, different from the prevailing Scholastic and Mystical schools. The Waldensians viewed God as closely involved in the events leading to searching and saving people through their own missionary work.

V. Contrasts of Waldensian and Catholic Theologies of History

Like the Scholastics and Mystics, the Waldensians resorted to the Danielic sequence of Empires to make sense of the events in history. But insofar the Catholic theologies fundamentally followed either an Orosian or Augustinian appraisal of the intertwinement of the secular and the spiritual facets of the Roman Empire, the Waldensians believed that any sort of divine endorsement for any political entity was completely absent from the Danielic prophecy. Rather, the latter believed that Daniel referred to a sequence of corrupt worldly empires that have nothing in common with the Kingdom of God, and they would eventually be destroyed by God.

The timelessness of the Catholic historical theology proceeded from the philosophical conception of God: the Scholastics had a Parmenidean detached deity while the Mystics posited a Heraclitean God who was revealed in the cotidianity, but in an inapprehensible way. Conversely, for the Waldensians God was deeply committed in finding and saving the lost and to that effect he devised a “plan of Salvation” which began in the days of Adam and will last to the end of the world; the Waldensians considered themselves as the instrument in the hands of God for reaching people.

Both the Roman and Waldensians theologies of history ultimately resorted to eschatology. But the eschatologies were grounded in different sets of presuppositions. On the one hand, the eschatology of the medieval Roman theologies was atemporal and mystical in that they were

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substantiated mostly by different modes of allegorization.⁷² From a hermeneutical perspective, allegory is not evidential or validational in the sense that it does not remit itself onto a referential ground, e.g., to Scripture. Allegory was understood as a kind of cryptology that searched for hidden meanings in a space of mystic images, similarities, and schemas. As such, the Waldensian considered allegory as a useful homiletical instrument, but not as a valid method of Scriptural inquiry.⁷³

On the other hand, Waldensian hermeneutics was literal and structurally articulated on historical development. Their relationship with the Bible was immediate and pressing, and stirred a sense of urgency upon the proclamation. The sole source for the eschatological understanding of the Waldensians was a literal understanding of prophecy. Along this line, Roman theologians placed the advent of the Antichrist in the past, as Moneta of Cremona, or an unspecified future moment, whereas the Waldensians believed that it had been continuously operating in some way since the 4th century when Sylvester accepted to fuse the political and religious realms.

We see that by the end of the 14th century the key elements of the Waldensian and Catholic theologies of history were diametrically opposed. Specifically, the multidimensional Waldensian concept of *truth* had the counterpart of the spiritual authority of the Church of Rome encompassing both the spiritual and political authorities.

VI. Summary

This study comprises two papers that expound and compare the Catholic and Waldensians theologies of history in the 12th–14th centuries.

⁷² Medieval theologians ascribed four senses to Scripture: 1) literal or historical, 2) tropological or allegorical, 3) moral, and 4) anagogical or spiritual. For a study on the symbolist mentality in the theologians of the Middle Ages see M. Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 99-145, and on allegorizing see especially 141ss.

⁷³ For instance, Etienne de Bourbon objects that “they expound and ruminant the Gospel to others in the vulgar according to the [literal] concatenation of the words, and not according to their exact [i.e. allegorical] meaning”: “. . . *deinde evangelia in vulgare, quae secundum seriem, non sensum verborum sanum dicunt et ruminant aliis. . .*” EFV II, 103. See also Papini, *Valdo*, 112-114.

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The study surveys sources of the period from Waldensians, inquisitors, and polemicists.

An increase in the depth and structuredness of the Waldensian views is apparent as the documentary evidence gets more recent. This has been traditionally interpreted by scholars as the result of the gradual development process of the Waldensian thinking which, according to them, was initiated in the tenets of Peter Valdès. However, the evidence within the documents makes it likely that such growing sophistication lies, not in the Waldensian belief system itself, but rather in the progressive understanding and awareness of it by inquisitors and controversists. In this way inquisitors might have gone from broad theological generalities sufficient to identify the Waldensians, to the more detailed aspects that underpinned the Waldensian theological edifice. Perhaps more importantly, this possibility also suggests the existence of a religious group, other than the Cathars, with an established theology prior to Peter Valdès and the Poor of Lyon [See quot. (32)].

