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Rethinking Orthodoxy and Heresy: The Transgression of Peter Waldes

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***Rethinking Orthodoxy and Heresy:
The Transgression of Peter Waldes***

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May 4, 2009

The purpose of this paper is to complicate the complementary categories 'heresy' and 'orthodoxy.' Not only are these terms sometimes uncritically accepted as *a priori* categories, but they also tend to be seen as polar opposites. Heresy and orthodoxy are not, however, eternal categories that are inherently, diametrically opposed to one another. Heresy is a category that is invented and concretized by a dominant 'orthodox' institution in order to solidify orthodoxy and more clearly demarcate its boundaries. Because heresy's existence is predicated on orthodox accusation, its definition is not fixed; likewise, the nature of orthodoxy, existing in dialectic with heresy, is therefore equally fluid. Furthermore, rather than distant opposite poles on a linear spectrum of 'orthodoxy,' what is dubbed 'heresy' can actually be very similar to religious practices and beliefs that are deemed orthodox.¹

In this paper, I will examine the relationship between orthodoxy and heresy through a case study that comes from high medieval France: the twelfth/thirteenth-century Christian 'heresy' 'Waldensianism.' This particular heterodox Christian movement highlights well the way in which heresy is constructed by orthodoxy, shows the close ties and similarities between what is orthodox and what is condemned heretical, and demonstrates how the category of 'heresy' both solidifies the prevailing social order and *actively* constructs the boundaries of orthodoxy. I explore these issues in the five sections that follow; these sections are "Waldensianism" and "The Inquisition," Mendicants and Waldensians: Common Ground, Making Heresy: Exaggerating Difference, Rethinking

¹ This paper was by no means a solitary project; for its completion I owe many people a great debt of gratitude. I would like to thank especially Paula Coeey, Susanna Drake and Ellen Arnold for the guidance and feedback they have given me throughout this project. Many thanks to Serena Ferente for first introducing me to the Waldensians in her tutorial at King's College: London. Thanks to all of Macalester's history and religious studies faculty, without whom I could not have written this paper. Last but not least, I want to thank my family and friends for all their support throughout not only this project, but my entire collegiate career.

Orthodoxy: The Waldensians and Transgression, and finally, Transgression, Heteropraxis and Doxa.

“Waldensianism” and “The Inquisition”

Before we proceed further, however, a word on definitions is in order. Especially because the goal of this paper is to wrestle with the complexities of the categories 'orthodoxy,' 'heresy,' and the relationship between the two, we would be remiss to accept uncritically 'Waldensianism' as a simple and unproblematic label for an equally simple, monolithic category. Waldensianism is useful to describe this movement and, for simplicity's sake, is used throughout this paper; but first we need to acknowledge the term's historical context.

The term Waldensianism is derived from the name of the religious movement's founder, Peter Waldes. Waldes was a wealthy cloth merchant in the city of Lyons. Around the year 1170, Waldes had a profound conversion experience after reading the gospels and works of Church Fathers he had had commissioned to be translated into the vernacular. Peter Waldes “resolved to devote himself to evangelical perfection,” renounced his fortune and began a career of itinerant preaching, gathering followers as he went. Even after Waldes' condemnation as a heretic, his followers continued to proliferate for years afterwards.² The term 'Waldensians' arose contemporaneously with this early movement, but was a term used by outsiders to describe the movement rather than as a term of self-distinction. Writing in the early fourteenth century, inquisitor Bernard Gui accurately notes that “We [inquisitors] call them 'Waldensians' or the 'Poor of Lyons', they however among themselves call themselves 'Brothers' or 'Poor of Christ'.”³

² Walter Wakefield and Austin P. Evans eds. *Heresies of the High Middle Ages: Selected Sources Translated and Annotated*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1969). p. 208-210

³ Peter Biller “Why no Food? Waldensian Followers in Bernard Gui's *Practica inquisitionis* and *culpe*.” As published in *Texts and the Repression of Medieval Heresy*. Caterina Bruschi and Peter Biller eds.

Likewise, the addition of 'ism' to the inquisitors' label Waldensians was an outside label applied to Waldes' followers. The term 'Waldensianism' was not one used by the Waldensians themselves; neither Peter Waldes nor his followers ever professed to be anything but Christians, nor did they espouse an alternative to Christianity to which they would have followers 'convert' (similar to how one would not speak of 'Franciscanism' or 'Dominicanism'). Waldensianism is, rather, a scholarly construction to describe the movement that followed Peter Waldes. For clarity's sake I use the terms 'Waldensians' and 'Waldensianism' throughout this essay, but the imported nature of these terms must be stated at the outset.

Yet the outside imposition of the label 'Waldensianism' only scratches the surface of medieval heresies' textual and historiographical problematics. Next—and perhaps more pressing—is the issue of how large a role the inquisition played in reifying, constructing, and even wholly inventing the heresy later labeled 'Waldensianism.' Before we can implement this heresy as an appropriate example on which to build a theory of heresy and orthodoxy, we must address the problems intrinsic to the construction of 'Waldensianism,' and even 'the Inquisition.'

In spite of the term inquisition's contemporary connotations, the thirteenth-century inquisition was not a widespread institution bent on uprooting heresy. Far from the omniscient leviathan of persecution that 'the Inquisition' is often assumed to be, the medieval inquisition was, in fact, an extremely decentralized and localized process. Edward Peters regards this common view of a towering religious institution as “the myth of *The Inquisition*” and Henry Ansgar Kelly asserts:

When capitalized and given a definite article, as "the Inquisition" or "the Holy Office of the Inquisition," the term is often either personified and endowed with a diabolical omniscience or made to stand for a central intelligence

agency with headquarters at the papal curia...there was never a permanently constituted congregation and tribunal of inquisition against heresy until the sixteenth century. Before then, there were only papal inquisitors, sometimes sporadically appointed, sometimes more permanently commissioned, but not organized over larger areas than individual dioceses, provinces, or kingdoms.⁴

In fact, the inquisition—antithetical to the notion of a specialized institution with the *sole* purpose of uprooting heresy—was a process that became “the universal method of trial procedure in all ecclesiastical courts...the medieval Latin sources always scrupulously distinguish between inquisition as a general process and inquisition against heresy by referring to the latter as *inquisitio heretice pravitatis*, 'inquisition of heretical depravity.'”⁵ Thus, when speaking of the 'inquisition' and the role it had in the relationship between heresy and orthodoxy, it is important to remember that it was never a completely uniform, centralized institution.

The inquisition was clearly a vital point (perhaps *the* vital point) of contact between the orthodox Catholic Church and the heretical 'Waldensians,' and the medieval inquisitors consequently kept copious records of their deponents' testimonies. But how are we to approach these documents? Far from Alexander Murray's overly bold statement that the inquisitorial records were “the nearest medieval equivalent of a tape recorder,” the medieval inquisitors' records—although a great wealth of information—are exceedingly problematic sources to work with.⁶

Around 1230, the creation and distribution of a “specialised technical literature” aided the inquisitors in Languedoc. These “manuals” for interrogation listed, with increasing specificity, the various beliefs of known heretical groups such as the the

⁴ Henry Ansgar Kelly. “Inquisition and the Prosecution of Heresy: Misconceptions and Abuses” *Church History*, 58 (Dec. 1989). p. 440

⁵ *Ibid* 441

⁶ John H. Arnold *Inquisition and Power: Catharism and the Confessing Subject in Medieval Languedoc*. (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2001). p.5

'Waldenses.'⁷ Thanks to these manuals, the inquisitors could tailor their questions to draw out answers within this framework, likely eliciting a response which they might cast to fit the mold of their preconceived image of the heresy in question. This process of shaping responses adds complexity to the already problematic relationship between inquisitor and deponent—a relationship that John H. Arnold approaches with an appropriately critical eye.

