penance” continued to touch the hearts of many of fervent spirituality throughout the Catholic world. If, then, the type of disciplined and churchly piety that the late-medieval summae confessarum and similar instrumentalities sought to inculcate among clergy and laity alike is to be brought into relationship with sixteenth-century reforming movements, that relationship must properly be understood as one of continuity as well as discontinuity, no less as a positive inspiration to the forces of Catholic renewal than as a negative stimulus to the initiatives of Protestant reform.


CHAPTER 3 • CURRENTS OF THOUGHT: THEOLOGICAL AND DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENTS

And, “The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.” If the Word was not ashamed to be born of men, should man be ashamed to be born of God? Saying “He gave them power to become sons of God” does not at all mean, as Pelagius dreamed, that he gave them power to become sons of God by preceding works of merit. It is inconceivable that St. John should contradict his Lord, who said, as John himself reports, “No one is able to come unto me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”

—THOMAS BRADWARDINE (ca. 1290–1349)

There is a distinction between compulsory necessity and unfailing necessity [that is, consistency]. With God compulsory necessity has no place, but an unfailing necessity is appropriate to God because of His promise, that is, His Covenant, or established law. This is not an absolute but rather a conditional necessity. According to God’s established law the pilgrim who does whatever he can to dispose himself for grace always receives grace. However, if He should choose to, God could deviate from His law for someone other than the pilgrim or the devil. Then, however much such a person [with whom God has not made His Covenant] might dispose himself for grace, he would not receive it. Man’s disposition does not require the giving of grace except by congruency, because grace surpasses every natural act; it is impossible for man to fully merit (de condigno) through any natural act.

—ROBERT HOLCOT (ca. 1300–1349)
Indeed no one is saved by works but entirely by grace. For if salvation is attributed to merits then there will be no grace but justice, nor grace freely given but conceded in a certain way to the necessity of justice. . . . It is nevertheless in our will where we direct the acts that we do and to will or not to will itself in whose liberty is the fall of sin, God most justly not exhibiting his mercy; and the reason of merit is by God Himself conceding grace through infinite clemency.

—COLOCCIO SALUTATI (1351–1406)

Although the principles governing inclusion in the hallowed pages of Denzinger’s Excommunicationum, definitionum, et declaracionum de rebus fidel et morum are clearly theological and canonistic rather than historical, the paucity of space devoted to that work to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (not much more than that allotted to the Tridentine documents alone) is a reasonably accurate index to the amount of formal activity on the part of the ecclesiastical magisterium during those centuries. Amid the archaeological litter of half-forgotten and sometimes puzzling condemnations, one or two documents, it is true, stand out as possessing historic significance—Cum inter nonnullis (1323), for example, John XXII’s catastrophic condemnation of the Franciscan doctrine of apostolic poverty, and Lastentior colui (1459), the Council of Florence’s bull of union with the Greek church, a document dear to the ultramontane theologians of the modern era because of its definition of the Roman primacy. But more significant than such magisterial pronouncements on doctrinal matters were the currents of theological controversy that ebbed about them.

Notable among these currents were the novel explorations of the relationship between Scripture and tradition stimulated by contemporary debates about such controverted doctrines as apostolic poverty and the Immaculate Conception. Also remarkable were the wide-ranging discussions about the nature of the church that bulked so large in the theological and canonistic discourse of the time, pointing not only in the direction of Lastentior colui but also of Huius sancta synodus (1415), the Consncrdecree on conciliar supremacy. Of greatest significance was the intense preoccupation with the interrelated questions of sin, grace, free will, justification, and predetermination, which, for the first time since the fifth century, became the dominant focus of theological dissertation, intruding themselves upon the attention of scholastic theologian and Italian humanist alike, and finding but inadequate and one-sided expression in the official condemnations of Wycliffe and Hus. The quotations opening this chapter illustrate the range of late-medieval opinion on these fundamental theological questions, opinion marked by contrasts only slightly less sharp than those between the essentially Pelagian “religion of works” so evident at the level of popular devotion and the contemporaneous mystic sense of having encountered the divine through a “steryng of love—that is the werk of only God.”

