

LEGITIMISATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST HERETICS IN 11TH AND 12TH-CENTURY CATHOLIC NARRATIVES

LEGITIMACIÓN DE LA VIOLENCIA CONTRA LOS HEREJES EN LAS NARRATIVAS CATÓLICAS DE LOS SIGLOS XI Y XII

ALIAKSANDRA VALODZINA
University of Greifswald
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8970-9280>

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ABSTRACT: The article explores 11th-12th-century anti-heretical polemics, aimed at justifying violence against heretics before it was legally sanctioned. Mediaeval authors argued that condemned heretics deliberately chose damnation, likening their actions to suicide, the gravest sin. The clergy viewed unrepentant heretics not as martyrs but as suicides, tainted with pride and vainglory. Ordeals and miracles were cited to affirm guilt, particularly in cases of burning the accused. Other fates did not demand any additional legitimisation. These narratives aimed to assert the righteousness of the Church and the inevitability of apostate retribution, helping to delineate the Church-heretic boundary and restore societal equilibrium.

Keywords: Heresy, religious polemic, legitimisation of violence, punishment of heretics, otherness

RESUMEN: El artículo explora las polémicas antiheréticas de los siglos XI y XII, destinadas a justificar la violencia contra los herejes antes de que estuviera legalmente sancionada. Los autores medievales argumentaban que los herejes condenados elegían deliberadamente la condenación, comparando sus acciones con el suicidio, el pecado más grave. El clero veía a los herejes impenitentes no como mártires, sino como suicidas, manchados de orgullo y vanagloria. Se citaban oráculos y milagros para afirmar la culpabilidad, particularmente en casos de quema de los acusados. Otros destinos no requerían ninguna legitimación adicional. Estas narrativas tenían como objetivo afirmar la rectitud de la Iglesia y la inevitabilidad de la retribución de los apóstatas, ayudando a delinear la frontera entre la Iglesia y los herejes y a restaurar el equilibrio social.

Palabras claves: Herejía, polémica religiosa, legitimación de la violencia, castigo de los herejes, otredad

«Call for the clergy, assemble the people, that by the common deliberation of those who have the Spirit of God, a terrible sanction may be promulgated in your province, in so far as those who suffer from this pestilence should be afflicted with such grave notice, that the rest would be afraid of their punishment».¹

Michel Foucault shows that in public punishment in the modern era «the very excess of the violence exercised is one of the parts of its [justice's] glory».² This excess, however, was no new invention: it is seen also in the executions of mediaeval heretics. The epigraph to this article, from a letter written sometime in the period 1192–6 by theologian and diplomat Peter of Blois (c. 1130 – c. 1211) to Geoffrey Plantagenet, bishop of York, is an explicit statement that heretics should be punished with maximum severity to make their example terrifying for others. Peter also emphasised the role of the clergy in the process of war with heresy. One of the churchmen's weapons was the religious polemic.

1. «Accite clerum, congregare populum, ut ex eorum communi deliberatione qui Spiritum Dei habent, terribilis constitution in vestra provincia promulgetur, quatenus tam gravi animadversione plectantur, qui hac peste laborant, ut ex eorum poena caeteri terreantur» PL 207:341. I am thankful to the Facoltà Valdese di Teologia di Roma, and especially to the dean Prof. Lothar Vogel and library director Prof. Daniele Garrone for their hospitality and methodological advice. The writing of this article was supported by a Gerda Henkel Stiftung Fellowship at the New Europe College – Institute for Advanced Studies during the 2022/2023 academic year. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are those of the writer of this article. The writing of this article was supported by a Gerda Henkel Stiftung Fellowship at the New Europe College – Institute for Advanced Studies during the 2022/2023 academic year.

2. MICHEL FOUCAULT: *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la Prison*, Paris: Gallimard, 1975, p. 38.

Studies of religious polemic have long sought to discover the truth about the heretical movements whose reality has been obscured by the extreme hostility of Catholic authors,³ a process which Pilar Jiménez Sanchez characterises as «systematic dedramatisation».⁴ The majority of studies from the second half of the 20th century do not even mention some «evidently mythical» elements of the accounts of heresy (for example, the participation of demons), trying to retell and analyse «only real facts». Anne Brenon contemptuously dismisses these accounts as «anecdotal and caricatural».⁵

Nevertheless, the very use of these elements is an important part of the image of a heretic which the authors of the sources presumably intended to create. One of several scholars who drew attention to the intentions of the polemicist was Giorgio Cracco; unfortunately, his deep analysis has a limited chronological scope: four heresies of the millennium described by Raoul Glaber (985–1047).⁶ In the last decade, the situation has changed towards researching polemic itself. Lucy Sackville has studied the most common patterns of the anti-heretical treatises in her large-scale book,⁷ refined and expanded by Emmanuel Bain,⁸ Reima Välimäki⁹ and others. These works concern mainly the great polemical treatises, starting with Alan of Lille (c. 1128 – 1202/03).

Dominique Iogna-Prat has demonstrated that the history of Western religious polemic begins with Peter the Venerable (c. 1092 – 1156).¹⁰ Earlier authors also used techniques of religious polemics, though only sometimes openly and obviously. Uwe Brunn in his deep, wide, and very precise book on heretical narratives in the Rhineland shows the motives of the clergy in writing them.¹¹ This article is an attempt to take the next step and to ask

3. SITA STECKEL: «Verging on the Polemical. Towards an Interdisciplinary Approach to Medieval Religious Polemic.» *Medieval Worlds* 7, 2018, pp. 2–60, p. 9.