Arnold suggests that historians engage with the inquisitorial deposition as a “text (as preferred by literary scholars)” in order to pay adequate deference to “the power of language” and the role it plays in these sources.⁸ Arnold cautions against reading these inquisitorial records as “verbatim” Latin translations of the responses that deponents gave to the inquisitors' questions. Instead, he advocates a hermeneutic that recognizes “the context of power that brought about their [the inquisitorial records] creation” and that “renders problematic the more positivist desire to read 'through' the records” in a way that presumably allows one to hear the long lost voices of their deponents.⁹

Adopting a Foucauldian paradigm, Arnold argues that the inquisition's deponents were caught up in the role of “a confessing subject” in the “authoritative discourse” of the inquisitors; consequently, the deponents were “drawn into a particular kind of linguistic context (inquisition) and thus made to collude in taking on a particular kind of identity (confessional).”¹⁰ All of the extant inquisitorial depositions are inextricably bound up in this coercive power dynamic, and while we need not throw out Waldensianism as a mere inquisitorial fabrication, it is vital to acknowledge the role the inquisition played in

⁷ Caterina Bruschi and Peter Biller eds. *Texts and the Repression of Medieval Heresy*. (York, UK: University of York Medieval Press, 2003). p.6

⁸ John H. Arnold “Inquisition, Texts and Discourse.” Published in *Texts and the Repression of Medieval Heresy*. Caterina Bruschi and Peter Biller eds. (York, UK: University of York Medieval Press, 2003). p.63

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ John H. Arnold *Inquisition and Power: Catharism and the Confessing Subject in Medieval Languedoc*. (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2001). p.11-12

concretizing its subjects' testimonies into the supposedly fixed category of 'Waldensians.'

Although the inquisition was never the centralized, omniscient institution it is sometimes envisioned as, it was indeed an ominous presence in the daily lives of countless Europeans. James B. Given couples this coercive power dynamic of the confessional with the inquisition's impressive and intimidating archival skills (what he calls the "technology of documentation") to paint a vivid picture of the terrifying experience of sitting before the inquisition. Given writes:

In the hands of the inquisitors, they [the inquisition's archives] were transformed into active tools for the generation of further information and the coercion of suspects. The care with which the inquisitors prepared and ordered their documents gave them unusual control of the written word, a control that in turn enabled them to diagnose and manipulate the social reality that surrounded them. Perhaps even more important, it gave them effective mastery over the spoken word...a different sort of spoken word: that uttered under interrogation by the suspected heretic. These words, pregnant with danger for those who spoke them, were often veiled, misleading, and obscure. The inquisitors, thanks to knowledge preserved in their archives and set forth in ordered fashion in their manuals, could reshape this oblique discourse so as to reveal the damning "truth" that they believed lay hidden within it.¹¹

It was not only the deponent, but the whole town that felt the foreboding power of the inquisitorial archives whenever an inquisitor was in their midst. Caterina Bruschi and Peter Biller highlight the terrible importance of inquisitorial records in the eyes of those who feared condemnation. They point out that there were several plots to steal these records, and argue that such attempts speak to the "awesome power and danger" these archives held for those who feared their names might lie within their tomes.¹²

While it is crucial to acknowledge the inquisition's role in constructing and concretizing the heresies it sought to uncover, it is equally important to be wary of extending this argument beyond its scope of utility. In response to the dizzying

¹¹ James B. Given. *Inquisition and Medieval Society: Power, Discipline, and Resistance in Languedoc*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997). p.50-51

¹² Bruschi and Biller 6

complexities embedded within the inquisitorial records, some historians have simply thrown up their hands to say 'well then there was no such thing as Waldensianism, only a spate of multiform 'Waldensianisms!' This is not, however, a view that I accept; there was indeed a religious movement, inspired by Peter Waldes, that was uniform enough to warrant the designation 'Waldensianism.'¹³

In his article "Goodbye to Waldensianism?" Peter Biller makes a convincing argument against abandoning of the notion of 'Waldensianism.' Biller points out that the extant sources regarding Waldensianism come predominantly from inquisition depositions given by peasants, and are therefore "bottom-heavy." This is to be contrasted to the surviving medieval sources from the institutional Catholic Church which, with their abundance of information regarding bishops, head abbots, popes, church councils etc., are decidedly "top-heavy."¹⁴ Peter Biller posits that, were the source material for both heresy and orthodoxy inverted, it is likely that we would see a much greater level of diversity within the Catholic Church, and far more uniformity and organization within Waldensianism.¹⁵

It is doubtful that any scholar would assert that the extant evidence for the Catholic Church's bureaucratic organization and doctrinal uniformity seen in Church councils provide adequate evidence for unwavering uniformity all the way down to the last layperson in the smallest diocese; so why assume the opposite in regards to a lack of institutional Waldensian organization based almost solely on sources from outside of the Waldensian hierarchy? Biller argues that such a conclusion constitutes a textbook example of "*reductio ad absurdum*" and that the subsequent "scholarly erosion of Waldensianism and its dissolution into the plural Waldensianisms of local communities

¹³ Peter Biller "Goodbye to Waldensianism?" *Past and Present* 192 (Aug. 2006). p.28-29

¹⁴ *Ibid* 21

¹⁵ *Ibid* 22

and then, beyond them, into the Waldensianisms of the individuals they contained, is no more and no less valid than the erosion of any lived faith that has an identity and a community of different individuals of varying minds and experience.”¹⁶ Though it is crucial to remember that 'Waldensian' and 'Waldensianism' are scholarly constructions never used by the 'Poor of Christ' to describe themselves, it would nevertheless be a mistake to throw out the notion of Waldensianism altogether.

Mendicants and Waldensians: Common Ground

Now, with these complexities intrinsic to the 'inquisition' and 'Waldensianism' in mind, we may proceed with an analysis of heresy and orthodoxy using Waldensianism as our guide. To begin, I wish to challenge the notion that heresy and orthodoxy are polar opposites. Rather than irreconcilable opposite poles of an orthodox/heterodox spectrum, orthodoxy and heresy can be quite similar. I hope to demonstrate this by showing the manifold ways in which Waldensianism was remarkably akin to the mendicant friars' (the Franciscans and the Dominicans) orthodox religious movements. In fact, all three movements arose out of a single common trend in twelfth and thirteenth century European religiosity.

Herbert Grundmann was among the first historians to acknowledge mendicancy and heresy's "common point of departure" in the twelfth century.¹⁷ The Franciscans, Dominicans and Waldensians all rose out of a religious ethos that emphasized a close following of the lives of the apostles—*vita apostolica*—"with special emphasis on the practice of poverty, itinerant preaching or both."¹⁸ More specifically, Ernest W. McDonnell describes *vita apostolica* as having "embraced three basic principles:

¹⁶ *Ibid* 29

¹⁷ Herbert Grundmann, Steven Rowan trans. *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995). p.xviii

¹⁸ *Ibid* xix

imitation of the primitive church...a passionate love for souls at home and far afield; and evangelical poverty in common, either predicated on mendicancy or mitigated by the work of one's own hands.”¹⁹ Indeed apostolic renewal was “voiced by reforming and 'heretical' movements alike.”²⁰ All of these groups sought to establish a form of religious life that was based on voluntary religious poverty and asceticism, but, because it entailed itinerant preaching, one which was also outside the parameters of the previously established Benedictine or Cistercian forms of monastic life.