Augustine and Pelagius Revisited

Over the course of the last half century or so, the strengths and weaknesses of late-medieval scholastic thinking in general and of its nominalist branch in particular have become the focus among scholars of mounting interest and growing disagreement. So, too, has the question of the continuity or discontinuity of that thinking with the scholastic philosophy and theology of the thirteenth century. Most would now concur in finding undesirable the older historical approach that sought anachronistically to comprehend the diversity and novelty of late-medieval thought in terms of earlier scholastic disputes between epistemological realists and nominalists. William of Ockham (ca. 1285–1347) was thus seen in opposition to Duns Scotus (ca. 1265–1308) in very much the same way as the early nominalist Roscellin (d. ca. 1125) had been placed in opposition to the famous realist William of Champeaux (ca. 1070–1121). Beyond that point, how-


ever, general agreement is not easy to come by. Some scholars still persist in measuring late-medieval nominalist theology against the exacting but anachronistic standard of thirteenth- (or sixteenth-) century Thomism and finding it, accordingly, wanting. Others of more revisionist bent sometimes lump together as alleged advocates of a single “traditional interpretation” historians of widely differing concerns with whom they find themselves in real or imagined disagreement.

However understandable such attitudes are, they remain distressing. The currents that run through late-medieval philosophy and theology are both multiple and complex; they are also of varying provenance. In the present state of research an accurate synoptic vision seems likely to exceed our capacities for some time. It would seem prudent therefore candidly to admit that the nature of one’s particular historical concern—whether with logic, epistemology, ethics, natural philosophy, or soteriology—is likely to frame the perspective from which one views late-medieval thinking as a whole. As our own interest at this point is fundamentally with theories pertaining to the process of salvation, we might do well to make our first approach to late-medieval theology less with the experience of the thirteenth century in mind than with that of the fourth and fifth centuries. For it was St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430), and especially the Augustinians who reacted so vehemently against what he took to be the views of the Pelagians, who set the terms in which medieval (and, indeed, postmedieval) debates on the relationship between nature and grace were subsequently conducted.

To say this, however, is not necessarily to say that Augustine’s teaching on nature and grace was identical, as it stood, with the norm of medieval orthodoxy on that issue. Augustine reacted against Pelagius’s (ca. 354–ca. 418) fundamentally optimistic appraisal even of fallen man’s moral capacities, against his unquestionable minimization of the role of divine grace in the process of salvation, and against his alleged conviction that it was possible for man in the freedom of his will and by his own natural powers to avoid sin and attain perfection in this life. Augustine’s opposition led him to state his own doc-

trine in its harshest and most uncompromising form. He was disposed already by the moral and spiritual struggles of his earlier life to stress the devastating impact of original sin on the souls of all of Adam’s descendants and the consequent inability of fallen man, without divine help, to put his free will to any moral use other than to do wrong. Now he was moved to assert not only the necessity of divine grace in the process of salvation but also its irresistible nature. As a result, he was moved further to insist upon a particularly uncompromising doctrine of predestination, whereby God based his dread decision not upon any foreknowledge of the degree of moral responsibility with which men contrive to lead their lives, but upon a secret and inscrutable justice that transcends the categories of any merely human equity. In the terminology of later centuries, that is, he was led to subscribe to a doctrine of predestination ante praevia merita rather than post praevia merita.

This harsh doctrine the medieval church proved unable wholly to digest. “Pelagianism” was roundly condemned in 418 at the Council of Carthage, and again in 431 at the Council of Ephesus. But although the authoritative position adopted in 529 by the Council of Orange and subsequently endorsed by Pope Boniface II (530–32) was certainly shaped by Augustine’s views, it did not reflect an equally favorable response to all of them. Endorsed was Augustine’s emphasis on the devastating and enduring impact of Adam’s original sin on the religious and moral capacities of all his descendants. Endorsed, too, was the assertion that without some prior gift of divine grace man can do nothing to please God, since even the desire to believe presupposed the prevenient workings of the Holy Spirit. But there was no mention of irresistible grace, and the idea that God has predestined some men to damnation was roundly condemned. It clearly lay within man’s power, therefore, to spurn the divine advances, and it was suggested only a little less clearly that man retained some power freely to cooperate with God’s grace and by such cooperation to do at least something to further his own salvation.

