

Conclusions

On 17 May 1340, while he lay sick in his bedroom at the new tower, Benedict XII summoned several cardinals, some dignitaries connected with the Curia, and some notaries, so that they could bear witness to his statements, uttered in public. Though physically impaired, the pope had full control over his mental capacities. He remarked that on many instances, both before and after his accession to the papacy, he had spoken on matters related to faith and Holy Scripture, engaging in theological disputes, preaching, authoring treatises in different places and times. He went on to declare solemnly that if by error, ignorance, negligence, or human imperfection he had ever uttered or written statements in contradiction with Holy Scripture, the Catholic faith, the Roman Church's morals or doctrine, he *ipso facto* withdrew them all submitting them to judgment and amendment by the Holy See and his own successors. An almost identical decree of withdrawal was also issued on 23 April 1342, just two days before the pope's death.¹

The rejection of any errors inadvertently spoken or written thus concluded the life of the Cistercian pope, excluding from any possible debate the idea of the pontiff's total orthodoxy. Jacques Fournier intended to pre-empt any posthumous discussion among his detractors, reserving any judgment on himself and his writings to future pontiffs. As is common knowledge, judgment on the Cistercian pope was severe, at times. The Franciscan Minors, protected by Ludwig of Bavaria levied charges of heresy against him: though John XXII was the main target of fierce propaganda against Avignon, the campaign turned also against Benedict XII who became the target of polemical writings, such as William of Ockham's *Contra Benedictum*. In the ferment of the imperial court, some aggressive intellectuals labeled Fournier as "seducer of the faithful", "heretic", "heresiarch", "pseudo-Christ" or "destroyer of the faith".² Whether or not he had in mind such interlocutors, Benedict XII wanted to protect his own image and his own memory, while at the same time preserving the dignity of the institution which he headed. By the same token, he pointed unequivocally to the sole authorities who were authorized to judge a pope: certainly not a handful of rebels, but the Apostolic See and future pontiffs exclusively. In other words, the label of "heretic" could not be used for any sort of unseating or inversion of roles: the head of the Church was the ultimate custodian and guarantor of orthodoxy.

¹ Mollat-Vidal, 40-1, no. 2767 and 221-2, no. 3274.

² Clément Schmitt, *Un Pape réformateur et un défenseur de l'unité de l'Eglise. Benoit XII et l'ordre des Frères Mineurs (1334-1342)* (Quaracchi: Collegio di S. Bonaventura, 1959), 260.

The final preventive repeal by Jacques Fournier brings to an end quite significantly our journey through theories and practices of religious exclusion in the first half of the fourteenth century, showing once again the interrelation among biographical events, processes of intellectual evolution and methods of legitimization of an institution, the papacy. Such an intertwined set of relationships begs the unavoidable question regarding a personal experience and its interaction with the cultural and political entities within which it is set, the choices of a single protagonist *vis-à-vis* collective decisions. Jacques Fournier's example allows us to grasp not so much the expressions of a personal psychology, but rather his ability to assimilate systems and rules at his disposal in order to arrive at practical and intellectual choices. The frameworks of reference within which his anticlerical efforts took shape emerge on different levels: in the rules of the *processus inquisitionis* and in the contribution of anticlerical treatises, in the developments of biblical studies in the late-scholastic period, in the representational systems and in the diplomatic strategies of the fourteenth-century papacy. But otherwise the comparison with pre-existing schemes has no constructive value, giving way to individual strategies and to the interpretation of the individual characters.

Jacques Fournier's unique career to the very top of the Church has proven to be a privileged access path to understand the systems of religious exclusion in the West towards the end of the Middle Ages. Reconstructing some aspects of his biography and of his production in writing – hitherto overlooked and never studied in an integrated fashion – represents the first specific contribution of this work. The cross-referenced survey of the various writings by the Cistercian pope has been essential for a study that shifted the viewing angle from the religious and social universe of heretics to the criteria and mechanisms used to identify heresy in the Avignon era. In particular, works of exegesis and the letters by Fournier's papal chancery have made it possible to reread from different viewpoints even the best known records of the Montaignou trials. In the light of these documents, the orthodox discourse on heresy has revealed itself in the complexity of its theological, legal and political meanings. Such contexts are only apparently unrelated: on the contrary, Jacques Fournier's career runs across them diagonally allowing for a close observation of the links among theological elaborations, repressive methods, and self-legitimising aims in the Avignon era.