Lester K. Little expounds on this view of mendicancy and heresy's common origin, delving deep into just what the nature of this “common point of departure” was. Little suggests that apostolic poverty arose as the ideal form of religious life for these three movements as a response to the advent of a “profit economy” in twelfth-century Europe. In this new economic atmosphere, trade was flourishing and becoming increasingly monetized. The new profit economy was accompanied by “the emergence of a wholly different attitude, one that calculated values to see whether any particular activity or transaction would be profitable.”²¹ However, many people found this new attitude exceedingly disconcerting. There was concern that monetary transactions, prefaced solely on profit, were overshadowing and supplanting the personal relations previously central to economic transactions, creating fear of “impersonalism...and moral uncertainty.”²²

It was in response to these economic/moral concerns that there coalesced the new religious spirit of *vita apostolica*, in which both orthodox mendicancy and 'heresies' took

¹⁹ Ernest W. McDonnell “The 'Vita Apostolica': Diversity or Dissent” *Church History*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Mar., 1955). p.15

²⁰ R.I. Moore. “Afterthoughts on the Origins of European Dissent” in *Herese and the Persecuting Society in the Middle Ages: Essays on the work of R.I. Moore*. Michael Frassetto ed. (Leiden, NL: Brill Academic Publishers, 2006). p.297

²¹ Lester K. Little. *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978). p. 18

²² *Ibid* 19

root. Little points out that, if one maps out the “most advanced commercial and industrial areas” of Europe, the map of where apostolic heresies like the Waldensians flourished corresponds all but perfectly with those urban centers of commerce.²³ Little cites the work of Gerhoh of Reichersberg (1093-1169) as further evidence of the monetized profit economy being the impetus for a new form of religious life predicated on apostolic poverty. The last of Gerhoh’s works, *On the Fourth Nightwatch*, divides Christian history into four epochs, each with a distinctive threat to Christianity—first, the persecution of Christians, then the encroachment of heresy, then the decay of morality, and finally, for the eleventh and twelfth centuries, *greed*.²⁴

Thus the Franciscans, Dominicans, and Waldensians are all tied together in the fundamental sense that they are similar apostolic responses to a common social reality. Here we see that, far from being diametrically opposed 'orthodox' and 'heretical' groups, the orthodox mendicants and the heretical Waldensians grew up side by side within the same religious atmosphere, responding to *the same spiritual concerns*. Furthermore, if we focus our gaze in closer, we will see the continuity and similarity between 'heresy' and 'orthodoxy' comes into particularly sharp relief. For example, a close comparison of the charismatic founders of the orthodox Franciscans and the heretical Waldensians highlights multiple parallels.

A comparison between Francis of Assisi and Peter Waldes is particularly productive because both figures served as the exemplar of religious life for their respective movements. The similarities between the lives of Francis of Assisi and Peter Waldes of Lyons are truly remarkable. First, both Francis and Waldes were involved in the lucrative cloth industry in urban areas prior to their conversion to a religious life. Though

²³ *Ibid* 113

²⁴ *Ibid* 111

Francis himself never fully entered the business, his father was a very wealthy cloth merchant in Assisi, and Francis helped him with buying and selling his goods.²⁵ Likewise, Peter Waldes was a remarkably wealthy cloth merchant who was truly “one of the great men of Lyons.”²⁶ This is significant evidence in support of Little’s thesis as both these figures—probably the single most influential mendicant and the single most influential heretic—were steeped in the culture of a new profit economy that they came to so strongly reject.

Furthermore, both Francis and Waldes had profound conversion experiences that compelled them to live religious lives. Walter Wakefield and Austin P. Evans describe how Peter Waldes “underwent a religious experience most appropriately likened to that which affected Francis of Assisi a little later, one that led him to rid himself of his wealth and his family and to appear in the streets with urgent appeals to his fellow citizens to repent.”²⁷ Indeed it is crucial to point out that the *primary* reaction of both Francis and Waldes was not one of increased prayer and devotion, not one of an ascetic and secluded rejection of the world, but rather one characterized by an impassioned rejection of wealth and itinerant preaching within society, emulating the lives of the apostles. In Thomas of Celano’s life of Francis—composed in the mid-thirteenth century—Francis is described as becoming “genuinely contemptuous of money” after his conversion. Just as Francis took his money and “threw it on a window sill, treating it as if it were dust,”²⁸ Peter Waldes also literally threw his money away, “casting some money among the village

²⁵ *Ibid* 146

²⁶ *Ibid* 121

²⁷ Wakefield & Evans *Heresies of the High Middle Ages: Selected Sources* 34

²⁸ Paul Halsall ed. “Thomas of Celano: First and Second Lives of Saint Francis.” *Internet Medieval Sourcebook* (Aug. 1998), <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/stfran-lives.html> (accessed November 15, 2008).

In light of Little’s thesis, this statement takes on new significance. It is not merely wealth that Francis is rejecting—just as Little suggests the *monetary* profit economy precipitates a desire for *vita apostolica*—but *money* specifically.

poor.”²⁹ According to another medieval biography, Peter Waldes, immediately upon taking up his vow of apostolic poverty, endeavored to rid himself of all worldly things, “selling all his possessions, in contempt of the world he broadcast his money to the poor.” Again in similar fashion, Francis not only contemptuously cast away money, but also immediately began using it for philanthropy; “When the new soldier of Christ arrived at the church...finding a poor priest inside, Francis kissed his sacred hands and offered him the money he was carrying.”³⁰ These parallels are emblematic of the *profound* similarities between the religious life founded by Peter Waldes—who was declared heretical along with his followers—and the much beloved Francis of Assisi, who, along with his followers, was deemed orthodox.

Making Heresy: Exaggerating Difference

'Heresy,' therefore, need not be envisioned as something that is necessarily distant and vastly different from orthodoxy, but can be nestled right up against orthodoxy. In order to move toward a more concrete definition of 'heresy,' it is useful to turn to Talal Asad's discussion of these same medieval heresies. As we have seen with the Waldensians (who were exceedingly similar to the Franciscans and wanted nothing more than to be accepted into the Catholic fold), Asad points out that heresy “does not signify active dissent.”³¹ Further, Asad critiques a functionalist interpretation (particularly that of Janet Nelson) that the margins of social life precipitate heresy on the ground that “its assumption of society as an integrated totality, within which cosmology and social structure support and reflect each other” is fundamentally flawed. Instead, Asad suggests—in a paradigm which is in perfect concert with Little's views on the relationship

²⁹ Paul Halsall ed. “The Conversion of Peter Waldo.” *Internet Medieval Sourcebook* (Aug. 1998), <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/waldo1.html> (accessed November 16, 2008).

³⁰ Wakefield and Evans 209-210

³¹ Talal Asad “Medieval Heresy: An Anthropological View.” *Social History*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Oct. 1986). p.355

between *vita apostolica* and the profit economy—that “religious ideologies and institutions are not to be conceived as ‘reflecting’ or ‘affirming’ society, as though they stood outside it, but as forming a distinctive *part of society*.”³²

The similarities held in common by heresy and orthodoxy have not gone completely unnoticed by scholars of religion. In his book *The Functions of Social Conflict*, Lewis Coser points out that “Unlike the apostate, the heretic claims to uphold the group's values and interests, only proposing different means to this end or variant interpretations of the official creed...the heretic calls forth all the more hostility in that he still has much in common with his former fellow members in sharing their goals.”³³ Likewise, in “Toward a Sociology of Heresy,” George Zito argues that “in heresy, the speaker employs *the same language* as the parent group, retains its values, but attempts to order its discourse to some other end.”³⁴ These two sociologists deserve credit for their recognition of the manifold similarities between ‘heresy’ and ‘orthodoxy;’ yet, the Waldensian example raises questions for both definitions. Peter Waldes was never “proposing different means” to the same religious end as others; in fact, he and Francis of Assisi had arguably the *same means* for the *same end*—apostolic poverty and itinerant preaching to cleanse Christian souls and help to unburden the urban poor.

In a similar vein to the analyses forwarded by Coser and Zito, Lester Kurtz describes the heretic as “an intense union of both nearness and remoteness...a deviant

³² *Ibid* 351-352

While I accept and support Asad's assertion that cosmology/religious ideology does not simply reflect social structure but is embedded within society, I would caution against reading religious ideology as a hermetically sealed aspect of culture. Religious ideology, like other facets of society, does not perfectly recreate some kind of bounded social reality, but rather interacts with other aspects of the culture in question. Because this ideology exists in dialogue with other aspects of the culture in which it is embedded, it would be a mistake to divorce it entirely from society and presume that religious ideologies have nothing at all to tell us about the social context in which they are developed.