The doctrinal norm bequeathed to medieval orthodoxy by the Council of Orange, then, was fundamentally of Augustinian inspira-
tion and was regarded as such at the time, but it left some room, nevertheless, for the play of competing interpretations. Certain boundaries had been established, and in response to doctrinal probings they were reaffirmed more than once—as, for example, in the twelfth century, when the Council of Sens (1141) condemned the view that "free will as such suffices to perform something good," and the Council of Rheims (1148), on the other hand, denounced the opinion that "apart from Christ there is no meritorious human action." But the intense debates of the ninth century and again of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (and, indeed, of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as well) underline the fact that legitimate disagreement had by no means been banished from the territory falling within those established doctrinal boundaries. Disagreements, moreover, often took the form of dissension concerning the precise import of Augustine's own views. The overall governing terms remained persistently Augustinian, but differences in temperament and theological concerns made for differing formulations. Again and again, for example, the essentially pastoral and missionary concern of the Pelagians, which led them to emphasize human responsibility and the efficacy of natural human effort in the process of salvation, also touched medieval thinkers. As a result, they were prompted to seek under the canopy of divine grace an enlargement of the arena wherein human effort can achieve merit. Again and again, too, the fundamentally confessional urge that had moved Augustine to acknowledge the impulsion of divine grace at every critical juncture in his own life (and to pray "all my hope can only be in [God's] great mercy") moved others. Hence they were led to elaborate confessional theologies that so stressed the providential role of divine grace in the process of salvation as to leave little room for the play of human freedom and responsibility. Thus on the very eve of the Reformation, the German theologian Gabriel Biel produced a theology of such markedly pastoral orientation that Luther accused him of "pelagianizing." And shortly afterward his fellow countryman Johann von Staupitz (d. 1525), Luther's mentor and monastic superior (from whom, he once said, he "received everything"), developed a theology of such persistently confessional orientation as to make "grace and not nature, mercy and not justice, hope and not fear... the constant themes of his message." So far, so good. For a more precise understanding of the complex forces shaping the late-medieval discussion of these issues, however, it is necessary, even at the risk of some confusion, to probe a little deeper. Though it is not always immediately apparent, and although Augustine himself addressed the issues separately and at different points in his life, two matters were at stake: the sovereign initiative of divine grace in the order of redemption and the sovereign omnipotence of God in the order of creation. We have seen that an overriding preoccupation with divine grace led Augustine in his writings against the Pelagians to an uncompromising emphasis on the doctrine of predestination and the irresistibility of grace. A firm commitment to God's omnipotence had earlier led him in his De libero arbitrio voluntatis to insist, in the teeth of widely held countervailing views, that man had indeed been endowed at the creation with freedom of will and the ability not to sin. In the name of overriding necessity and the universal sway of ineluctable fate, the views that Augustine had opposed had either qualified the freedom and moral responsibility of man or altogether denied them. And it is no accident that the Manichaean, Gnostic, and other pagans who had espoused such views were thinkers to whom the biblical and patristic doctrines of divine omnipotence and creation ex nihilo were irredeemably alien. Only an omnipotent God, after all, unlimited by any external or rival force and therefore radically free, could be regarded as capable of endowing the creature he had made in his own image and likeness with an attribute as godlike as freedom. Nor is it

3. See Ockham, Four Masters, p. 150.  
4. As Coelestinus, the disciple of Pelagius, is reported to have said, "If I sought, I can..."  
6. See Ockham, crater, p. 77.  
7. Steinmetz, Monasticism, p. 151; for Luther's statements of indwellingness to Staupitz, see p. 2.  
an accident that the early opponents of Augustine’s predestination teaching should accuse him of reintroducing in Christian guise the type of heathen fatalism that he himself had earlier rejected. Against that classical fatalism it had been the persistent concern of the earlier apologists for Christianity to affirm the freedom and responsibility of man. And that concern had been part of the prior and more fundamental struggle to vindicate in the teeth of pagan incomprehension the freedom and omnipotence of the transcendent Creator-God who had made him.