4. PILAR JIMÉNEZ SANCHEZ: «Aux commencements du catharisme: la communauté d'«apôtres hérétiques» dénoncés par Evervin de Steinfeld en Rhénanie.» *Heresis* 35, 2001, pp. 17–44, p. 19.

5. ANNE BRENON: «Les hérésies de l'an mil. Nouvelles perspectives sur les origines du catharisme.» *Heresis* 24, 1995, pp. 21–36, p. 24.

6. GIORGIO CRACCO: «Riforma ed eresia in momenti della cultura europea tra X e XI secolo.» *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 7, 1971, pp. 411–477.

7. LUCY J. SACKVILLE: *Heresy and Heretics in the Thirteenth Century: The Textual Representations*, York: York Medieval Press, 2014.

8. EMMANUEL BAIN: «Aux sources du discours antihérétique ? Exégèse et hérésie au XIIe siècle.» *Aux marges de l'hérésie*, 53–83, 2018.

9. REIMA VÄLIMÄKI: «The Worst of All Heresies: Polemical Responses to Waldensianism ca. 1200 – 1400,» in Nicolas Faucher and Virpi Mäkinen (eds.): *Encountering Others, Understanding Ourselves in Medieval and Early Modern Thought*, Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022, pp. 21–40.

10. DOMINIQUE IOGNA-PRAT: «L'argumentation défensive: de la polémique grégorienne au 'Contra Petrobrusianos' de Pierre le Vénérable (1140),» in Monique Zerner (ed.): *Inventer l'hérésie?: Discours polémiques et pouvoirs avant l'inquisition*, Nice: Centre d'Études Médiévales, Faculté des Lettres, Art et Sciences Humaines, Université de Nice Sophia-Antipolis, 1998, pp. 87–118.

11. UWE BRUNN: *Des contestataires aux cathares: discours de réforme et propagande antihérétique dans les pays du Rhin et de la Meuse avant l'inquisition*, Paris: Institut d'études augustiniennes, 2006.

not «what historical truth may be found in the midst of polemical lie?» but «what did the writers of polemic wish to convey to their readers».

The emphasis of investigation will be shifted from «what exactly happened with heretics» to «how it was justified by the clergy», because in the medieval mentality «everything that happens should have a cause».¹² Such methods are broadly applied in works on hagiography. These studies have made clear that it is the author who selects the protagonists and the extras of the drama he recounts, the witnesses to it, and its events, distinguishing the divine supernatural from the magical and diabolical.¹³ The lives of saints are recognised as the sources not only for their biographies but also for the mediaeval mentality in general. The stories about their complete opposites – heretics – may be treated in the same way.

Guy Lobrichon proposes that rather than seeking to understand a heretical narrative literally, it should instead be viewed as a coded text, the interpretation of which can be discovered within the realm of ideology. The keys to this text may be found through a metaphorical reading. Such a strategy is appropriate in light of both the exegetical rules and the pervasive propagandist techniques.¹⁴ Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is applicable to the task of decoding complex writings that are rife with metaphors and analogies. It is particularly useful for examining how social elites' methods for protecting their power and perpetuating social injustice relate to issues of power and inequality.¹⁵ CDA enables the exposure of metaphorically disguised types of abuse and dominance.

The High Middle Ages was the time when anti-heretical discourse was formulated. It was also a period in which Catholic dogmas were not yet firmly rooted among the clergy, still less among the laity. Clerics looked for ways to devalue heretics and justify the use of violence against them. They managed to concentrate upon heretics a catalogue of accusations of the great crimes and sins, such as suicide, treachery, devil worship, and the vainglory of pretending to be the true martyrs, obviously unacceptable behaviour leading heretics to a violent death. The process of accepting the killing of the heretics by burning their bodies alive was deeply analysed in the book by Michael D. Barbezat.¹⁶ He writes about his methodology:

12. PAUL R. HYAMS: "Trial by Ordeal: The Key to Proof in the Early Common Law," in *Essays in Honor of Samuel E. Thorne* (1981), 97.

13. SOFIA BOESCH GAJANO: *Un'agiografia per la Storia*, Roma: Viella, 2020, p. 220.

14. GUY LOBRICHON: "The Chiaroscuro of Heresy: Early Eleventh-Century Aquitaine as Seen from Auxerre," in Thomas Head and Richard Landes (eds.): *The Peace of God: Social Violence and Religious Response in France around the Year 1000*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992, pp. 80–103, p. 86.

15. TEUN A. VAN DIJK: "Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis," *Discourse & Society* 4 (2), 1993, pp. 249–283, p. 252.

16. MICHAEL D. BARBEZAT: *Burning Bodies: Communities, Eschatology, and the Punishment of Heresy in the Middle Ages*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018.

«I have approached the sources in the way that I have in order to better understand the complex of ideas that justified the persecutors' point of view. To realize this goal, I have taken seriously many of their claims that I do not regard as historical fact. To me, tales of demonic inspiration, orgiastic nocturnal rituals, and ceremonial cannibalism are obviously fallacious, but these shocking practices served as part of a unified complex of ideas for the medieval authors who attributed them to religious dissidents. For this reason, I have maintained their pairing with these dissidents' supposed theological positions, analyzing them together as parts of one whole. Even if the integument of medieval authors' topoi of the heretic could be penetrated to reveal the lived reality of religious dissent, these topoi themselves would remain important artifacts of the past that should not be discarded».¹⁷

The same methodological approach is employed in this paper.