In light of the contexts that have been observed, it has been possible to glean the salient traits of a protagonist who was perfectly attuned to contemporary practices, but who interpreted them in an original fashion. Fournier's appropriation of tradition and its rules comes to the surface first of all in the Pamier inquiries: they are rooted in the transmission of a consolidated inquisitorial experience of which he adopts the procedural apparatus, and the

investigative and interpretative criteria. Nonetheless, Bishop Fournier's records reveal unparalleled documentary potential; the records allow such space to the religious doubt and daily life of the accused as to suggest a certain broadening of the heretical paradigm. The exegetical works of the Cistercian bishop are equally suspended between the contributions of thirteenth century biblical studies and the uniqueness of the results achieved: indeed, the structure of the texts, and the use of sources keep clear of scholastic commentaries, endowing the *Postilla super Matheum* with the characteristics of a coherent and monumental theological treatise, in which the problem of heresy is thoroughly probed. Lastly, the present examination of Benedict XII's pontificate sets out even more vividly the tension between the rules of an institution and the initiative of those who move within it. The third pontiff of Avignon portrays a papacy in crisis, no longer able to keep up the thirteenth century claims to traditional authority, a papacy hindered by the conflicts that divided the Christian West. His measures against heretics, schismatics and infidels adhere closely to evolving expectations and contexts, testing exegetic categories that were often misleading, such as those of continuity and breach, tradition and change.

The varying scales of analysis and chronological, geographical, and documentary contexts that have been examined have conferred greater substance to our outlook on the fight against heretics at the times of Jacques Fournier. This forces some observations on what we are able to understand of heresy and of the ways to describe it through the combined investigation of legal, theological, and political perspectives. What sort of history are we able to come up with, if we trace the links among these different issues in the drive against heresy? What sort of dialogue is there between the different levels? What is the resulting perception of heretics?

The involution of the Cathar presence in the course of the 13th century did not reduce the perception of the heretical phenomenon as a dangerous disease that insinuated itself among the faithful, in order to fatally corrupt the limbs of the *societas christiana*. The concern with what is perceived as a ubiquitously pervasive threat is still alive and deep-felt in the first half of the 14th century; it features new elaborations in that workshop of theological thinking represented by the Curia in Avignon. They threaten the kingdom of France and the city of Avignon, they spread in the cities of Italy, they erode the Catholic faith and the obedience to Rome in Germany, shielded by an emperor who has usurped his title, and they infiltrate the outskirts of the Christian world. If we broaden the horizons under observation, the complex religious makeup of the Mediterranean region appears to dispute the universal ambitions of the Church of Rome: Saracen ships plough the seas, and the Holy Land has fallen irreparably

into Saracen hands, whilst Christendom is split by irreconcilable fractures between East and West. The kingdom of Armenia, the last formally Catholic stronghold, wavers in its obedience to Rome and, further East, the Christian message struggles to sway the religious sentiment of the Mongol rulers. Despite its universal ambitions, the Church of Rome extends its spiritual domain over a quite limited area by now; in point of fact, it is confined to Western Europe. In the citadel of Avignon, the consolidation of papal authority is sustained ever more by the repression of heretics.

Yet who are the heretics? As a concept that can be applied to the most disparate contexts, heresy brings together within the same semantic area: neo Manichaeans, Waldensians, friars of strict observance, thinkers who challenge the pope's *plenitudo potestatis*, political enemies, adulterers and homosexuals, men and women who worship the devil and practice sorcery, who do not pay their tithes, mock the clergy or cast doubt on the sacraments. Such an inexhaustible insurgence of heresy took on countless profiles. Regardless of the distinctive traits of heretics in specific occurrences in place and time, the contrast between unity and fracture synthesizes the clash between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. There is only one Church, one doctrine, one hierarchy that is authorized to teach and defend that doctrine. The proliferation of heresy is manifested by the breach of such unity, by the plurality of teachings, by the emergence of contrasting opinions and dissenting behaviors. These categories allow us to equate the new heretics of the Avignon era with those of antiquity, all of whom are guilty of pitching a multifaceted falsehood against the one and only truth.

By means of biblical exegesis, the foundations of the contrast are firmly fastened to Holy Scripture: therefore, we are able to extract the causes of the heretical malaise, and the heretics' specific traits. The clash between the heretics and the *doctores catholici* is as straightforward as it is self-assertive, nourished by the collision of opposite values such as good and evil, truth and falsehood, justice and error, salvation and damnation. At this point the whole body of clergy is charged with the crucial task of identifying and destroying the malignant plants, preventing them from growing and branching out. However, it is difficult to recognize them, given that the heretics skillfully disguise their own identity. Hence, it becomes essential to be able to recognize those signals that are more likely indicative of heresy: just like the fruits from a tree, words and actions represent the main object that the *magistri* of the church and the inquisitorial judges can identify as manifest expressions of error. The uncovering of "heretical deeds" constitutes therefore the layout of the inquisitorial questionnaire, whilst the reading of the Gospels bears out the concurrence between inner