The point deserves emphasis. In the historic encounter between Athens and Jerusalem, between the Greek philosophical tradition and religious views of biblical provenance, the great stumbling block had been (and necessarily remained) the difficulty of reconciling the personal and transcendent biblical God of power and might, upon the free decision of whose will the very existence of the universe was contingent, with the characteristically Greek intuition of the divine as limited and inner-worldly and of the universe as necessary and eternal—or, to put it somewhat differently, with the persistent tendency of the Greek philosophers to identify the divine with the immanent and necessary order of an eternal cosmos.10

If Augustine himself had succeeded in effecting an accommodation with the Platonic and Neoplatonic versions in which the Christians of the ancient world encountered the Greek philosophic tradition, it was an accommodation by no means devoid of serious internal tensions. Those tensions mounted in the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when the treaty had, as it were, to be renegotiated and a far more difficult accommodation reached with full-scale philosophical systems of Arab-Aristotelian amalgam. Teaching not only the eternity of the universe but also its necessity, those systems confronted Christian thinkers with the picture of a determined world in which everything had to be what it was and which permitted no room for the play of free will either in God or in man. Not even the subtle philosophical and theological diplomacy of Aquinas could fully succeed in convincing his contemporaries that such an accommodation was truly possible without the abandonment or radical modification of beliefs so fundamental to Christianity as to be nonnegotiable. And during the century following his death in 1274, while the attempt to harmonize reason and revelation was certainly not abandoned, it was pursued more cautiously and with much less confidence than heretofore in the effective reach of human reason.

The need for such caution was signaled in 1277 by the condemnations issued by the bishop of Paris and the archbishop of Canterbury, proscribing a whole series of philosophical propositions, including some advanced by Aquinas himself. In the wake of those condemnations a theological reaction set in, which stimulated a widespread concern to vindicate the freedom and omnipotence of God at the expense, if need be, of the ultimate intelligibility of the world. There was a tendency, therefore, common to thinkers of very diverse stamps, to take the divine omnipotence as the fundamental principle, to set God over against the world he had created, and to regard the order of that world as deriving not from any sort of participation in the divine reason but rather from the inscrutable mandate of an autonomous divine will. Such a tendency was evident already in the primacy over the divine intellect that Duns Scotus (reversing Aquinas’s emphasis) accorded to the divine will. It became dominant in the thinking of the nominalist school, which, despite its diversity, still owed its basic inspiration to the scholastic writings of William of Ockham.

But while the driving concern was with the freedom and power of God in the order of creation, the very strength of that concern necessarily generated cognate impulses in theological discussions about the order of redemption, thus sparking renewed and anxious questioning about the power and freedom of man in the economy of salvation. The circuitry was complex, however, the connections were not always direct, and the energy thus liberated discharged itself along two paths

9. See Faustus Reinsius, De gratia libri duo, 1:16 (CSEL, 21:49–50); cf. Pelikan, 1:120.
10. For discussions of this point and its implications, see the essays gathered in O’Connor and Oakley, eds.
that led in very different directions—the first, in effect, to an ultimate denial of that human freedom, and the second to its affirmation. We will pursue each of them in turn to its appointed destination.

However startling the destination of the first of these paths, there is nothing paradoxical about it. The emphasis on the omnipotence of God and his freedom in the creative process provided, on the one hand, the best basis for a defense of human freedom against the renewed pressure of deterministic views, yet on the other hand, as the Jewish and Muslim traditions both make very clear, it posed to that belief a threat of a different but no less potent kind. Could the deeds of man, no matter how worthy, really hold any mortgage on the freedom of a truly omnipotent God? And if God’s power were really unfettered, could any created will be said to escape the enveloping domination of his own uncreated will? To the first of those urgent questions the Jewish Bible could be taken to have responded in the negative, and to the second the Islamic Koran. When Job, after all, had sought some justification, comprehensible in human terms, for the disasters that Yahweh had brought down upon him, Yahweh’s only reply had not been a rational vindication of the justice of his dealings with man but rather a terrifying evocation of his omnipotence: “Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades, or loose the cords of Orion? . . . Shall a fault-finder contend with the Almighty?” (Job 38:31; 40:2). And when the Koran admonished the believer: “Ye shall not will except as God wills,” members of the early-medieval Muslim school known as the Jabariya deduced that the movement of the divine will must necessarily be present even in the evil men do: “We are told that Ghailan asked: ‘Does God will that sins should be committed?’ to which Maimun retorted: ‘Are they committed against His Will?’ Whereupon Ghailan was silenced.”