For this article, 37 narratives about 44 heretical cases were analysed. The narratives were written from the 1020s through the 1220s by Catholic clerics (primarily monks) from France, the Holy Roman Empire, Italy, and England. Descriptions of the heresies and anti-heretical trials were included not only in anti-heretical treatises and sermons but also in different annals and chronicles, deeds and historical writings, proceedings of synods, and private letters. Some sources include more than one heretical issue. A famous *The Five Books of the Histories*¹⁸ by Raoul Glaber contains the description of heretical cases (two of them, the earliest, are mentioned only there). The burning of heretics in Orleans was described in five different sources.¹⁹ Some stories are very long (historical books or sermons), and sometimes there is only a single sentence (annals and chronicles). Brief references, which contain only rewritten data without new additional details are excluded from the analyses.

The chronological scope of the paper is the 11th and 12th centuries. This was a time of flowering of comparatively small and unconnected heterodox movements in the territory under the jurisdiction of the Roman Catholic Church. Before the millennium, there were only a couple of mentions of charismatic heterodox preachers (Adalbert of Soissons, Miget of Spain, Theuda of Mainz), who were condemned by local Church authorities, without any serious consequences for them or their followers.²⁰ The upper

17. *Ibidem*, p. 9.

18. RAOUL GLABER: *Les cinq livres de ses histoires: 900–1044*, Paris: Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1886, Liber II Cap. XI, XII; Lib. III Cap. VIII; Lib. IV Cap. II.

19. ADÉMAR DE CHABANNES: *Chronique*, Jules Chavanon (ed.), Paris: A. Picard, 1897, III:59; Glaber, *Les cinq livres de ses histoires*: Liber III, Cap. VIII; BENJAMIN EDMOND CHARLE GUÉRARD (ed.): *Cartulaire de l'Abbaye de Saint-Père de Chartres*, Paris: Crapelet, 1840, p. 108–15; André de Fleury: *Vie de Gauzlin, Abbé de Fleury. Vita Gauzlini Abbatiss Floriacensis Monasterii*, Paris: Éditions du Centre National, 1968, pp. 96–103; *Ibidem*, pp. 180–183.

20. For more details, see JEFFREY BURTON RUSSELL: *Dissent and Reform in the Early Middle Ages*, 1st ed., University of California Press, 1965, pp. 10–13, 102–108.

range marked by the papal bull *Vergentis in senium* (March 25, 1199),²¹ which officially proclaimed heresy *lèse-majesté* and treason against God, and urged that accused heretics, like traitors, be passed for punishment from ecclesiastical to secular powers.

The majority of the known anti-heretical cases (in the period analysed in this research) ended with the death of the accused (see Figure 1). The mode of death could vary: one died at the hand of a licentious cleric, one committed suicide, one was lynched by a zealous crowd, one was burned. However, at the time, there were no laws according to which the church could use violence against heretics. Robert Ian Moore, briefly retelling the story of the legalisation of violence against heretics has written that prelates often had some doubts about what should be done with dissidents.²² Raoul Manselli explores the participation of the crowd in the fate of heretics: several of them were lynched (burned) not by official authorities, secular or Church, but by zealous people. If the clergy had some doubts about the doom of the heretics, the mob did not hesitate: if a bishop delayed when guilt was proven – heretics were burned immediately.²³ Bernard of Clairvaux openly applauded this zeal; his opinion «leaves the door to the violence at least ajar».²⁴ Malcolm Lambert sees in these lynchings a social protest of the people against their new passive role in the tripartite structure of society.²⁵ Even if his hypothesis is correct, it is highly doubtful that this social protest was conscious.

All the persecutions of the heretics in the 11th and 12th centuries took place outside the scope of the law: only the imperial laws of Friedrich II (1194–1250) officially prescribed their burning alive (for relapsed or unrepentant heretics).²⁶ Until such violence was officially legalised, the authors had one more goal: to show the audience that the death of heretics was right and approved by God.

«Quite often, vocabulary referring to intellectual engagement as warfare or battle actually pursued an irenic strategy, stressing the polemicist's aversion to violence and ascribing illegitimate violence to the opponent. As mentioned in the discussion of categorization, the issues of moral deficiency, but also of intellectual deficiency or physical deformity played a role».²⁷

21. PL 214:537–539.

22. ROBERT IAN MOORE: *The Origins of European Dissent*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1985, pp. 252–256.

23. RAOUL MANSELLI: *Studi sulle eresie del secolo XII*, Roma: Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo, 1975, pp. 20–26.

24. BEVERLY MAYNE KIENZLE: "Tending the Lord's Vineyard: Cistercians, Rhetoric and Heresy, 1143–1229. 1: Bernard of Clairvaux, the 1143 Sermons and the 1145 Preaching Mission." *Heresis* 25, 1995, pp. 29–61, p. 44.

25. MALCOLM DAVID LAMBERT: *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation*, 3rd ed. Oxford, UK ; Malden, MA: B.H. Blackwell Ltd., 2002, p. 33.