³³ Jacques Berlinerblau. “Toward a Sociology of Heresy, Orthodoxy, and Doxa.” *History of Religions*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (May, 2001). p.335

³⁴ George Zito “Toward a Sociology of Heresy.” *Sociological Analysis*, Vol. 44 No. 2 (Summer, 1983). p.125. Emphasis original.

insider.”³⁵ Again, Kurtz offers an astute and laudable recognition of the heretic as a kind of “insider” who is characterized by “nearness.” Yet whence the “remoteness” which he sees in paradoxical union with “nearness?” Heresy’s “remoteness” is, I argue, only established vis-a-vis orthodox *rhetoric*.

The striking similarities between Waldes and Francis illustrate that, were they divorced from the presence of an overarching politico-religious institution that proclaims one 'orthodox' and the other 'heretical,' these two religious movements might be construed as part of *the same movement* of apostolic poverty. It is thus the rhetoric of the reigning religious institution—not some preexisting intrinsic difference—that creates “remoteness” as a characteristic of heresy.

Mary Douglas' views on the rhetorical exaggeration of disparity between social groups will be helpful in further elucidating this point about orthodoxy's characterization of heresy as utterly 'remote' or 'different.' In her book *Purity and Danger* Douglas argues that

ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by *exaggerating the difference between within and without*, above and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created (emphasis added).³⁶

Thus, following Douglas, the exaggeration of difference between orthodoxy and what was deemed heretical was crucial to the entrenchment of the social order (or at least, as Douglas says, “a semblance of order”). That is to say that, despite heresy's similarity to orthodoxy, a discourse of otherness is deployed by the prevailing religio-political institution in question, effacing their similarity in order to solidify a sense of rigidity, order, and permanence of authority in the social structure.

³⁵ Berlinerblau 335

³⁶ Mary Douglas *Purity and Danger* Boston, MA: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969, c1966 (1980 printing). p.5

This effacement of heresy's similarity to orthodoxy is clearly present in our case study. In the *Chronicon universale anonymi Laudunensis* it is written that Peter Waldes “had amassed a great fortune through the wicked practice of lending at interest.”³⁷ This is the *only* form of commerce associated with Waldes here. Yet, as we have seen, Waldes was primarily a cloth merchant. The most *reliable* source for Waldes' life comes from Stephen of Bourbon, owing its validity to the fact that Stephen had “firsthand testimony...from those who had known Waldes.”³⁸ Stephen, however, does not include any mention of Waldes as a usurer. Though Stephen was also writing in condemnation of the Waldensians as heretical, he did not add usury to the list of Waldes' faults; as Stephen had the more reliable sources for his account, it is prudent to assume Waldes' primary source of income was from the cloth business, *not* usury.

Furthermore, the “rudimentary forms of banking” such as lending money that Waldes engaged in were but a minor piece of his rather remarkable array of commercial enterprises. Celebrated medieval historian Lester K. Little portrays Peter Waldes' commercial activity around the time of his conversion in 1170. Little, however, portrays money lending as quite tangential to Waldes' central cloth business. 'Usury' (though Little certainly never uses that pejorative term) is shown to be merely one of many other supplementary forms of income for Waldes. In addition to buying and selling cloth, Waldes also “invested money in the manufacture of cloth,” and profited from the myriad “pastures, arable fields, woods, ponds and streams, vineyards, ovens and mills” that he owned.³⁹ This is quite the list indeed!

Here we see a good example of how orthodox authors are careful to efface similarity while simultaneously “exaggerating the difference between within and without”

³⁷ Wakefield & Evans 200-201

³⁸ Wakefield & Evans 208

³⁹ Little 121

in order to shore up the sense of order in society.⁴⁰ While his other commercial endeavors are ignored, Waldes is depicted as profiting *solely* from usury. This has a rhetorical effect of rendering his later acts of charity null and void, making the sum-total of his actions zero instead of positive. Even when the *Chronicon universale anonymi Laudunensis* mentions his post-conversion generosity, it is depicted as making “restitution to those from whom he had profited unjustly,” again deemphasizing the positive effect of his actions and stressing his charity as merely making amends.⁴¹ Furthermore, the equation of Waldes with usury sets him up as having been unorthodox even before his conversion, adding to the depiction of his character a sense of rigid, uncompromising and static divergence from orthodoxy. Waldes is typified into a presumed fixed category of 'heretic' where his otherness to orthodoxy is exaggerated at the expense of a more nuanced and detailed picture of his commercial endeavors. This is meant to reify the 'bad-heretic' and 'good-orthodox' as preexistent and unchanging categories into which people/groups can be unproblematically placed. Difference is exaggerated; similarity is effaced.

It is manifest that Peter Waldes' dissimilarity to orthodoxy was exaggerated as he was declared heretical; but how does the second half of Douglas' assertion—that through such an exaggeration of difference a “semblance of order is created”—play out in our Waldensian case study? The work of R.I. Moore is particularly helpful in answering this question. In his magnum opus *The Formation of a Persecuting Society* Moore examines the European origins of persecution “as a general phenomenon” in the High Middle Ages. Moore argues that several factors (but perhaps most relevantly the growth of universities and the resultant rise of an educated clerical elite that, in the face of growing anti-clericalism and anti-sacerdotalism, was staunchly devoted to consolidating both the

⁴⁰ Douglas 5

⁴¹ Wakefield and Evans 201

power of the institutional Church and their own power within it) lead to the formation of a 'persecuting society' that otherized and then attacked marginal groups during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It was in these centuries that "socially sanctioned violence began to be directed, *through established governmental, judicial and social institutions*" against certain groups (such as Jews and heretics) that existed at the margins of society.⁴²

For both Moore's harmony with the views espoused by Douglas⁴³ and for our purpose of examining heresy's role in constructing orthodoxy, it is crucial that this persecution is *institutional* rather than rooted in spontaneous popular animosity. Moore highlights that "heretics and Jews owed their persecution in the first place not to the hatred of the people, but to the decisions of princes and prelates."⁴⁴ He goes beyond highlighting the institutionalized nature of this persecution to try and ferret out the causes, goals and results of institutional persecution.

Moore's analysis is by turns Durkheimian and Weberian. First, in an analysis of the impetus to institutionalized persecution, Moore explicitly follows in the footsteps of Emile Durkheim; he argues:

the purpose of defining individuals or groups as deviant...[is] to reinforce the unity of the rest. The exercise is particularly necessary at times of rapid social change and increasing differentiation, when the redefinition of social values and the reaffirmation of social unity is called for.⁴⁵

As we have seen (particularly in Little's analysis), the "rapid social change and increasing differentiation" Moore speaks of pervaded twelfth century Europe in various forms: there was at that time an increasingly monetized society, a resultant rise in the wealth and prominence of the merchant class, and the growth of universities that produced literate

⁴² R.I. Moore *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250*. (New York, NY: Blackwell, 1987). p.3-5. Emphasis original.

⁴³ Moore was deeply influenced by Douglas, not merely citing her but even paying homage to her impact by entitling a chapter of his seminal work 'Purity and Danger.'

⁴⁴ *Ibid* 123

⁴⁵ *Ibid* 106

(and wealthy) clerical, mercantile and secular elites. This time of social turbulence—a time in which class differentiation and a consequent labeling of societal deviance took place—coincided with an epoch of political institutionalization, bureaucratization and solidification that took place throughout much of Western Europe (a development that owed much to the aforementioned rise in literate individuals produced by the growing urban universities).

It is here that Moore, to some extent, breaks with Durkheim and moves closer to Max Weber. He argues that, although the Durkheimian defense of social unity through labeling and persecuting deviance still play a vital role, the roots of persecution were embedded less in *popular* animosity than they were in institutionalized governmental and Church authority; these two types of authority were evolving in what Moore calls “a Weberian progression towards the establishment of a bureaucratic state.”⁴⁶ Within such a ‘Weberian progression,’ Moore suggests that in order “to create a recognizable apparatus of state, the earliest developments always include the appearance of a hierarchy of specialized agencies for the enforcement of order,” agencies that then endeavor to sift out people or groups that are potentially dangerous to the prevailing social structure.⁴⁷

Moore suggests that these developments led to the formation of a ‘persecuting society’ that actively oppressed, expelled and attacked lepers, Jews, homosexuals, prostitutes and, as most interests us in this essay, heretics. Moore does not, however, fall prey to the oversimplifying tendency to assume that heresy is an unproblematic label one can easily and objectively apply to a preexistent phenomenon of ‘that-which-is-not-orthodoxy.’ He recognizes the complex relationship between the two and reminds his

⁴⁶ *Ibid* 113. ‘State’ here need not connote strictly the post-Westphalian nation-state but should also encompass the religio-political state of ‘Christendom’ as envisioned and governed (or at least attempted to be governed) by the papacy.