tension and outward manifestations of faith. Biblical exegesis and inquisitorial procedure show therefore important points of contact, as they both identify in the *operatio* the preferred means to arrive at the *forma*, highlighting at the same time the pivotal function of behavior in ascertaining heresy. On these theoretical premises, the way is open for the inclusion within the ambit of heresy of any deviant or dissident behavior. Disobedience thus becomes a key factor in shaping the contours of heterodoxy, aiding the inclusion of enemies and detractors of the Church hierarchy and of the papacy.

In spite of these unifying features, the multifaceted structure of religious dissent demands diversified responses. Every geopolitical, cultural and church related context requires a reassessment of strategies which are tailored to the contingent needs. Benedict XII's letters show conscious shifting among friendly diplomatic relations, preemptory calls to obedience, appeals for peace or holy war, invitations to reconciliation, overtures or sudden closures to theological debate. The policy lines adopted by the pope's diplomats change from time to time in accordance with the relations held with the Christians of the East, the Mongolian emperors, the Catholic kings, or the envoys of Ludwig of Bavaria. Even the inquisitors turn out to be at times faithful allies worthy of support, at times fierce opportunists against whom bishops and papal envoys must be activated, alternating decisions of centralized and decentralized authority. Keeping under control the abuse of power and keeping in check the conflicts with other centers of power is a key passage in order to restore the efficiency and purity of intentions which must typify tribunals of faith.

While the ecclesiastical judges set in place consolidated methods for the repression of heretics, biblical studies endeavored to find elsewhere in space and time the foundations for a strenuous battle to defend the faith. The mechanisms that underpin the representation of heresy are worked out simultaneously – and ultimately with analogous results – both in the inquisitorial tribunals and in the hubs of theological debate such as the Curia of Avignon. Indeed, delving into the characters of all heresies in light of the Gospel, Fournier ends up formulating a theoretical justification for the inquisitorial investigation. While he adapted diplomatic strategies and judicial procedures to the contingent needs and to the variable profiles of heretics, schismatics, and infidels, he held in his mind this model firmly rooted in the interpretation of the holy text.

It is necessary to keep in mind the complexity of this model when looking at the ways of portraying heresy towards the end of the Middle Ages. Starting from the experience of a bishop-inquisitor who became theologian to the Curia and then pope, it has been possible to focus on strategies and means of exclusion worked out in the era of Avignon. This has been

achieved by observing closely the logical steps, the opportunities and the protagonists involved, at times in quite local contexts, at times in the central body of the Church of Rome, the papal court. The experiment becomes even more exciting to the extent that heresy as such was observed through quite different sets of lenses which were anachronistically overlapped on one another: the lenses of patristic authors, those of mediaeval controversialists, those of fourteenth century inquisitors or theologians summoned to develop fresh arguments at the papal court. And it is precisely within the context of Avignon, driven by a papacy by now transplanted away from Rome and in search of a new identity, that the exclusion of religious dissent finds new and significant developments.

In more general terms, asking the question of how the boundaries of heresy are perceived and redesigned in Jacques Fournier's perspective, has meant questioning oneself on some central aspects of the debate on the representation of others in the mediaeval West: the basic motivations of a 'persecuting society'; the relationships between knowledge and power, between authority and textuality; the complementary link between identity claim and discrimination against others – or in the words of Michel de Certeau, "the unstable balance of a society which always defines itself through the manner of excluding its contrary".³ Within the scope of these considerations the documents examined have also allowed an empirical test of the usefulness of deconstructionist approaches to the study of mediaeval heresies. This study is fully aware of the stimulus they have produced for a renewal of the study of sources. Yet, the records of the Pamiers trials and of the papal missives suggest a re-thinking of the hypothesis that an authentic "invention" of heresy by the authorities of the church was in place – a stimulating hypothesis, albeit not valid universally – opting, rather, for an idea of "definition", in its etymological sense of "delimitation" of the boundaries between religious inclusion and exclusion. Such a shift in emphasis prompts a notion of mobility of the boundaries of heterodoxy; boundaries that were not invented, but rather redesigned from time to time, and subject to new outlines. With respect to these boundaries, it is necessary to trace – for every occurrence – contingent factors, the personalities involved, the concepts and values tested, the documental outcomes. A slow-motion view on these elements allows us to study what it meant on every occasion "to define" heresy toward the end of the Middle Ages.

³ Michel de Certeau, *La possession de Loudun* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).