26. RAOUL MANSELLI: *L'eresia del male*, Napoli: Morano, 1980, p. 148 n. 3.

27. STECKEL: "Verging on the polemical," p. 15.

Fate

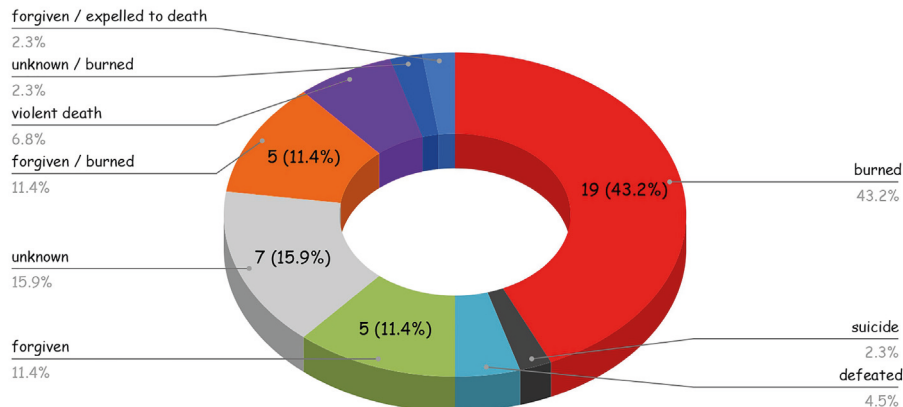


Figure 1

Despite the absence of legal grounds, the process of moral legitimation of the burning of heretics alive was presented in the sources from the first proven case of burning in Orleans in 1022. «They were ordered by the above-said king to be handed over to the fire *in order to be received by the everlasting fires*». This means, as was explicitly demonstrated by Barbezat, that the punishment in this world mirrors the eternal Hell fire in the Other. «It prefigures their ultimate punishment both immediately after death and for eternity in the company of the rest of the damned in Hell».²⁸ This was the opinion of the clerical authors almost two centuries before the official papal approval. Accordingly, the author's task was to demonstrate that the condemned heretics chose the path to hell by themselves, and a stake in this life sanctioned by the Roman Catholic Church was only the response to the heretical desire for endless flames.

The decision-making process of the episcopal courts of the period is unknown. Mediaevalists know only the result (and not always this). They do, however, also have the opinion of the authors of anti-heretical polemics. It is safe to presume that authors tried to shift the responsibility for death to the heretics themselves. For this purpose, different strategies were used. They will be studied individually, below.

Not only the very fact of the death was important. The mode of dying has the same or an even greater significance. For heretics, the most terrifying one was most often chosen. The goal was stated at the beginning of the paper: to terrify. An illustration of this fact is the perception of the stories

28. Studied by BARBEZAT: *Burning bodies*, p. 75.

of heresiarchs Vilgard and Leutard by an 18th-century Catholic canon.²⁹ He writes that the followers of the former were «cut to pieces» (which certainly sounds more intimidating than just being «thrown down by the sword» as in the source). Moreover, he, unlike many scholars, does not omit intimate details about the penetration of bees into the body of Leutard (signifying that these bees were not messengers of God but of Devil).

The most common mode was death by burning. Before the 11th century, it was used mostly against crimes «against nature», such as witchcraft and cannibalism, or lèse-majesté.³⁰ «The obvious way to explain why burning was the most appropriate punishment is with reference to Roman law in which there was growing interest in the eleventh century. ... Far from regularising the crime of heresy, burning exoticised it».³¹ Apart from the fact that it is a very painful death, this was the worst variant for every Christian because it ruined the possibility of the resurrection after the Last Judgement.

SUICIDE

Suicide had the same consequences – a person who committed it lost the last chance for salvation. Étienne Delaruelle shows that the question of salvation was the central subject in the 11th and 12th-century texts.³² Every sin, even a mortal one, could be forgiven through penitence, except for suicide. That of Judas is exemplary, as all the commentators of Matt. 27:3 agree on his case: if the traitor Judas had not killed himself, he could have benefited from the remission of his sins. With his suicide, he definitively deprived himself of salvation.³³ It means that every time an author placed the responsibility for death on a heretic himself, he blamed him for suicide and condemned him to eternal damnation. Among the analysed cases, there are two persons who committed directly named explicit active suicide: Leutard, who jumped into the well,³⁴ and a young girl who escaped from the hands of those who tried

29. DOMENICO BERNINI and GIUSEPPE LANCISI: *Istoria di tutte leresie*, Vol. 3, Venezia: Mainardi, 1728, pp. 345–346.

30. MANSELLI: *Studi sulle eresie del secolo XII*, pp. 24–25.

31. MAJA ANGELOVSKA-PANOVA and ANDREW P. ROACH: «Punishment of Heretics: Comparisons and Contrasts between Western and Eastern Christianity in the Middle Ages.» *Journal of History* XLVII (1), 2012, pp. 145–170, pp. 156–157.

32. ETIENNE DELARUELLE: «Les ermites et la spiritualité populaire,» in *L'eremitismo in Occidente nei secoli XI e XII: Atti della seconda Settimana internazionale di studio, Mendola, 30 Agosto–6 Settembre 1962*, Milano: Società Editrice Vita e Pensiero, 1965, pp. 212–241, p. 219.

33. UWE BRUNN: «Suicide, martyre et hérésie – la mort volontaire dans les textes ecclésiastiques de l'Antiquité chrétienne et du Moyen Âge.» In *Le Suicide. de l'Antiquité au XXI^e siècle*, 2022. https://www.academia.edu/88758483/Suicide_Martyre_Heresie_la_mort_volontaire_dans_les_textes_eccl%C3%A9siastiques_de_lAntiquit%C3%A9_chr%C3%A9tienne_et_du_Moyen_%C3%82ge, p. 21.

34. GLABER: *Les cinq livres de ses histoires*, Liber II, Cap. XI.

to hold her and threw herself into the fire.³⁵ In addition, in the Middle Ages, some other behaviour (false martyrdom or denying of proper penitence) could be regarded as suicide.

Giorgio Cracco proposes another reason for Leutard's suicide, which could not be omitted. He claims that Leutard saw himself (in the eyes of Raoul Glaber) as the unique lord of God's revelation. His defeat in the eyes of his believers meant the defeat of God's truth, which was insupportable.³⁶ It adds to Leutard's guilt the sin of vainglory.