⁴⁷ *Ibid* 109

reader that “heresy exists only in so far as authority chooses to declare its existence.”⁴⁸

After this (necessary) caveat about heresy, Moore goes on to argue that “the attack on heresy” was one way in which the “concentration of 'religious' functions in the hands of an increasingly professional clergy” was further entrenched into European society.⁴⁹

Thus does Moore deftly portray the way in which Douglas' theory (exaggerating difference and the consequent concretization of social order) plays out in the persecution of marginal groups during the High Middle Ages. Persecution of heretics was not only a way of quelling dissidents, but (of equal if not greater importance to those enmeshed in the bureaucratic machinery of the state) also a way for those in power to legitimate their authority and the social structure over which that authority presided. Though the persecution of marginal groups for the sake of shoring up and legitimizing institutional authority was a general trend across various ruling institutions in eleventh and twelfth-century Europe, the persecution of heretics (such as the Waldensians) was uniquely and especially authorizing for the Catholic Church's position as the proper and permanent defender of 'right religion,' of orthodoxy.

We see that it is a rhetorical exaggeration of difference/effacement of similarity that creates heresy out of what otherwise might be subtle dissimilarities, and that this exaggeration in turn legitimizes the perceived rectitude and permanence of orthodox social structure and the institutions that support it. Yet the accusation of heresy not only functions to help support the prevailing institutionalized social structure, but also *actively defines* just what orthodoxy is in both doctrine and practice. Scholars of religion have developed a myriad of theories that help to shed light on this intricate interaction of accusation and definition. I will turn now to focus on the complexities of how orthodoxy

⁴⁸ *Ibid* 68

⁴⁹ *Ibid* 134

is itself dialectically defined by heresy.

Rethinking Orthodoxy: The Waldensians and Transgression

The concept of 'transgression' as elucidated by Michel Foucault and Michael Taussig provides a helpful theoretical framework for looking at heresy and orthodoxy; we may envision heresy as 'transgressing' the boundaries of orthodoxy. Both of these authors explicitly suggest transgression's utility for imagining 'the sacred.' Taussig argues that because "transgression turns out to be the quintessence of intellectual and emotional uncertainty," it is perfect for discussing "what is referred to as sacred."⁵⁰ Foucault goes perhaps even farther to argue that "transgression prescribes...the sole manner of discovering the sacred in its unmediated substance" and that transgression "was *originally* linked to the divine, or rather, from its limit marked by the sacred it opens the space where the divine functions."⁵¹ Thus, this theory of transgression seems obviously applicable to religious issues such as the relationship between heresy and orthodoxy.

The theory itself might best be described in two parts; the first part being *what transgression has to do with*, and the second being exactly *what transgression does*. Furthermore, both of these two categories operating within transgression are themselves twofold. Transgression *has to do with* two things: the definition of two sides of an imagined boundary, and the manifestation of the boundary itself. Transgression is not simply an 'othering' or a new spin on Hegelian dialectics (although the theory undoubtedly owes much to Hegel), but an active movement. Foucault eloquently describes transgression thus:

Transgression, then, is not related to the limit as black to white, the

⁵⁰ Michael Taussig. "Transgression" in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* Mark C. Taylor ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998). p.350

⁵¹ Michel Foucault "A Preface to Transgression" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977). p.30 & 37 respectively. Emphasis added.

prohibited to the lawful, the outside to the inside, or as the open area of a building to its enclosed spaces. Rather, their relationship takes the form of a spiral which no simple infraction can exhaust. Perhaps it is like a flash of lightning in the night which, from the beginning of time, gives a dense and black intensity to the night it denies, which lights up the night from the inside, from top to bottom, and yet owes to the dark the stark clarity of its manifestation, its harrowing and poised singularity; the flash loses itself in this space it marks with its sovereignty and becomes silent now that it has given a name to obscurity.⁵²

Second, what transgression *does* is likewise twofold; it not only creates a heightened sense of difference between the two sides of the boundary (as Foucault illustrates with his metaphor of the lightning that gives a deeper blackness to the same blackness it denies), but also *creates* the very boundary it purports to transgress! Here it is crucial to point out the role that visceral shock plays in Taussig's theory of transgression. Taussig adopts Walter Benjamin's phrase "profane illumination" to describe transgression. For Taussig, it is the internal, *visceral reaction* produced by transgression that signifies the location of the boundary—thereby creating the heretofore unrecognized boundary through visceral shock.⁵³ It is only after this visceral reaction occurs that one recognizes the presence of a boundary; thus Taussig suggests that "the barrier crossed by transgression does not so much exist in its own right as erupt into being on account of its being transgressed."⁵⁴ The boundary crossed by transgression is not itself delineated *until it is transgressed*, causing the boundary-producing shock of its transgression.

However, this is not to say that the limiting boundary is an illusory one because it is defined by a breach of itself. The relationship between transgression and its boundary is one of mutual dependence; Foucault writes, "the limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess: a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely

⁵² *Ibid* 35

⁵³ Taussig 352

⁵⁴ *Ibid* 350

crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows.”⁵⁵ The boundary crossed by transgression, therefore, is permeable but also real rather than illusory.

In this framework, we can imagine heresy as thus not only bringing the essence of orthodoxy and the orthodox order into sharper relief (a la Douglas' theory and Moore's example), but also as *actively* constructing the boundaries of orthodox doctrine and orthodox practice. Imagined thus, the condemnation of heretics does not simply label those who have clearly strayed beyond the realm of the orthodox faith, but rather *creates* heretics in a way that consequently—if only semi-intentionally—defines just what exactly the realm of orthodox faith is.⁵⁶ Hence orthodoxy is equally dependent on heresy for its own self-definition and demarcation as heresy is dependent/contingent upon the presence of an actively self-enforcing orthodoxy to condemn and label it as heretical.

This theoretical view of heresy as transgression as explicated in the work of Foucault and Taussig is a very exciting and fascinating one—yet it will help to bring the abstract back down to the level of the (at least somewhat more) concrete. Taussig himself asserts, “doubtless these issues [questions of transgression in religion] would be best explored and enunciated through historical study of a particular religion in a particular location in order to eschew the universalizing pseudotruths that plague the study of religions.”⁵⁷ Let us now turn back to our medieval case study to see how this theory plays out.

That heresy not only helps to shore up the prevailing orthodox social structure and institutional organization (as R.I. Moore points out), but also constructs the doctrinal boundaries of orthodoxy is apparent in the profession of faith the Church forced Peter

⁵⁵ Foucault 34

⁵⁶ I call this action 'semi-intentional' because, while the defenders of orthodoxy do not specifically intend to create or define what orthodoxy is in their condemnation of heretics, they do intend to defend orthodoxy's borders, which is in itself a way of *defining* orthodoxy through asserting where orthodoxy ends.