The Waldensians ascribed to Scripture the complete doctrinal primacy, and from it they derived their whole theological edifice. They also assigned to it a paramount practical importance, committing large portions to memory.

While both theologies concurred that the Danielic pattern described the flow of events in the Christian economy, they arrived at opposing views. Medieval Catholic theologians posited the merging of the temporal and spiritual in the Christian Rome. The notions of *translatio imperii* and *translatio sacerdotii* played the foundational role in their understanding of God's ordering of time and authority. Conversely, the Waldensians understood that history involved a conflict between God and Satan, while the "Holy Church" was God's instrument in that conflict. Waldensians interpreted the defection of the Church of Rome, her abandonment of the Christian commission, and subsequent transformation into a persecuting power in the symbols of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation.

The dual concept of power and authority played the central role in the medieval Catholic theology. The medieval theologians considered that the Church was the sole depositary of the authority to bind and loose on Earth and Heaven. Conversely, the Waldensians resorted mainly to the concept of *truth*, which was passed down in the Church from generation to generation of believers.

VII. Appendix

More texts are presented herein with additional descriptions of beliefs and arguments that recurred frequently in the accusations that the polemist launched against the Waldensians. For example Waldensians were said to be few (*argumentum ad numerum*), uneducated (*ad-hominem*), alien from the priesthood, and recent. All this, according to the polemist, was enough to condemn Waldensians as heretics.

Arguments of Church Provenance, Indefectibility and Apostolic Succession

The assertion of the Church's uninterrupted existence from the times of the Apostles, or Church indefectibility, was a very active source of debate, and it also fueled other areas of disagreement as discussed below. Moneta references the Waldensian tenets on continuity, ecclesiology, and historiography:

Perhaps they might say that their congregation and the congregation of the Church of Rome are one, holy and Catholic, although they are divided in two parts: one part is malign, which is called the Roman Church, the other part benign, which is the Waldensian congregation. Against this: there was no such party from the time of Sylvester until the time of Valdesius that you can show. . .

Those heretics say that the Church of God defected at the time of the blessed Sylvester. . . And that it has been restored in these times by themselves whose chief was Valdesius. We inquire therefore, from whence they have it that it has defected? And, since they have no testimony to confirm it, they fall silent. . . We may point out that since its inception, the Church of the New Testament has not defected: "*Fear not, little flock, for it hath pleased your Father to give you a Kingdom*" [Luke 1:32]; "*But in the days of those kingdoms the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, and his kingdom shall not be delivered up to another people, . . . and itself shall stand for ever.*" [Dn. 2:44]. . . [quotes Mt. 7:22] [these did so] Not by their [sanctified] lives, but by their ministry. Therefore, a bad life does not remove the efficacy of the

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ministry. Hence even if we admitted that Sylvester sinned and became wicked (which is false), yet the Church did not defect with Sylvester.⁷⁴

To the persistent Waldensian argument of their antiquity and of their movement predating Valdès (see quotes. (12), (33), and (34)), Moneta argued that Peter Valdès was the founder of the group, and also invoked to absence of documentary evidence as a proof against the Waldensian claims:

. . . It is not long ago that these began, because as it is well known, they were founded by Valdesius, a citizen of Lyon, who started this way not long ago, perhaps eighty years more or less, but not far from that. And they are not many. Therefore, they are not the successors of the primitive Church, and consequently neither the Church of God. If they nonetheless say that their way is prior to Valdès, let them prove it by some testimony, which they cannot do. . . .⁷⁵