DIABOLICAL INSPIRATION

The earliest authors of anti-heretical polemic in Western Europe explained the terrible choice of heretics to separate themselves from divine salvation by diabolical instigation. Different authors described the seduction of the clerics from Orleans in 1022 variously: Paul, a monk of a Benedictine monastery of Saint-Père de Chartres, fifty years after the event itself mentioned night gatherings, where a demon came in the guise of a little beast.³⁷ Adémar of Chabannes claims that the peasant-heresiarch, who «deceived the churchmen, had with him ashes of dead³⁸ children, which functioned as a magic powder: everybody who consumed them with food or drink became a heretic and could not resist the heresiarch».³⁹ Raoul Glaber blamed a woman: she was «full of devil» and «seduced whomever she wanted», including these clerics.⁴⁰

The practice of the convergence of the images of heresiarchs with that of magicians and ministers of the Antichrist was developed in the Cistercian text from Troyes. There is the heresiarch/magician/slave of the Antichrist who enticed naive believers with fake rich delicious food. In reality, this food was the excrement and urine of beasts and human beings. Those who ate it could no longer leave this heresy.⁴¹ Heretics are not presented here as independent actors, only as messengers of the Antichrist and their victims.

35. MGH SS XVII:778.

36. CRACCO: "Riforma ed eresia in momenti della cultura europea tra X e XI secolo", p. 463.

37. GUÉRARD (ed.): *Cartulaire de l'Abbaye de Saint-Père de Chartres*, p. 112.

38. Dead as a complete opposite to eternal alive Christ.

39. In his later sermon, Adémar wrote about many heresiarchs, who had such a powder made from bones of dead men (no mentions of children), which they deceit under the guise of medicine to naive peasants; and nobody could resist to it. DANIEL F. CALLAHAN: "Heresy and the Antichrist in the Writings of Ademar of Chabannes," in Michael Frassetto and John Hosler (eds.): *Where Heaven and Earth Meet: Essays on Medieval Europe in Honor of Daniel F. Callahan*, Leiden: Brill, 2014, pp. 178–226, p. 226.

40. GLABER: *Les cinq livres de ses histoires*: Liber III, Cap. VIII:26, 31.

41. OLIVIER LEGENDRE: «L'hérésie vue de Clairvaux. Témoignage inédit d'un recueil cistercien d'exempla sur les mouvements hérétiques de la fin du XIIe siècle.» *Heresis* 33, 2000, pp. 69–78, pp. 70–72.

A division between a clerical core and a wider circle of lay believers, typical of such popular religious movements as the Waldenses and the Cathars, will appear later. In this context, it is important that the responsibility of the clerical core in the eyes of inquisitors was much greater than that of the common followers. There is the same situation here: the aforementioned Leutard, Vilgard (deceived by demons in the images of ancient poets)⁴² and Orleans' clerics were followers of demons and their messengers (even if they had their own followers): the peasant with magic powder and a diabolical woman. Former ones were guilty of being so weak as to follow the Devil.

FALSE MARTYRS

In the 12th century, responsibility began to return to the heretics. Glaber, who wrote his account of the heresy in *Monsfortis*, highlighted the description of the devil's army.⁴³ Landulf Senior (c. 1050 – c. 1110) did not mention in his Chronicle any diabolical forces.⁴⁴ These heretics were depicted as false martyrs. «The Church reserves the monopoly on martyrdom while relegating suicide to the devil, to heretics. Any voluntary death accomplished outside the Catholic Church therefore becomes a homicide accomplished in diabolical fury».⁴⁵ Beginning with Saint Augustine of Hippo (345–430), the most influential of the Fathers of the Church for anti-heretical doctrine, false martyrs were the same as suicides, but with the additional sins of pride and vainglory.

At the same time, for heretics themselves, martyrdom was a part of the general appeal to the «golden age», to the primitive Church. The central idea of all the heresies in the Middle Ages was the return to the origins, to the primitive Church.⁴⁶ Every innovation was regarded as a bad thing, and a good innovation should be represented as a return to the sources. This was an aim of the heretics: to restore the pure Church of Christ, in which they were not «as Apostles» but the Apostles themselves.⁴⁷

The same desire not to die his own death, but to be tortured and killed, is mentioned in the letter of a certain monk Heribert.⁴⁸ The precise origin and

42. GLABER: *Les cinq livres de ses histoires*: Liber II, Cap. XII.

43. *Ibidem*, Liber IV, Cap. II.

44. MGH SS VIII:66.

45. BRUNN: «Suicide, martyre et heresie», p. 7.

46. GIOACCHINO VOLPE: *Eretici e moti ereticali dal XI al XIV secolo nei loro motivi e riferimenti sociali*, Milano: Il Rinascimento, 1907, p. 35.

47. ANNE BRENON: *Le choix hérétique: dissidence chrétienne dans l'Europe médiévale*, Cahors: La Louve, 2006, p. 51, 56.

48. GUY LOBRICHON: «Le clair-obscur de l'hérésie au début du XIe siècle en Aquitaine. Une lettre d'Auxerre.» *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 14 (3), 1987, pp. 423–444, p. 442.

dates of this source are unknown, but its wide dispersion allows fixing an actuality of such an idea among clerics.

In the second half of the 12th century, the willingness of those martyred by painful death was changed to courageous acceptance of painful death. Burning clerics from Orleans in 1022 screamed in flames in an attempt to escape.⁴⁹ The citizens of *Monsfortis* around 1034 hid their faces in their hands.⁵⁰ The behaviour of heretics burned in Cologne in 1143⁵¹ and in Reims in 1176⁵² was the opposite: they stepped into a fire with great joy and burned without any complaint. In the 13th and 14th centuries, this became typical for Cathars, but its roots lie in the 12th. In the eyes of the clergy, the heretics become more impertinent in their perfidy.

REJECTION OF PENITENCE

As in the example of Judas, mentioned above, every sinner, even the most miserable, has a chance for salvation through penitence. Every person could be saved by sincere penitence, and precisely the rejection of it guides one to eternal damnation.