⁵⁷ Taussig 349

Waldes to make. In 1180 or 1181 Waldes was forced to make a profession of his faith according to strict orthodox guidelines (a profession he agreeably acquiesced to, but one which did not ultimately prevent him and his followers from later being re-condemned as heretical). The core tenets of this profession of faith date as far back as the sixth century when they were part of the ordination rite of Gallican bishops. Yet the creed read by Waldes was not a static sixth century affirmation of orthodoxy; for Waldes' profession, multiple "additions were made which reflect the concern of the prelates over contemporary heresies...these indubitably were inserted so that Waldes might repudiate the teaching of the Cathars," in order to affirm "the validity of the sacraments," and to reject the right of laypersons to preach.⁵⁸

These additions highlight not only the fluidity of orthodoxy, but the way in which orthodoxy is constructed, through transgression, by heresy. Before the heretical transgressions of the High Middle Ages, the importance of various tenets—sacerdotalism for example—to proper orthodox belief was not stressed in this creedal affirmation for ordination of bishops. Yet after the transgressions occur, the importance of certain beliefs for the nature of orthodoxy is brought to the forefront of consciousness for the prelates who define Waldes' creed, thus defining what is and what is not important for orthodox faith.

But where exactly does this construction of orthodoxy occur? If heresy is to be understood as both a category constructed by a presiding orthodoxy and simultaneously as an orthodoxy-constructing transgression, then arguably the place in which the boundaries of orthodoxy are drawn—the very locus of the division of sacred and profane—is the space for inquisitorial interrogation of suspected heretics. In his discussion of transgression, Taussig adopts Victor Turner's notion of the "liminal period" in religious

⁵⁸ Wakefield & Evans 205

rites, but criticizes Turner for failing to pay adequate deference to “the force of negation, and hence of transgression” in such a period.⁵⁹ As Taussig describes it, the “so-called liminal period outside normality, a period involving an enclosed, set-apart, theatrical-like space of make-believe for the representation and visceral realization of sacred force;” that is to say, a space for transgression.⁶⁰

We can thus imagine the liminal phase as a space for transgression—and so too can we see inquisitorial interrogation as a location for liminality. Turner lists the following characteristics of the liminal period in religious rites (explicitly pilgrimage in this context): “release from mundane structure; homogenization of status...ordeal; reflection on the meaning of basic religious and cultural values...emergence of the integral person from multiple personae”⁶¹ When a deponent was summoned before the inquisition, she or he was drawn out of her or his mundane everyday experience. In this context, the accused priest and accused peasant were equals in the precarious position of potential heretic. The ordeal of the potential heretic is clear, as her or his words were, as Given says, “pregnant with danger” for the speaker.⁶² Whether the deponent's self-perception was of heretical guilt or innocence, the deposition would have undoubtedly been an intense moment of reflection on her or his religious and cultural values. Finally, the entire purpose of the inquisition was to ferret out the heretical 'integral person' in order to discover in whom such a polluted, heterodox soul resided, and consequently to purify or destroy it, lest it contaminate others. The inquisitorial interrogation was thus the 'liminal' crucible in which the boundary between heresy and orthodoxy was wrought through 'transgression.'

⁵⁹ Taussig 350. The 'liminal' is a notion adopted from the work of Arnold Van Gennep and somewhat modified by Taussig.

⁶⁰ Taussig 350

⁶¹ Victor and Edith Turner. *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Cultures: Anthropological Perspectives*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1978). p.34-35

⁶² Given 50

Waldensian transgression was not, however, *exactly* the same as transgression described by Taussig. This discrepancy does not render the application of Taussig's thought void, but it does warrant further examination. Whereas Taussig speaks of a "controlled transgression" of taboo sacrality, heresy is a kind of *uncontrolled transgression*.⁶³ But lack of control is precisely what makes heresy so profoundly dangerous to—but also so powerfully formative for—orthodoxy. Through the inquisition, the uncontrolled transgression becomes a 'controlled transgression;' the inquisition becomes the liminal space in which the sacred is revealed and the profane sequestered into heretical exile. The inquisition harnesses heresy's transgressive sacrality, thereby delineating the nature and boundaries of orthodoxy. The fact that the inquisition orders the chaos and makes uncontrolled transgression controlled is another reason why the inquisitorial deposition should be seen as the locus of orthodoxy's boundary construction.

Transgression, Heteropraxis and Doxa

The idea that 'uncontrolled transgression' is characteristic of the heretical Waldensians might at first seem in discord with my earlier assertion that they were all but orthodox and that their likeness to orthodoxy was effaced. Here we see that condemnation of heretics may be based not only on heterodox *belief*, but also on heteropraxis. The Waldensians were, in fact, very closely in line with orthodox doctrine in their interpretation of the gospels and in their preaching; yet it was not *what* they preached that transgressed the boundary, but *that they preached at all*. In Stephen of Bourbon's aforementioned account of Peter Waldes' life, Stephen writes that Waldes not only admirably "broadcast his money to the poor," but also that he "strengthened them [his followers] in the Gospel."⁶⁴ Stephen could have used a verb that simply implied that

⁶³ Taussig 356

⁶⁴ Wakefield and Evans 209

Waldes 'taught' or 'instructed' his followers, but the word "strengthened" implies that, in spite of the sect's heretical status, Stephen agrees that Peter Waldes' followers' education in the Gospels is a *good* thing. Yet Stephen still condemns Waldes and his followers as heretics because they "fell first into disobedience by their presumption and their usurpation of the apostolic office."⁶⁵ Thus it was not the *beliefs* preached by the Waldensians, but the *practice* of preaching that was heretical in the eyes of Stephen of Bourbon.

The practice of lay preaching was deemed heretical because it threatened to undermine the prevailing social structure. Drawing on the works of Georg Simmel, Jacques Berlinerblau writes that, although "the heretic" is allegedly punished for a specifically religious violation, "in reality the crime is against group unity."⁶⁶ The Waldensians' threatened "group unity" and orthodox social order through their practice of preaching. On the topic of practice and its role in undergirding the orthodox social order, Karen King writes the following:

Practice is always about power relations, insofar as practices both produce and reproduce a social group's understanding of the way things are. That understanding rationalizes certain social relations and power dynamics, while simultaneously establishing the framework for contesting them. Human practices are always directed toward some purpose; they are always involved in the processes of meaning-making; and they always inscribe, reinscribe, or contest certain relations of power.⁶⁷

What Stephen of Bourbon calls the Waldensians' "usurpation of the apostolic office" is so dangerous because it constitutes an implicit (but still profound) challenge to the fundamental "understanding of the way things are." It is not that they are espousing a peculiarly radical reform in their sermons that makes them dangerous; rather it is the seemingly simple fact that they are preaching at all that is so destabilizing. This is

⁶⁵ *Ibid* 210

⁶⁶ Berlinerblau 344

⁶⁷ Karen L. King. *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005). p.241

evidenced in Stephen of Bourbon's life of Peter Waldes, in which he portrays the Waldensians' preaching as follows:

He [Waldes] also sent out persons even of the basest occupations to preach...men and women alike, stupid and uneducated, they wandered through the villages, entered homes, preached in the squares and even in the churches, and induced others to do likewise...they had spread error and scandal everywhere as a result of their rashness and ignorance.⁶⁸

There are many layers of the social threat of preaching in this account. First, Stephen denounces the Waldensians' preaching both because they are “stupid and uneducated,” and also because they allowed women to preach. This disrupts the Church's institutionalized gendered hierarchy of clergy/laity in which the former is unequivocally assumed to be males whose duty it is to preach. Furthermore, he points out that they “entered homes” and even churches to preach the gospel, further highlighting the social disruption of the Waldensian sermons by showing that they are invading social spaces that are not theirs to occupy. Finally, the particularly acute threat of preaching is shown in Stephen's concerned addition that “they induced others to do likewise,” revealing that he was concerned that their movement might spread the practice of preaching among the laity. Clearly it is not the rhetoric within Waldensian discourse that rendered its existence dangerous to the orthodox hegemony; rather it was the fact that the movement infringed upon the clergy's institutionalized realm of discourse that earned the Waldensians their condemnation as heretics.