⁷⁴ “*Forte dicerent quod eorum congregatio et congregatio Romanae Ecclesiae est una, sancta et catholica, licet duce sint ejus partes: una est pars maligna quae dicitur modo Romana Ecclesia, alia benigna quae est congregatio Valdensium. Sed contra. Iliam partem a tempore Silvestri non fuit usque ad tempus Valdesii, quod tu possis ostendere; . . . Isti haeretici dicunt, Ecclesiam Dei, tempore beati Silvestri defecisse . . . in temporibus autem istis restitutam esse per ipsos, quorum primus fuit Valdesius. Quaeramus ergo, unde habent quod defecerit? Et cum inde testimonium non habeant, obmutescent. Ostendamus quod Ecclesia Novi Testamenti postquam esse coepit, non desierit esse: [Luke 1:32]. In diebus autem regnorum illorum suscitabit Deus coeli regnum, quod in aeternum non dissipabitur, et regnum ejus alteri populo non tradetur . . . et ipsum stabit in aeternum’ (Dan. ii. 44). . . Non per vitam, sed per ministerium. [quotes Mt. 7:22] Ergo mala vita non tollit effectum suum ministerio; ergo non amittitur Ordo propter aliquod peccatum; ergo, posito quod Sylvester peccavit, et malus factus fuerit, non tamen defecit Ecclesia in Silvestro,” Moneta, 407, 412-414. See P. Melia, *The Origin, Persecutions, and Doctrines of the Waldenses*. (James Toovey, London, 1870), p. 5-8.*

⁷⁵ “. . . non enim multum temporis est quod esse coeperunt, quoniam sicut patet a Valdesio Cive Lugdunensi exordium acceperunt, qui hanc viam incoepit, non sunt plures, quam octoginta anni, vel si plures, aut pauciores parum plures, vel pauciores existunt; Ergo non sunt successores Ecclesiae primitivae; Ergo non sunt Ecclesia Dei. Si autem dicunt quod sua vita ante Valdesium fuit, ostendant hoc aliquo testimonio, quod minime facere possunt. . . .,” Moneta, 402; EFV II, 87.

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Durando of Huesca, a follower of Valdès,⁷⁶ wrote a polemic treatise called the *Liber Antiheresis*⁷⁷ to confute Catharism. Among the arguments and counter-arguments of the book, the treatise registers an interesting Cathar argument to the effect that Peter Valdès could not have possibly learned “the way of the fathers” from priests or monks, but rather he might have adopted it from some “good man” who already had it before:

[Cathars]: Where was the church since the advent of the Savior until your [Poor of Lyon] advent, and who taught Valdès his way? Did not he learn it from some good man, and not that your patron discovered another way?
[Durandus]: We verily say: because God is there where the church is, the congregation of the faithful that have the true faith and fulfill the [righteous] works. . .
[Cathars]: From whom has he heard, and who told him the Gospel from (33) which he might know that that way is good?
[Durandus] From the pontiffs and priests, we truly say, to what they laugh and ask:
[Cathars]: Did the Pharisees, who are reproached by God, taught you? In which way, who are impure and do not have the Holy Spirit, you could learn good works from them? . . .
[Durandus]: And they say: You always hold against us the fornicatress hand of the Roman Church⁷⁸

⁷⁶ As A. Rossi, *Medioevo Valdese 1173-1315* (Editrice UNI Service, 2011), 188, remarks that Durando had a sense of “homogeneity and connection with the orthodox tradition.”

⁷⁷ Dondaine and Grundmann indicate that the *Liber Antiheresis* dates from 1184 (EFV I, 31n2), C. Thouzelier considers that it was written between 1190 and 1194, in *Catharisme et Valdeisme*, 60-81. Durando was the first theologian of the Poor of Lyons and later returned to the Church of Rome and founded a preaching order, the Poor Catholics, which later was absorbed by the Dominicans. Durando’s ideas, as Peter Valdès’s, exhibit more elements in common with the Church of Rome than with the core tenets of Waldensianism. See also, Gonnet and Molnar, 61ff. See also S. Grau Torres, (2009) *Durand de Huesca y la Lucha contra el Catarismo en la Corona de Aragón*. *Anuario de Estudios Medievales*, 39/1, 3-25.