Such considerations had by no means been irrelevant to the Augus- tine who taught divine predestination ante praeventia meritis and the ir- resistibility of grace—no more so, indeed, than they were later to the Luther who urged against Erasmus the widespread sense that we

must be “under necessity if the foreknowledge and omnipotence of God are accepted.” But they were certainly much less central to the thinking of either of those men than they were to the Muslim predestinarians or even to some of the late-medieval scholastics. In Chaucer’s “ Nun’s Priest’s Tale” the narrator, having told us that . . . what that god forworote must needes be

After the opinion of certeyn clericis,

and having referred by name to “Augustyn,” “Boëce,” and “the bishop Bradwardyn,” adds:

That in scote is gret altercacion In this matere, and gret disputasion.

Indeed, in the De causis dei (1344), the long polemic that Thomas Bradwardine wrote against those thinkers of his own day whom he denounced as pelagiarii pestiferi, while clearly reacting against the de- terminism of some of the Aristotelians and frequently referring to the condemnations of 1277, he “concentrates his attack on the proud self-conceit of those who think that it is possible to maintain human autonomy under the eyes of the sovereign God.” Moved less, it seems, by the weakness of man as a fain creature than by his natural dependency simply as a creature (that is, simply as one who has been created), he was led to stress the “omnicausality” of God, and, as a result, to argue that men are justified not through their works but through the prevenient of grace and are predestined to eternal life, therefore, ante praeventia meritis.

Bradwardine presents us with a forceful illustration of the degree to which the heightened preoccupation with the divine freedom and omnipotence so characteristic of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century theology possessed the potential to undercut the freedom and au- tonomy of man. In this, however, he represents something of an ex- treme, even when ranged alongside such theologians as Duns Scotus,

Gregory of Rimini (ca. 1300–1358), and Johann von Staupitz, all of whom similarly taught the doctrine of predestination ante pravitarum mortis, though on very different grounds.

Far more characteristic of the period as a whole is the stance adopted by so many theologians of the nominalist school, such men as Ockham himself, Holcot, Pierre d’Ailly, Gabriel Biel, and Bartholomaeus von Ussingen (1465–1532), Luther’s teacher at Erfurt. These men were no less concerned than was Bradwardine to vindicate the freedom and omnipotence of God, but they were wedged by that concern along the second of the two paths referred to above and led by it to a destination very different from his. So different, indeed, that he himself would have felt compelled to rank all of them among the “modern Pelagians” against whose detestable influence he felt it his mission to struggle.

Although of course differences and variations in thinking existed among these men, recent studies have made it clear that on the particular questions of justification and predestination their attitudes were very similar and that in general they were animated by a common spirit. Crucial to that spirit was not merely their responsiveness to the Old Testament vision of Yahweh as a god of power and might but, more specifically, their fidelity to another fundamental biblical theme: that of God’s promise and covenant. The significance of this differentiating factor should not be overlooked. The only force, after all, that is capable of binding omnipotence without thereby denying it is the omnipotent will itself. Conversely, if that will were incapable of binding itself, it could hardly be regarded as truly omnipotent. Whereas God, therefore, cannot be said to be bound by the canons of any merely human reason or justice, he is certainly capable by his own decision of binding himself to follow a certain pattern in dealing with his creation, just as an absolute monarch can bind himself in his dealings with his subjects. Nor is that analogy improper or misleading. It is a commonplace in the medieval texts themselves. More fascinatingly, recent investigations have uncovered the fact that the analogy

16. There is a good example in Gabriel Biel’s sermon, “On the Circumcision of the Lord” (ca. 1460), a translation of which is printed in Ochtrup, Fournauris, pp. 165–74. See p. 173 for his parable of the “lenten king.”

has firm foundations in the text of the Bible itself; for it has been argued, and on very compelling grounds, that Israel took as a model to describe Yahweh’s pact with her and her own peculiarly covenantal relationship with him the ancient Near Eastern treaty form, especially that very one-sided form whereby a powerful suzerain conceded his terms and freely pledged his loyalty to a faithful vassal. 17

In the thinking of these nominalists, and especially in that of Holcot, d’Ailly, and Biel, the covenantal theme finds its expression in their extensive employment of that crucial distinction between the absolute power and the ordained power of God to which reference was made in the last chapter. That distinction, though present in the thirteenth century—Albertus Magnus (ca. 1200–1280) implies that in his own day its use was already customary—rose to prominence only in the fourteenth century. The terms potentia absoluta and potentia dei ordinata occur frequently enough in the writings of the nominalists, but scholars disagree, unfortunately, on the precise meanings to be attached to them. All would agree that God’s absolute power meant God’s ability to do anything that does not involve a contradiction—that is, his omnipotence considered apart from the chosen natural, moral, or salvational order of things made known in revelation or apparent in the operations of nature itself. The disagreement concerns whether that ability is relevant only to “the total possibilities initially open to God” before his creation of the established order or whether it continues to remain open to realization. And that disagreement involves, in turn, a comparable lack of consensus about what was meant by God’s ordained power.