Pierre Bourdieu's work is helpful in sketching how Waldensian preaching constituted such a dire threat to high medieval social order. Bourdieu's conception of *doxa* is particularly applicable to this case study. Bourdieu defines *Doxa* as a given society's “realm of implicit and unstated beliefs” that function on a subconscious, naturalized

⁶⁸ Wakefield & Evans 209

level.⁶⁹ *Doxa* and *doxic* beliefs are the societal underpinnings which seem so fundamental to 'the way things are' that they elide even the notion that they *can* be challenged. As Bourdieu puts it, *doxa* “goes without saying because it comes without saying.”⁷⁰ In *Distinction*, Bourdieu further explicates how *doxa's* arrival “without saying” is etched into one's perception of social reality; he writes,

through all the judgements, verdicts, gradings and warnings imposed by the institutions...or constantly arising from the meetings and interactions of everyday life, the social order is progressively inscribed in people's minds. Social divisions become principles of division, organizing the image of the social world. Objective limits become a sense of limits, a practical anticipation of objective limits acquired by experience of objective limits, a 'sense of one's place' which leads one to exclude oneself from the goods, persons, places and so forth from which one is excluded. The *sense* of limits implies *forgetting* the limits....primary experience of the social world is that of *doxa*, and adherence to relations of order which, because they structure inseparably both the real world and the thought world, are accepted as self-evident.⁷¹

This, I argue, is a useful way of imagining how the boundaries that are constructed through transgression are silently “inscribed in people's minds.” These boundaries exist in unquestioning and forgotten silence and are only brought to the forefront of consciousness *after* they are transgressed. The hitherto unexposed *doxic* social boundaries (boundaries that Bourdieu implies are 'forgotten' and 'sensory') are rendered tangible—in effect, are created—by the equally sensory, visceral reaction to their transgression.

In fact, Bourdieu explicitly applies the notion of *doxa* to the relationship between orthodoxy and heresy; he writes,

the dominant classes have an interest in defending the integrity of *doxa*, or, short of this, of establishing in its place the necessarily imperfect substitute, orthodoxy...the manifest censorship imposed by orthodox discourse...delimits the universe of possible discourse...[which] masks in turn the fundamental opposition between the universe of things that can be

⁶⁹ Berlinerblau 346

⁷⁰ Pierre Bourdieu. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice, (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1992). p.167. Emphasis original.

⁷¹ Pierre Bourdieu. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Trans. Richard Nice. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984). p.471

stated, and hence thought, and the universe of that which is taken for granted.⁷²

Within Bourdieu's paradigm, the Waldensians' particular 'heresy' arose not from their promulgation of heretical views within the extant rhetorical universe, but from its potential disruption (as Foucault and Taussig would say, 'transgression') of the unspoken *doxic* assumption that priests preach and others do not. By preaching the gospels themselves, the Waldensians took what was previously a doxic assumption—that which 'went without saying'—and forced it into the 'realm of possible discourse' by their *practice* of preaching.

Yet conceiving of the Waldensian heresy in this way is perhaps not entirely in harmony with how one might at first envision the 'transgressive' to operate within heresy. Heresy as transgression is likely to first conjure up images of 'straying from the faith,' of pushing past the bounds of the sacred and into the profane. But the Waldensians, I would argue, actually constitute the *opposite*; they transgress the invisible (though now constructed through their transgression) boundary from the lay person's profane world into the priesthood's realm of the sacred through infringing on the priesthood's sacred realm of preaching. The anxious way in which Stephen of Bourbon condemns the Waldensians for preaching "even in the churches" shows how they were envisioned as impinging upon the prelates' sacred space.⁷³ This transgressive movement still demarcates the boundary between heresy and orthodoxy, but it also further delineates the border between the clergy and the laity (a border which had been growing increasingly darker and starker since the eleventh century).⁷⁴ The Waldensians crossed the boundary into the sacred realm of the priesthood by preaching; because of their transgressive preaching, the

⁷² Bourdieu. *Outline of a Theory of Practice* 169-170

⁷³ Wakefield & Evans 209

⁷⁴ Maureen C. Miller. "Religion Makes a Difference: Clerical and Lay Cultures in the Courts of Northern Italy, 1000-1300" *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 105, No. 4 (Oct. 2000). p. 1098

Waldensians were otherized and had their doctrinal similarities with orthodoxy effaced so as to construe the preaching Waldensians as outside the boundaries of orthodoxy—boundaries which were themselves made more palpable by the condemnation of Waldensians as heretics! It is perhaps best to envision this double transgression as taking place within concentric circles of the orthodox priesthood and laity, with heresy lying outside the realm of both (please see diagram below).

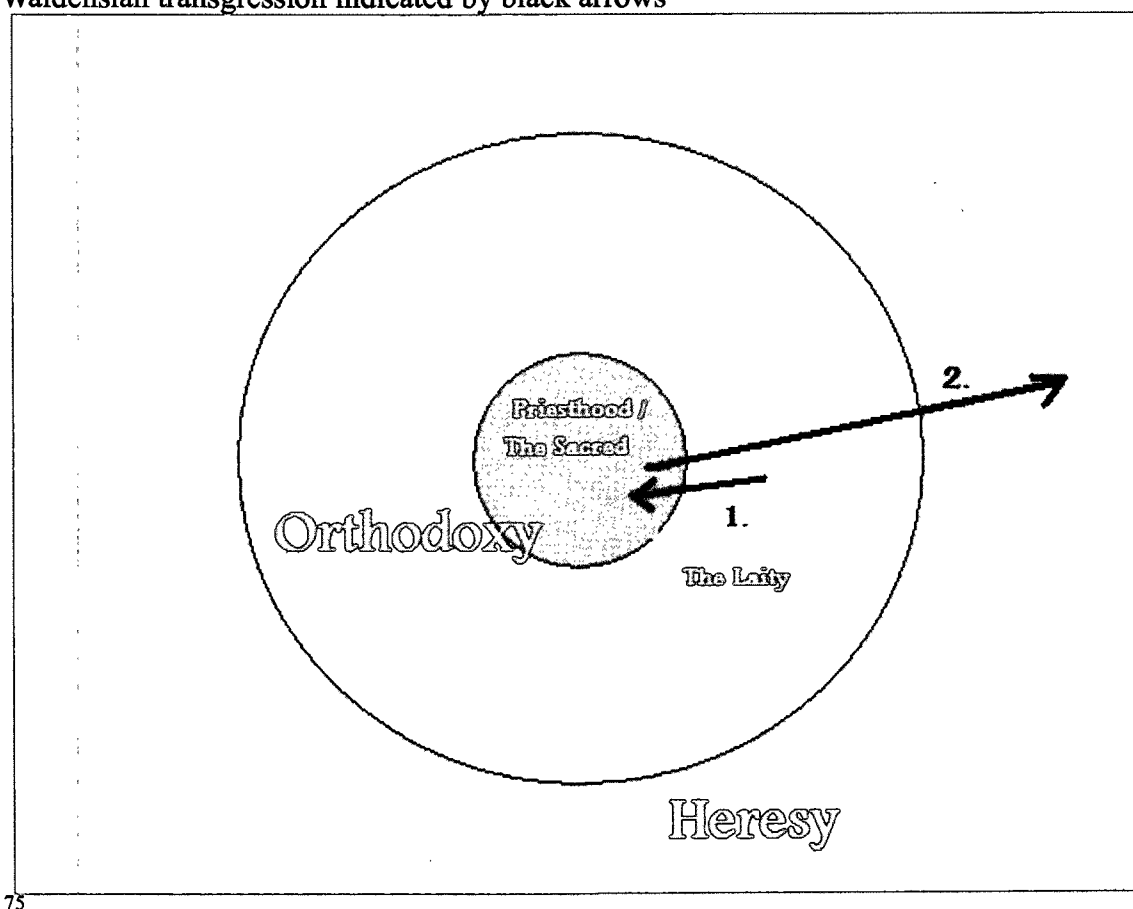
Orthodoxy: Shades of Blue

Heresy: Orange

Priesthood/ The Sacred: Dark Blue

Laity/ The Profane: Light Blue

Waldensian transgression indicated by black arrows



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⁷⁵ Though this is a helpful diagram, the visual representation of my argument is necessarily imperfect. This visual guideline should not lead one to think that the contrast between orthodoxy and heresy is necessarily so marked as from deep blue to bright orange, nor should it be taken as a suggestion that heresy is of a singular variety, monovocal in its orange opposition to orthodoxy.