⁷⁸ “*Ubi erat ecclesia ab adventu salvatoris usque ad vestrum adventum, et quis docuit valdesium viam illam? Numquid ab aliquo bono homine accepit, neque aliquem vie istius patronum invenit? Nos vero dicimus, quia semper ibi dei est ecclesia, ubi congregacio fidelium, qui fidem rectam tenent et operibus implent. . . A quo audivit, et quis illi dixit evangelium, unde sciret viam illam esse bonam? Nos vero dicimus: A pontificibus et sacerdotibus. Set ad hoc quasi irridentes dicunt: Numquid pharizeei, qui a deo maledicti sunt, vos docuerunt? Et quomodo ab illis, qui immundi sunt et spiritum sanctum non habent,*

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On addressing the same argument of the Waldensian antiquity, Salvo Burci as Moneta, also argues in favor of the indefectibility of the Roman Church against the recentness of Valdès:

Sunday, 6 May 1235 in the house of Monachus de Cario—It is manifest that the Church of God existed from the time of the Apostles until today, and will exist until the end of times. . . .

Valdesius, who was from Lyon, was the head of your party, and before him you had none but the Church of Rome. This happened about 60 years ago. There are still many of his followers who like Valdesius, belonged to the Church of Rome. Therefore because you believe that there was no church before Valdesius you are foolish. . . and your labor is in vain.⁷⁹ (34)

Another recurrent argument against the Waldensian claim of being the Church of God was that they were recent while the Church of Rome by virtue of the *translationes*,⁸⁰ encompassed the whole orb, as Burci argued in the following statements:

. . . note the date recorded above [in note 78]. Why? If you were wise, you would quickly realize how recent you are. Therefore, the date was set clearly so that you admit your newness.⁸¹ (35)

Another persistent flank of the Waldensian argument of continuity was the idea that they embodied the restoration of the true piety. Burci states that:

vos bona opera percipere potuistis? . . . Sed forte dicent: Vos semper contra nos illam fornicariam romanam manu tenetis ecclesiam!" Liber Antiheresis, EFV I, 41-42, 44.

⁷⁹ "a. 1235 indict. VIII. Die dominico VI. mensis Madi, in domo Monachi de Cario. Manifestum est quod ecclesia Dei est ab apostolis usque nunc et erit hinc usque ad finem. Valdexius, qui fuit de Leono, fuit vestrum caput et a Valdexio in retro non habebatis caput, nisi Ecclesiam romanam; et hoc esse potest circa LX annos; et multi sunt modo de illis hominibus qui fuerunt sui familiares, et ipsemet Valdexius fuit de Ecclesia romana. Quomodo ergo creditis quod Ecclesia non esset a Valdexio in retro, stulti estis. . . . et quod labor vester frustra est. . ." Ilarino, 316-317. Bruschi, 72. EFV II, 64.

⁸⁰ See Part I for a discussion of the *translationes*.

⁸¹ "Item notate millesimum supradictum; quare? quia si sapientes estis vos, bene videbitis, quantum novi estis, et ideo positum est millesimum, ut agnoscatis vestram novitatem," EFV II, 64-65. See also WE 272.

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. . . you Poor Lombards cannot prove that yours [sect] is more than 36 years old. . . and still you say that the Church of God has been lost for many years before you, and that you have restored it. Greater stupidity cannot be believed! It is not possible for the Church of God to ever fall.⁸² What did the Lord say to the Churches? “*Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world*” therefore it will not fall until the end of the world. And also says “*I will not leave you orphans,*” if it had apostatized, there would be orphans. . . the Church of God is throughout the whole world, and throughout the whole world must save. . . . But this does not apply to you.⁸³ (36)

Justification of the Character and Use of the “Omnis Potestas”

Directly linked with the consequence of the above arguments was the contention that the Church of Rome had legitimately received the *omnis potestas*; and as a consequence of its intrinsic characteristics his use was also justified. Moneta clings to the *translatio imperii* and *translatio sacerdotii* as the basic premises to refute that Sylvester accepted the power by rapine:

. . . I say that Sylvester received neither the spiritual powers of binding and loosing nor the Pontifical line of succession from Constantine. I grant though that he actually got from him what you have said, the honor of the secular power in Italy, and the western provinces as it is recorded concerning the privileges of the Church in the Decrees [of Grazian distinctio] X., chapter.6. Thus it is completed by the prophecy of Daniel (37)

⁸² The wording used by Burci to describe the fall of the church (*defecisset*) echoes the Vulgate language in Rev. 14: 8, 18:2 “*Cecidit, cecidit Babylon illa magna: quae a vino irae fornicationis suae potavit omnes gentes. . . Cecidit, cecidit Babylon magna: et facta est habitatio demoniorum, et custodia omnis spiritus immundi, et custodia omnis volucris immundae, et odibilis. . . Cecidit, cecidit Babylon, et omnia sculptilia deorum ejus contrita sunt in terram,*” Is. 21:9 (*cecidit*), and specifically Rev. 2:3 (*defecisti*): “*et patientiam habes, et sustinuisti propter nomen meum, et non defecisti.*”

⁸³ “*Sed vos, Pauperes Lombardi, non potestis probare quod vestra sit de trigintasex . . . et adhuc dicitis quod Ecclesia Dei stetit amissa multis annis usque ad vos, et vos restituistis. Maior stulticia non potest credi. Absit enim quod Ecclesia Dei defecisset unquam. Unde Dominus dicit Ecclesie? ‘Ego vo biscum sum omnibus diebus usque ad consumationem seculi’ [Mt. 28:20]; ergo non deficiet ante consumationem seculi et adhuc dicit: ‘Non relinquam vos orphanos’ [Jn. 14:18]; si defecisset, ergo stetissent orphani. . . Ecclesia Dei est per universum mundum, et per universum mundum debet salvari. . . ; sed sic non estis vos. . . ,” Ilarino 328, EFV II, 66.*

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7 v. 27 “*And that the kingdom, and power, and the greatness of the kingdom, under the whole heaven, may be given to the people of the saints of the most High.*” Concerning what you have said that Constantine seized the power by violence and rapine, I respond that it is not true. On the contrary, God is the author of all authority [*omnis potestas*] as says the Apostle in Rom. 13 v. 1 and also the popular common consent can confer upon him their rights of government.

It is granted that before his conversion [Constantine] abused his powers, but afterwards he gave it good use for punishing the evildoers and for the praise of the good. I maintain the same of his predecessors in regards to this, that they had that power from God, even though they abused it causing the death of the saints. But this can be grasped from Daniel 2, that in v. 37 in which he called the most wicked king Nebuchadnezzar “*Thou art a king of kings: and the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, and strength, and power, and glory.* (v. 38) *And all places wherein the children of men, and the beasts of the field do dwell: he hath also given the birds of the air into thy hand.*” Hence it is legitimate that [Constantine] bequeathed it to the Roman Pontiff, and also legitimate for Sylvester to use it.

Besides, you cannot prove your assertion that he [Sylvester and his successors] acquired his power by violence and rapine. Tell me heretic, if somebody acquires a thousand pounds by violence and rapine, and he comes to you with them, and hands them over to you for your use, will he by any chance disclose his business to you? Can you possibly appraise this? No. In what way therefore, you argue concerning Constantine and the Roman Pontiff, that the power was both, seized by Constantine and delivered to Sylvester with rapine?

Granting that the power was gotten by rapine, that stayed such is not true; I mean that it was not bequeathed to Sylvester as it was gotten, because even if it was illegitimately acquired, yet Sylvester had it legitimately. And this is so because of God’s decree made manifest by the aforementioned authority of Daniel.