Thus, at one extreme, it has been argued that if the absolute power refers only to the possibilities initially open to God, the ordained power must accordingly denote “the total ordained will of God, the

17. George Mendenhall was the first to perceive this; see his Law and Covenant (1935). See also McCarthy and Hillers. 18. See Summa Thes., vol. 1, Tract. 39, qu. 78, mensura 2: “Ad hoc dici convenit, quod potentia Dei potest acipii absoltue, et potest acipi ut disposto et ordinato secundum ratiorem scientiae et voluntatis,” etc. (italics mine), in Bourger, ed., Opus omne, 31: 832. Cf. the valuable discussion of the distinction in Metzke, pp. 142–56.
complete plan of God for his creation.” Everything that happens, however unusual or even miraculous, must reflect God’s ordination, and the ordained power, therefore, is not to be identified “with the particular laws by which the established order normally operated.” 19

At the other extreme, it is precisely the latter identification that is endorsed, and the absolute power is understood accordingly as an ability to transcend those laws—an ability so potentially active, indeed, as to threaten “the entire foundation of His [God’s] ordained law” and to transform it into “the most fleeting of contingencies, ever liable to be dispensed with.” 20 This is confusing enough, no doubt, to us, but it was confusing already, it should be noted, to some of the late-medieval thinkers who used the distinction—not excluding Ockham himself, who ruefully warns of the ease with which anyone who “has not been excellently instructed in logic and theology” can fall into error in this matter. 21

The confusion can be dissipated, however, if we are prepared to acknowledge with Pierre d’Ailly and Francisco Suárez (1548–1617) that the expression potestas ordinata could be (and in fact was) used in both ways. It was used, that is, to denote both the ordination whereby God has externally willed that certain things are to be done and the ordinary power by which he acts in accord with the order—natural, moral, salvational—that he has in fact established and ordained and apart from which he can act only de potestate absoluta. Aquinas and Ockham favored the first usage, d’Ailly thought the second “more ap-


20. The distinction . . . means that according to the absolute power God, inasmuch as he is omnipotent, retains the ability to do many things which he does not will to do, has never done, nor will ever do.” Courtenay, it should be noted, acknowledges with reference to d’Ailly, Gabriel Biel, and Gregory of Rimini that the distinction was sometimes given the second of the two meanings under discussion here.

21. Thus Leff, Brudervoud and the Pelagians, p. 132; cf. Jerich, Gnad und Exequiterie, pp. 67–79. Leff has since moved to distance himself from Jerich’s interpretation and has indicated his wish to distinguish the use made of the distinction by Ockham himself from the more radical use to which “his followers and successors” put it; see also Ockham, especially pp. 15–16, 450, 470–71.

22. D’Ailly, Quaestiones, 1, qu. 13, art. 1, d. 159r; Suárez, Disput. Metaph., XXX, sect. viii, 1 52–56, especially at p. 141. Suárez, like some others, uses the words ordinaria tamen than ordinaria.” Dr. Johannes Eck (d. 1543) gives a particularly clear formulation of the second usage; see In finem librum Sententiarum, dist. 42, ed. Moore, p. 125.

in an arbitrary or despotic way. If God has freely chosen the established order, he has so chosen, and while like an absolute monarch he can dispense with or act apart from the laws he has decreed, he has nonetheless bound himself by his promise and will remain faithful to the covenant that, of his kindness and mercy, he has instituted with man.