Authors emphasised that heretics, who fully rejected their errors, were forgiven and rejoined the Catholic Church. Fully forgiven were those miserably accused in Arras;⁵³ bishop Wazo of Liège asked his colleague Roger of Chalons-sur-Marne to forgive the heretics in his diocese;⁵⁴ and the accused in Liège were protected by the clerics from being stoned while waiting for a papal decision.⁵⁵ All these cases are relatively early. Later, penitent heretics were expected to receive God's approval by ordeal before forgiveness (see below).

There were cases of division within a heretical movement: some of the heretics agreed to be penitent and set free, and others refused and were burned («forgiven/burned» on the Figure 1). The most common was in which heretics totally «persist[ed] in their mistakes» and were burned. As it

49. GLABER: *Les cinq livres de ses histoires*: Liber III, Cap. VIII:31.

50. MGH SS VIII:66.

51. PL 186:677.

52. RADULPHUS DE COGGESHALL: *Chronicon Anglicanum, De expugnatione Terrae Sanctae libellus. Thomas Agnellus de morte et sepultura Henrici Regis Angliae Junioris. Gesta Fulconis Filii Warini. Excerpta ex otis Imperialibus Gervasii Tileburiensis. Ex Codicibus Manuscriptis*, Joseph Stevenson (ed.), London: Longman, 187, p. 123.

53. PL 142:1312.

54. MGS SS VII:226–7.

55. EDMOND MARTÈNE and URSIN DURAND: *Veterum scriptorum et monumentorum historico-rum, dogmaticorum, moralium; amplissima collectio*, Vol. I, Parisiis: Apud Montalant, ad Ripam PP. Augustinianorum, propè Pontem S. Michaelis, 1724, col. 776–778.

was explained by the 13th-century author, «those, who do not want to have a fire of charity, now have one of the burning».⁵⁶

This rejection, in the eyes of the Catholic clergy, made heretics false martyrs, and, therefore, suicides, as discussed above. They were guilty not only in erroneous doctrine but also in suicide, vainglory, and pride.

GOD'S APPROVAL

From 1077 to 1223, God could officially participate in an anti-heretical trial through the ordeal⁵⁷. Some scholars see an ordeal in the early cases, for example, Moore claims a trial in Arras in 1025 could be a form of an ordeal.⁵⁸ Samuel Sospetti assumes the burning alive in Orleans in 1022 was an ordeal rather than a real condemnation to the stake inflicted by the king because the condemned clerics pretended to escape unhurt from fire.⁵⁹ However, these examples contain only traces of ordeal rather than the whole procedure. The destiny of the accused did not depend on the trial's result while the ordeal determined the fate of the defendants.

Any medieval court proceeding was heralded by an oath of innocence taken by both parties, which was considered a kind of ordeal in itself: it was believed that God would not allow a guilty person to swear a false oath⁶⁰ or punish for it.⁶¹

Normally the ordeal was preceded by three days of preparation: fasting, praying, a blessing of ordeal arms, and Holy Communion. «Apart from being a preparation for the trial, the reception of communion served in itself as a means of proving the accusation false and thus became itself the «ordeal» or replaced the oath of purgation». The anger of God himself should «direct against the guilty communicant if he dared to receive communion as if he were innocent».⁶² This ritual is supposed to have its roots in the Gospels (Matthew 26:23), where Jesus Christ himself revealed Judas by bread during

56. ANTONIO BRUSA: «Eretici in Italia meridionale dall'età normanna all'età angioina.» *Quaderni medievali* 1 (June), 1976, pp. 45–61, p. 55.

57. The very concepts of ordeal and judgment (*iudicium*) were interconnected. In Medieval France, the word *iudicium* could be used to mean «ordeal.» ROBERT JACOB: *La Grâce des juges: L'institution judiciaire et le sacré en Occident* (Paris: PUF, 2014), 202.

58. MOORE: *The origins of European dissent*, p. 259.

59. SAMUEL SOSPETTI: «Il rogo degli eretici nel medioevo.» Dissertation, Bologna: Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna, 2013, p. 113.

60. HYAMS, «Trial by Ordeal: The Key to Proof in the Early Common Law», 92.

61. ROBERT JACOB: «Le jugement de Dieu et la formation de la fonction de juger dans l'histoire européenne,» *Archives de Philosophie du Droit* 39 (1994): 91.

62. GODEFRIDUS J. C. SNOEK: *Medieval Piety from Relics to the Eucharist: A Process of Mutual Interaction*, BRILL, 1995, pp. 148–150.

the Last Supper.⁶³ Here there are direct connotations: both the sin of Judas and the sin of a heretic are the betrayal of Christ and his Holy Church, the betrayal of God.

Thus, it is safe to cite the offer of Eucharist to Ramhird⁶⁴ as «an ordeal by the body of Christ» and then his burning by a crowd. He refused to accept the Eucharist from the hands of sinful priests (the ordeal did not happen – God's opinion was left unknown) and was lynched (burned) by a crowd. Nevertheless, from him were left not only ashes (as after heretics from Orleans or *Monsfortis*, for example) but bones too. It means that he passed the ordeal by fire because the fire should consume the whole body of heretics.⁶⁵ It is indicative that the Pope also condemned his burning⁶⁶ (unfortunately, too late for him).

During the period under discussion, the ordeal by Eucharist can be seen only one more time, with the same indefinite result: ex-cleric Dominic William successfully accepted the Eucharist, but after returning home, he fell back into fornication and died «an unworthy death».⁶⁷ Any unnatural death was regarded as a bad sign in the Middle Ages, but it was still better than burning alive.