To the heretics’ objection that “*my kingdom is not from this world,*” I have already responded in the first part of the first chapter. . . Concerning Mt. 20 v. 25 it was answered in the first part of chapter six. . . To the objection that Christ fled the kingdoms of this world, I say that he did not want to be the temporal king of those who wanted to proclaim him their king, but not for his sake, but because they had eaten his bread. But he [Christ] did not flee the authority of the kingdom of this world, because he already had it, and those who have it, had it from him. For the Wisdom, which is Christ, in Proverbs 8 v. 15 says “*by me kings reign.*” It is likewise

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patent by the testimony of Daniel 2 v. 37: “Thou art a king of kings,” etc., by the Apostle in Romans 13 v. 6 “For they are the ministers of God, serving unto this purpose”. . . I say, therefore, that the Church does not flee from the authority it has, as neither Christ did. Yet just as Christ was unwilling to be their temporal king, neither the Pope wants to be King or Emperor yet he consents or he concedes that somebody else is.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ “Dico, quod Silvester potestatem spiritualem ligandi scilicet, & solvendi non habuit a Constantino, nec illa potestate Pontificali successit ei, licet illa quae tu dixisti ab illo habuerit, & Imperii secularis honorificentiam in Italia, & occidentalium regionum provinciis, ut habetur in privilegio Ecclesiae in Decretis dist. x. cap. 6. & sic completa est Prophetia Danielis 7. v. 27. Regnum autem, & potestas, & magnitudo regni, qua est subter omne caelum detur populo sanctorum Altissimi. Ad illud autem quod dixisti quoniam Constantinus illud dominium per violentiam possidebat & rapinam; dico non est verum, imo Deo Auctore a quo est omnis potestas teste Apostolo Roman. 13. v. 1. & per communem populi voluntatem, qui jus suum potuit illi dare, jus videlicet regendi se ipsum; & licet ante conversionem suam abuteretur illa potestate, postea tamen illa bene usus est ad vindictam malefactorum, laudem vero bonorum: idem dico de praedecessoribus suis quoad hoc, quoniam illam potestatem a Deo habuerunt, licet abusi sint illa ad mortem Sanctorum: Istud patet Danielis 2. in Nabuchodonosor Rege impiissimo, cui ait Daniel v. 37. Tu Rex Regum, & Deus coeli regnum, & fortitudinem, & imperium, & gloriam dedit tibi (v. 38) Et omnia, in quibus habitant filii hominum & bestiae agri, volucres quoque coeli dedit in manu tua. Juste ergo tradere posuit illa Romano Pontifice quae dixisti, & juste potuit Sylvester uti eisdem. Praeterea, dato quod per rapinam illud imperium, & res imperii habuerit, quod probare non potes: Dic mihi haeretice: Aliquis mille marcas per violentiam & rapinam acquisivit, venit autem ad te cum illis, tradens tibi usum illarum, numquid ipsum argues de illis rebus? numquid non recipies? imo nunquid de hoc te judicas? Non. Quare ergo de regno per rapinam a Constantino possesso & Silvestro tradito ab eodem arguis Constantinum, & Romanum Pontificem? Hoc dato quod per rapinam habuit illa, quod tamen non est verum; dico quod non tradidit ea Silvestro sicut habuit, quia injustes habuit, Sylvester autem juste recepit, quia ex Dei decreto ut patet per dictam auctoritatem Danielis. Ad illud quod objecit haereticus, quod regnum meum non est de hoc mundo, responsum est in prima parte primi capituli hujus operis, & in prima parte cap. 8. . . Ad illud etiam Matth. 20. v. 25. Scitis &c. responsum est in prima parte sexti capituli secundae partis. Ad illud quod objicitur, quod Christus fugit regnum mundi, dico verum esse quoad hoc, quoniam noluit esse temporaliter Rex illorum, qui volebant eum constituere sibi Regem, quaerentes ipsum non propter ipsum, sed quia manducaverant de panibus ejus; auctoritatem tamen regni mundi hujus non fugit, imo illam habuit, & qui habent, ab ipso habent; unde Sapientia, quae Christus est ait Proverbiorum 8. v. 15. Per me Reges regnant. Idem patet per proximum testimonium Danielis 2. v. 37. Tu Rex Regum &c. Idem patet per Apostolus Roman. 13. v. 6. ubi a Deo ordinati & ejus ministri, in hoc ipsum ei servientes vocantur. . . Dico igitur, quod auctoritatem habet Ecclesia, non fugit eam, sicut nec Christus, & tamen sicut Christus noluit esse temporaliter Rex illorum, ita nec Papa vult esse Rex, vel Imperator, sed consentit, vel concedit quod alius sit, Moneta, 410-411.