So far as the order of salvation is concerned, this meant that the nominalist theologians were able to protect the freedom and omnipotence of God without being led thereby to assert a doctrine of predestation ante præstation mortis. By his absolute power, of course, God can justify men by grace alone and predestine them to eternal happiness regardless of their deeds. He is no man's debtor; of themselves, and without the conjunction of grace, human actions, however worthy, are incapable of meriting salvation. Of his ineffable mercy and by his ordained power, however, God has chosen to accept men as partners in the work of their salvation. He has done so in such a fashion that if, of their natural powers, they freely do the best they can (facient quod in se est), he will confer upon them that habit of sanctifying grace by which alone, in the presently established dispensation, acts that are morally good can be transformed into acts that merit an eternal reward. If he is not bound to do this by any simple or absolute necessity, for that has no place with God, he is so bound by what Chaucer's Nun's Priest accurately designates as a “necessary condition”—an “unfailing necessity . . . appropriate to God,” as Holcot tells us, “because of his promise, that is, His Covenant, or established law [ex præsenti suo et pacto suo legi statuta].” According to Heiko Obermann—who has asserted that in its “inner structure” the doctrine of justification taught by Ockham, Alilly, and Usingen is “to be characterized at least semi-Pelagian”—has nevertheless been properly careful to insist that “the Reform period is not marked by an unprecedented ascendance of the authority of St. Augustine nor by the sudden discovery of the radical anti-Pelagianism of Augustinian theology.” He has argued further for the influence of “the Scotist-Nominalist tradition” on the final doctrinal formulations of the Council of Trent and concluded that “the popular representation of the Tridentine decree on justification as the via media between the extremes of a Pelagian nominalism and a Lutheran Augustinianism stands [now] in need of correction.”

If, then, as we saw in the last chapter, the customarily alleged continuities of certain modes of piety from the late-medieval period to the era of Protestant Reformation are neither as direct nor as evident as has often been supposed, we must now be prepared to conclude that in the realm of doctrines of grace the customarily alleged doctrinal discontinuities between the “nominalism” of that period and the theology of

25. Thus, for Ockham, Quodl., VI, 1, fol. 91r, it was Pelagian's error to have argued that man could actually win merit by the exercise of his own natural powers de potestas dei ordinata, whereas he himself would argue that that would be possible only by de potestas dei absoluta.

26. Obermann, Histor., p. 426, cf. pp. 177 and 181, where he describes Biel's doctrine as "essentially Pelagian" and Usingen's as "clearly Pelagian." For an opposed point of view, see Vigano, Iustification, pp. 157, n. 2, 185–88 (with reference to Ockham), and his Luther, pp. 89–92 (with reference to Biel, too).

27. The further remarks of Obermann quoted here and below are from his Forerunners, p. 151, and his "Das tridentinische Rechtfertigungsdecrete," p. 282.
the age of Catholic or Counter-Reformation are not necessarily any more obvious.

Scripture and Tradition

Something similar may be said in relation to the second area of theological concern that rose to prominence during the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and was destined to become central to the Reformation debates of the following century—namely, that which focused on the sources of Christian doctrine.

In the older view, the sixteenth-century debate was characterized by the clash between Protestant appeals to "the Scripture alone" and Catholic appeals to "Scripture and Tradition." The late-medieval thinkers were classified in a similar fashion, with such men as Wycliffe and Hus, Wessel Gansfort and John Poper of Goch lauded as forerunners of Protestant biblicism. Karl Ullmann gave standard expression to this view over a century ago when he asserted that among the things "these men made to be more clearly and generally understood" was "the necessity of appealing to Scripture as the pure Word of God in opposition to all human doctrine and tradition."28 Such a view was grounded, of course, in what was at the time a pardonably inadequate comprehension of the richness and complexity of late-medieval theology, and before the century was out it had been subjected to some harsh criticism. The subject remained, nevertheless, somewhat less than fashionable among scholars. As recently as twenty years ago, when Paul de Vooght addressed himself to it, he still found reason to deplore the lack of scholarly attention paid to the views of the fourteenth-century scholastic theologians concerning the sources of Christian doctrine; and he ventured the opinion that the continuing inadequacies in our knowledge of the theologians of the period in general helped account for the disparate and disappointingly tentative nature of our attempts to comprehend the views of Wycliffe and Hus in particular.29