At this point, an objection might be raised that I am trying to have it both ways with the Waldensians—that is to say, I argue that they are so similar to the Franciscans that they are arguably just as 'orthodox,' but that they also constitute an illustrative example of transgression. Clearly, there are manifest, indissoluble parallels between the Waldensians and the Franciscans; yet the two groups are separated by an equally indissoluble *difference*—about thirty-two years time. Peter Waldes' converted to a life of apostolic poverty most likely in the year 1173, while Francis' conversion experience came in 1205.⁷⁶

During those three decades that elapsed between Waldes and Francis' conversions the Church's strategy for dealing with the prospect of lay preaching changed; this was due in large part to the rise of Innocent III to the Petrine throne in 1198. Like Waldes, Francis appealed to the Papacy for Catholic approval by stressing the fact that all of the rules he had devised for himself and his followers were taken directly from the Christian gospels. However, unlike the five popes who reigned from the time of Waldes' conversion to the end of the twelfth century, Innocent III was not wholly hostile to the notion of lay preaching. Innocent was a skilled and ambitious pope who knew both his power and its limits; *The Legend of the Three Companions*—one of the accounts of Francis' life written by one of Francis' companions Brother Angelo—says of Pope Innocent III that “he desired only the possible—but all of it.”⁷⁷

Likewise, historian Euan Cameron calls Innocent III “one of the most accomplished and astute politicians and most able managers of ecclesiastical affairs in the whole history of

⁷⁶ Paul Halsall ed. “Thomas of Celano: First and Second Lives of Saint Francis.” *Internet Medieval Sourcebook* (Aug. 1998), <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/stfran-lives.html> (accessed November 15, 2008).

Paul Halsall ed. “The Conversion of Peter Waldo.” *Internet Medieval Sourcebook* (Aug. 1998), <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/waldo1.html> (accessed November 16, 2008).

⁷⁷ Adrian House. *Francis of Assisi*. (Mahwah, NJ: HiddenSpring, Paulist Press. 2001). p.98

the medieval papacy.”⁷⁸

Astute ecclesiastic that he was, Innocent III recognized that imitation of the Christian apostles was a powerful theme in the religious ethos of his time, and consequently chose to use it to his advantage rather than suppress it as his predecessors had. Again in *The Legend of the Three Companions*, Pope Innocent III declares to Francis not only “We approve your rule, Go, Brothers, with the Lord and preach penitence to everyone,” but *also* that he must “come back and report everything to us.”⁷⁹ Innocent was not unlike his papal predecessors in that he desired religious and social stability and wished to suppress subversion; however, Pope Innocent III's great innovation was that he saw the rise of lay preaching not as a subversive movement that needed to be repressed, but rather viewed it as a potential tool he might use to further solidify papal influence in Europe. After three decades—and notably the election of Pope Innocent III—the Church had changed its hard line position on lay preaching; it was ready to accept a group of itinerant lay preachers into the Catholic fold.

This change further highlights the fluidity of orthodoxy. Although the act of transgression and condemnation of heresy does indeed construct the boundaries of orthodoxy, those boundaries are in constant flux. Jacques Berlinerblau formulates this point when he writes, “orthodoxy is not—as the orthodox would always have it—in singular possession of an invariable 'truth.' Rather, its contents are to be construed as fluid, as developing in a dialectic with heterodoxy.”⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Euan Cameron. *Waldenses: Rejections of Holy Church in Medieval Europe*. (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2000). p.49

⁷⁹ House 98

⁸⁰ Berlinerblau 332

Conclusions

In summary, I would like to tie together my conclusions about the nature of the Waldensian heresy in particular; summarize what I believe this case study can tell us about the relationship between heresy and orthodoxy in general; and finally, suggest where scholars of religion might plot the next foray into the study of orthodoxy and heresy.

As I hope to have shown, the Waldensians were hardly wholly antithetical to orthodoxy, but were in fact quite 'orthodox' in both their beliefs and their desire for a renewed apostolic life. However, they were condemned as heretics because of their *practice* of preaching; they transgressed the sacred realm of the priesthood by preaching the gospel, thereby committing the unforgivable offense of bringing the profane into contact with the clerically demarcated realm of the sacred. Further, their preaching threatened the *doxic* assumption that priests preach and laity do not, and thus it was even more in the interest of the orthodox Church to condemn them as heretical and stamp them out in order to maintain the social order. Mary Douglas' theory is confirmed as orthodoxy obscures the profound similarities between the orthodox Catholics and the 'heretical' Waldensians while simultaneously exaggerating difference—such as portraying Waldes as singularly a usurer—in order to protect the social order. This 'otherizing' construction of the Waldensians as vastly divergent and heretical consequently reinscribes the prevailing social order and its supporting institutions while additionally constructing the very boundaries of orthodoxy. The Catholic Church thus not only erects its theoretical/theological/orthopraxis borders through this interaction, but defines its very essence in dialectic vis-a-vis the heresy it invents⁸¹. Finally, orthodoxy is constantly in the

⁸¹ I do not mean to say that the Waldensians were 'invented' in the sense that they were an illusory movement without any real grounding in reality, but that their status as heretical was invented—as all

process of reinventing itself; the Catholic Church eventually accepts the Franciscans' lay preaching, though the Waldensians remain outside the orthodox fold.

From this case study and the application of the aforementioned theories of religion and culture, I believe we may conclude the following about heresy, orthodoxy, and their relation to one another:

- 1.) Heresy is not necessarily wholly at odds with orthodoxy, but is often very similar to it.
- 2.) Heresy is constructed by orthodoxy and exists only in relationship to a predominant institution that enforces itself as orthodox.
- 3.) Orthodoxy, however, also exists only vis-a-vis heresy, defining its essence and its boundaries through the labeling of heresy.
- 4.) Orthodoxy is *not an immutable category*, but rather is found to be in constant flux as it continues its self-defining "dialectic with heterodoxy."⁸²
- 5.) The boundaries of orthodoxy are constructed through their own transgression—a transgression that is defined by who the empowered elite say have transgressed the newly constructed boundary.
- 6.) Finally, despite the root of 'orthodoxy' being 'correct teaching' or 'correct opinion,' heresy need not be rooted in heretical belief, but may be heretical because of heteropraxis.

In this paper, I hope I have clearly demonstrated that heretics' transgression of the supposedly preexistent border between orthodoxy and heresy is actually what produces that boundary; the line between orthodoxy and heresy is in constant flux as they dialectically define and redefine one another; and that the boundary between them does

heresies are—by the orthodoxy that condemned them.

⁸² Berlinerblau 332

not exist until it is crossed, and it is not crossed until orthodoxy *claims* it is crossed.

Yet what of heresy today? The Catholic Church has lost much of its political and cultural hegemony in the twenty-first century; how are we now to envision orthodoxy and heresy? Peter Berger offers one response. Because constraint on choice is requisite for heresy's persecution, and because "modernity makes choice the currency of all social existence," Berger argues that "heresy has become universalized" because choice is a constant imperative.⁸³ In a very different paradigm, George Zito suggests that from a "discursive perspective," heresy "can take place within any institutionalized discourse and presents itself as a threat to that way of speaking...it is not, strictly speaking, a religious phenomenon, but an institutional phenomenon. It arose first within religion only because of the religious institution's central position in governing the discourses of a particular historical moment."⁸⁴ I find Zito's vision of heresy as an institutional rather than strictly religious phenomenon more useful, as it does not succumb to the problematic universalizing assumption that a liberal economy of choice is the global norm. Yet Berger's analysis raises interesting questions in the context of this paper; as I have endeavored to show that *practice* as much as discourse can be heretical, is a 'discursive perspective' sufficient for the analysis of heresy and orthodoxy? If not, how might the conclusions of this paper be applied to heresy as a contemporary institutional discursive *and* non-discursive phenomenon?

⁸³ *Ibid* 333-334

⁸⁴ Zito 126

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