Waldensians' Questioning of the Efficacy of Sacraments

The Waldensian contestation of the legitimacy of the Roman Apostolic Succession brought in its wake the denial of the efficacy of the sacraments. Since these were seen as the channels of grace whose administration the Church held to have been entrusted with, by denying them the Waldensian incurred not in just a theological and historical disagreement, but rather in a severe pragmatic antagonism at the local level. Particularly, the Waldensians held that they had “*received the authority to preach from God, like the holy Apostles had.*”⁸⁵ They defended instead the priesthood of believers, as registered by Etienne de Bourbon from his inquisitorial trials (1232–1249):

They hold that all good men are priests and that any good man is as capable in the absolution of sins as we esteem the Pope to be. . . .

They propose that only God can forgive sins, and say that any good man can do this because God operates only through them to this effect, for he dwells in them, and they can bind and loose all things by him. They scorn Church absolutions and excommunications for, they say, only God can excommunicate. . . .⁸⁶

One great teacher and missionary among them drew the following distinction to me: there are those who are not ordained neither by God or men such as wicked laymen. Others are ordained by men but not by God such as our wicked priests. Others are ordained by God though not by men, these are the good laymen that keep God’s commandments, who can bind and loose, ordinate and consecrate, if they invoke the words of God established for it. (38)

. . . They deride papal indulgences and absolutions and the keys of the Church; they call feast of stones the dedications of churches and altars.

⁸⁵ “*dicunt se habere talem potestatem a Deo, sicut sancti apostoli habuerint,*” EFV II, 58.

⁸⁶ In another anonymous inquisitorial source the Waldensians held that they “. . . are not subject to the Pope, Church of Rome, or prelates, and consequently cannot be excommunicated by these. Furthermore, they say that nobody can demand them to abandon the sect, even though it was condemned as heretical by the Church of Rome: “*Dicebant, se Papae, Romanae ecclesiae et Praelatis ejus non esse subjectos, proinde ab illis se non posse excommunicari. Porro dicebant, neminem posse ipsis injungere quod sectam deserentes abjurent, quanquam per Romanam Ecclesiam ipsa secta tanquam haeretica sit damnata.*” Döllinger, II, 7. Also, EFV II, 51.

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They likewise say that all ground is equally consecrated and blessed by God. They disdain Christian cemeteries and churches. . .

. . . They say that it suffices for salvation to confess only God, not to men, and that the exterior penitence⁸⁷ is not necessary for salvation.

They hold that the Church of Rome is Babylon, the harlot⁸⁸ from whom it is read in Rev. 17. They call ridiculous those who observe saints' days for those who work in those days commit no sin. . . They completely disregard the obedience to the Church of Rome. Furthermore, they say that God should be the only object of every kind of adoration, and say that those who adore the Cross, or what we believe to be the body of Christ, or other saints of God or their images, commit sin.⁸⁹

The Waldensian tenet of the priesthood of believers was an insurmountable problem and a most fundamental heresy in the eyes of inquisitors and theologians. The reason for this was that it challenged the papal jurisdiction as expressed in the dual hierarchy of the *ordo sacerdotalis* and the *ordo laicalis*, as it was already discussed in Part I. These *ordines* represented two predetermined social and spiritual groups

⁸⁷ For a discussion of the meaning of exterior penitence in relationship to the sacrament of absolution see H. Lea, *A History of Auricular Confession in the Latin Church* (Lea Brothers & Co.: Philadelphia, 1896), I, 460ff.

⁸⁸ Moneta, 399-400 elaborates on this point.