Regardless of the spiritual correlation between the sin of heresy and the Eucharist, it did not become a common method to test heretics. Most likely the reason was in the relative easiness of successful passing of this ordeal when the Church needed more effective tools in the battle with such a dangerous enemy as heresy. The second reason could be in using the ordeal in its more cruel form as a punishment itself.⁶⁸

Much more precise results were given by ordeal by water or fire. However, for every God decision could exist a human's way out: in the 13th-century manuscript 872 of the Toulouse Municipal Library there are different medical receipts, including how to false the results of the ordeal by hot iron and boiling water.⁶⁹ According to the Robert Jacob, ordeal by water should not pose great difficulties to a good swimmer.⁷⁰ Perhaps it was the apparent ease

63. ANDREA MARASCHI and FRANCESCA TASCA: «Aux limites de l'hérésie et de la magie. L'ordalie du pain et du fromage.» *Food and History* 16 (1), 2018, pp. 49–67, p. 58.

64. MGH SS VII:540.

65. TOMAS HEAD: «Saints, Heretics and Fire: Finding Meaning through the Ordeal,” in Sharon Farmer and Barbara H. Rosenwein (eds.): *Monks & Nuns, Saints & Outcasts: Religion in Medieval Society: Essays in Honor of Lester K. Little*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 2000, pp. 220–38, pp. 234–325.

66. RUSSELL, *Dissent and Reform in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 43–44.

67. MGH SS VIII:193–194.

68. HYAMS, «Trial by Ordeal: The Key to Proof in the Early Common Law,” 100.

69. JEAN DUVERNOY: «La procédure de repression de l'heresie en Occident au Moyen Âge.” *Heresis. Revue d'hésiologie médiévale*. [Centre d'études cathares. Carcassonne] 6, 1986, pp. 45–54, p. 52.

70. JACOB: «Le jugement de Dieu et la formation de la fonction de juger dans l'histoire européenne,» 97–98.

that made such an impression on the crowd: an enraged mob lynched the heretics in Soissons who failed the water ordeal.⁷¹

The first and obligatory condition of the ordeal was full penitence of an accused or his full rejection of the accusation. The ordeal was used to prove the sincerity of this penitence (in the 12th century, in opposition to the 11th, penitence alone appears not to be enough) and in situations where an accused claimed his innocence when witnesses claimed his guilt. Robert Bartlett summarises it as «when the other ways of discovering the truth were not available».⁷²

God also could show his approval (or better to say the authors show that God agrees with the Catholic Church) through natural phenomena. He created the conditions for wise old Hildebert, bishop of Le Mans, to enter his rebellious city, which supported the heretic Henry, by a great conflagration.⁷³ When a stake had been prepared for Cathars near Cologne, «in the city there was the strongest rain ... [but] not a single drop of that strong rain fell where they were burning».⁷⁴

All these examples of ordeal by water or fire pursue the aim of showing that the Church court is always right: there are no cases when an innocent was killed. In the case of Ramhird, there is a possibility of additional political interest to describe the bishop in a negative light, because, during the Investiture Controversy he supported not the Pope, but the German Emperor.⁷⁵ However, he was not burned by the clergy, but lynched by a mob, which only proved the infallibility of the Catholic Church and the necessity of leaving the final decision under its control.

EXCEPTIONS

Thus, all the known violent deaths of the heretics of the 11th and 12th centuries as described by the Catholic clergy had one or several of the following features: suicide, the vainglory of a false martyr, rejection of penitence, demonic inspiration, or divine approval.

71. PL 156:951-953.

72. ROBERT BARTLETT: *Trial by Fire and Water: The Medieval Judicial Ordeal*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986, p. 26.

73. GUSTAVE BUSSON, AMBROISE LEDFU ET EUGÈNE VALLÉE (eds.): *Actus Pontificum Cenomannis in Urbe Degentium*, Le Mans: La Société des Archives Historiques, 1901, p. 413.

74. MGH SS rer. Germ. XVIII:114. There is only one reference to this miracle, while the four descriptions remain silent about it. See CAESARII HEISTERBACENSIS: *Dialogus Miraculorum*, Coloniae Agrippinae: in aedibus Wissenschafts antiquariat und Verlagshandlung Creutzer g. m. b. h., 1851, V:XIX; MGH Rer. Germ. XVIII:114; MGH SS XIII:286; PL 195:13-18.

75. RUSSELL, *Dissent and Reform in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 43-44.

There are four exceptions, two of which could be regarded as confirmation of the rule.

In 1051/1052 in Goslar, certain heretics were hanged by order of the Holy Roman Emperor.⁷⁶ In 1124 in Antwerp, a Nicolaite (?) priest killed heresiarch Tanchelm by a blow to the head.⁷⁷

The only «crime» of the heretics from Goslar was their refusal to kill the chicken.⁷⁸ Tanchelm was a well-known Donatist, blasphemer, and rebel against the Church's orders.⁷⁹ Hanging was a common penalty for a variety of crimes, and murders took place quite often too. In addition, there are no data about their contacts with Devil or suicidal attempts to become martyrs. They did not participate in the ordeals or refuse penitence. Evidently, in the eyes of the Catholic clergy they were worthy of dying, but not by so awful a death as burning alive or suicide.

Impenitent heretics in England, haters of the Eucharist, baptism, and marriage, were judged in Oxford near 1166.⁸⁰ By the order of the king, they were expelled from the city fully naked during the winter, their houses were burned, and all the other people were prohibited from helping them. Obviously, they were condemned to a painful death. However, they were not burned alive. The idea of burning heretics had existed on the continent for more than a century, but it was not used in England. There are several possible reasons. First, according to English chronicler Roger of Howden (died 1202), in 1178 King Henry II (1154–89) generally forbade the burning of heretics in his lands.⁸¹ Second, exile and exclusion were «a constant and fundamental part of social interaction» in England at the time.⁸² «Like all public ceremonies, public executions were based not only upon a set of shared perceptions, but also upon a set of known symbols, altered only with great difficulty».⁸³ A third possible explanation could be found in the secular character of the court, which was not so insistent on burning.