⁸⁹ “*dicunt omnes bonos esse sacerdotes, et tantum posse quemlibet bonum in absolutione peccatorum sicut nos ponimus papam posse; . . . ponunt solum Dominum posse a peccatis absolvere, et quemlibet bonum hominem hoc posse dicunt, quia hoc solus Deus operatur per eos, qui habitat in eis, per quem omnia possunt ligare et solvere. Absoluciones et excommunicationes Ecclesie contempnunt, quia solus Deus est, ut dicunt, qui potest excommunicare. . . boni laici qui servant mandata Dei, qui possunt ligare et solvere et consecrare et ordinare, si proferant verba Dei ad hoc statuta. . . derident indulgentias pape et absoluciones et claves Ecclesie, dedicaciones et consecraciones ecclesiarum et altarium vocantes festa lapidum. Item dicunt omnem terram equaliter a Deo consecratam et benedictam; cimiteria christiana contempnunt et ecclesias. . . Item dicunt quod sufficit ad salutem soli Deo et non homini confiteri, et quod exteriores penitencie non sunt neccessarie ad salutem. . . Item ipsi irrident eos qui luminaria offerunt sanctis ad illuminandas ecclesias. . . Item dicunt Ecclesiam romanam Babilon, meretricem de qua legitur Apoc. Xvii. Item irrisibiles dicunt qui faciunt festa sanctorum, et quod non peccant qui in eis laborant. . . Item obedienciam romane Ecclesie omnino evacuant. Item solum Deum adorandum dicunt omni genere adoracionis, et dicunt peccare eos qui crucem vel illud quod nos dicimus et credimus corpus Christi adorant, vel sanctos alios a Deo vel eorum imagines. . .*” Stephanus de Borbone, *Tractatus de septem donis Spiritu Sancti* in EFV II, 105-106. See also WE 347-348.

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with specific dignities and functions (*officium or ministerium*) attuned to the heavenly and earthly hierarchy.⁹⁰ Therefore, anybody that advocated for the priesthood of laypeople was actually threatening the order of the universe, a function proper of the Antichrist.

Along the same lines as Etienne de Bourbon, the already mentioned Ermengaud of Béziers also registers the Waldensian denial of official sacramental efficacy:

. . . they say that they alone, as disciples of Christ, ought to baptize. They say that nothing is accomplished with frequent visits to cemeteries, the aspersion of exorcised water, the burning of incense, and the suffrages for the dead. They believe, I regret to say, that the Church of Rome does not afford a better spiritual benefit than that provided by anyone of them (39) without ecclesiastical garments and without tonsure. . . these disturb and assault God's Church more than any other heretics. I have seen myself that that neither these [Waldensians] nor those [Albigensians] can be rooted out except by the material sword.⁹¹

From these sources it is apparent that the Waldensians considered that the means of salvation institutionalized by the Church of Rome had no profitable effect upon salvation; quite the contrary for they considered themselves the true disciples of Christ and as such the depositaries of the true Christian message.

Gonzalo Pita, a native of Argentina, is an Adjunct Associate Scientist and Lecturer at Johns Hopkins University. Dr. Pita's interests include the history of the Waldensians, history of philosophical and theological ideas, medieval Latin, and the writings of Ellen White. Other interests include the metaphysical relationships between Science and Theology and mathematical modeling of deep uncertainty. gpital@jhu.edu

⁹⁰ I. Robinson, *Church and Papacy* (1991), 261-266.

⁹¹ “. . . dicunt quod ipsi soli tanquam Christi discipuli debent baptizare . . . Revisitare cimiterium, aquam exorcizatam aspergere, incensum ponere, celebrare pro defunctis, nichil proficere dicunt. Credunt etiam, quod nefas est dicere quod ecclesia romana non dat magis eis spirituale viaticum quam quilibet vel quelibet suorum sine vestimentis ecclesiasticis, sine tonsura. . . plus infestant ecclesiam Dei quam ceteri heretici et expugnant. Et michi videtur quo nec isti (Lugdunenses) nec alii (Albigenses), (non) nisi gladio materiali possunt radicitus extirpari” in *Manifestatio Haeresis Albigensium et Lugdunensium*, in EFV II, 16.