There are three cases where the secular lord gave the final sentence: Orleans in 1022, Goslar in 1051, and Oxford in 1163. In Orleans, the accused died at the stake, but there it had a more political significance of demonstrating

76. MGH SS V:130.

77. MGH SS VI:449.

78. MGH SS VII:228.

79. PAUL FRÉDÉRICQ: *Corpus documentorum inquisitionis haereticae pravitatis neerlandicae: Verzameling van stukken betreffende de pauselijke en bisschoppelijke inquisitie in de Nederlanden*, Vol. 1. Gent: J. Vuylsteke, 1889, p. 16–17.

80. RICHARD HOWLETT (ed.): *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I*, London: Longman & co., 1884, pp. 131–134.

81. ANDREW LARSEN: «Y a-t-il eu des cathares en Angleterre?» *Heresis* 42–43, 2005, pp. 11–32, p. 17.

82. MELISSA SARTORE: *Outlawry, Governance, and Law in Medieval England*, New York: Peter Lang, 2013, p. 76.

83. ESTHER COHEN: *The Crossroads of Justice Law and Culture in Late Medieval France*, Leiden: Brill, 1993, p. 24.

that the new Capetian dynasty took seriously the duty of the defenders of the Christian faith⁸⁴ or was a result of the political struggle between a French king and a count of Blois.⁸⁵ It could be noted that punishment by burning returned to the Latin West after the break in the 10th century against the backdrop of political rebellions.⁸⁶ The additional political background determined the particular severity of the punishment.

A separate case is the burning of Peter of Bruys, described by Peter the Venerable: «Ardent believers took revenge by burning him on the pyre lit by them from the Lord's crosses, after [which] the wicked person [passed] from the natural fire into the eternal fire».⁸⁷ Here, there is a burning without «the necessary» conditions. A possible explanation could be found in the general rhetoric of this «first polemical treatise». Peter the Venerable praised convincing heretics by word but also ordered acting «if necessary, by force of armed civilians».⁸⁸ In his opinion, Peter of Bruys' behaviour was outrageous enough to be condemned by God, and a zealous crowd took the role of the divine arm.

The last and maybe the most crucial goal of anti-heretical stories was to show that revenge is inevitable. Every heretic is an enemy of God and the Roman Catholic Church (the same in the eyes of the clergy) and will suffer the death penalty in this world and eternal damnation in the other.

CONCLUSIONS

The main intention of the Catholic authors, who wrote about heretical affairs during the 11th and 12th centuries, was to depict the otherness of the heretics. This approach serves to create and exaggerate the distance between good Catholic believers, locals, «ours», united as a true Church of God on the one hand and weak and perverted heretics, «theirs», strangers, numerous but divided on the other. A demonised image allows not only legitimating violence against dissident movements but also implies the perfection of the Roman Catholic Church. The very appearance of any heterodox idea

84. HUGUETTE TAVIANI-CAROZZI: «Une Histoire « édifiante » : L'hérésie à Orléans en 1022,» in Claude Carozzi and Huguette Taviani-Carozzi (eds.): *Faire l'événement au Moyen Âge*, Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 2007, pp. 275–98, pp. 20–24.

85. ANGUS BRAID: *The Amalrician Heresy and Illuminist Mysticism in the Central Middle Ages*, 2012, <https://theamalricianheresy.wordpress.com/>, «The Heretics at Orléans».

86. FRANÇOIS BOUGARD: «Le feu de la justice et le feu de l'épreuve, IVe-XIIe siècle,» in Enrico Menestò (ed.): *Il fuoco nell'Alto Medioevo. Spoleto, 12-17 Aprile 2012*, Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 2013, pp. 389–432, p. 425.

87. CC CM 10:5. Grado Giovanni Merlo suggests that it was not a zealous crowd, but the response of the secular authorities claimed by Church prelates to deal with a rebellion. GRADO GIOVANNI MERLO: *Eretici ed eresie medievali*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2019, p. 23.

88. CC CM 10:3.

caused anxiety in mediaeval society. It was necessary to restore confidence in Catholic priests through the depreciation of heresiarchs – initiators of heterodoxy.

Before the proclamation of heresy as *lèse-majesté* in 1199, the clergy tried to fasten the blame on heretics themselves. There was a gradation of reliable punishment according to the heretical behaviour: heretics who imagined themselves as martyrs; heretics directly under a demon's influence; suicides, impenitent heretics, and heretics who failed an ordeal – all of them were worthy of eternal damnation and exclusion from resurrection (through their suicide or burning at the stake). In the absence of markers from this list, heretics were killed in a less cruel way. Fully penitent heretics were to be forgiven, in the 11th century immediately, in the 12th after the successfully passed ordeal.

Just vengeance against religious dissidents was to restore the shaken equilibrium in society. The separation of unrepentant heretics as «others» and their demonstrative punishment strengthened the consolidation of the Catholic Church. The boundary between the two became clearer and more obvious. Heretics' fate should serve as an example for all the good Christians and a model for the other ecclesiastical judges. The former should be warned about the desperate end of every pertinent heretic, the latter should have step-by-step instructions on how to eradicate heresy. Both should see which side God is on.

ABBREVIATIONS

CC CM – Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis.
MGH SS – Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores.
PL – Patrologia Latina.

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