In the years since de Vooght wrote, however, there has been something of a surge of interest in medieval explorations of the relationship between Scripture and tradition. It has been stimulated in part by a renewed preoccupation with the lineaments of the sixteenth-century debates on the subject and by an unexpected challenge to the interpretation that historians and theologians alike had given for centuries to the Tridentine decree on Scripture and the apostolic traditions. It had been customary to assume that in opposition to the "Protestant principle" of scriptura sola (Scripture alone) the Council of Trent had endorsed the teaching that the Gospel was to be found only partly in Scripture and partly, therefore, in the unwritten traditions the apostles had received from Christ and handed down to their episcopal successors (the so-called partim . . . partim formula). Such a teaching had been widely received in the years immediately before the assembling of the council; it was to become a cliché of Counter-Reformation theology, and the text of the decree itself, admittedly, can quite readily be interpreted in such a way as to support it. Close scrutiny of the actual debates at Trent, however, has made it clear that the fathers of the council, in response to vehement minority protest, had actually excised a partim . . . partim formula from the draft decree. Joseph Geiselman and others have argued that this step indicated the council's desire not to impugn the orthodoxy of the minority view urged by Agostino Bonuccio (d. 1553), superior general of the Servites, to whom "tradition" was "essentially an authoritative interpretation of Holy Writ, not its complement," Scripture itself containing "all truths necessary for salvation."30 And, if this is so, then Trent did not teach the material insufficiency of the Scripture taken alone and the concomitant necessity for an authoritative extrascriptural tradition. Although Geiselman's view has not gone unchallenged, its effect upon late-medieval studies has been such as to suggest the impropriety of trying to stretch the views of late-medieval theologians to fit the Procrustean alternatives of Scripture alone or Scripture and tradition.

30. Jedin, History, II, 75. Jedin draws on Geiselman. Oberman is among those who disagree with Geiselman's claim; see Harvest, p. 107, n. 156. There is a balanced discussion of the controversy in Morsman.
The striving for alternative modes of classification is already evident, therefore, in the literature. It has not yet generated a great deal of confidence in the ways in which individual thinkers are being classified. It is hard to generalize without a craven superfluity of qualifications when a thinker of Ockham’s stature can be represented in turn as a precocious advocate of the Protestant appeal to Scripture alone, as undecided between that position and the rival claim that the divine revelation had also been mediated by the apostolic tradition, as one who actually leaned toward this latter “two sources” theory, and as one who definitely embraced it. Generalize we must, however, and it is fair to say that whatever the hesitations and complications evident in the scholarly literature, the outlines of a less anachronistic classificatory schema have definitely begun to emerge.

The basic difficulty is that the church fathers, like the theologians of the early and High Middle Ages, had been content to join together what so many (though by no means all) of their late-medieval and sixteenth-century successors felt moved to put asunder—namely, the Scripture, tradition, and the magisterial authority of the church in relation to both. For the early fathers, the kerygma, the revealed “good news,” was understood to be communicated in its entirety in the Scripture, and “tradition” was understood in the active sense as a handing down (tradere) of that scriptural revelation and of its authoritative interpretation within the community of the faithful. Bonaccio’s stance at Trent reveals the tenacity of this general point of view. And if, by his day, it seems to have become something of a minority position among Catholic theologians, that development was comparatively recent. Until the fourteenth century one sees few signs of any inclination to distinguish clearly between the “trUTHs of the Catholic faith” taught by the church and the scriptural revelation itself. The prevailing attitude was very matter-of-fact. Exegetical credal statements tended to be understood as formulating or summarizing scriptural truths; there was little disposition to confront the problem raised by such points of doctrine as the filioque clause in the Latin version of the Nicene Creed or the form of several of the sacraments, which could not clearly be grounded in the Scriptures. All the truths of the faith were seen as “deriving” at one remove or another from the Scriptures and there was no hesitation about describing Scripture as the “sole source” of Christian doctrine—though such expressions clearly did not possess the “exclusive and literal” meaning accorded to them in later centuries. Even in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when some had begun to canvass the notion that revelation had been communicated in part by an extrascriptural tradition, such theologians as Guido Terreni (d. 1342), Bradwardine, Wyclif, Hus, and Wessel Gansfort continued to espouse the older view. Indeed, it is rather as latter-day defenders of that older view than as precocious proclaimers of any proto-Protestant notion of scriptura sola that Wyclif and Hus must properly be understood.

Defenders, then, they were, but self-conscious defenders, deliberate affirmers of an older understanding of tradition and of an older unity that could no longer quite be taken for granted. For the newer understanding of tradition that rose to prominence during this period laid a special stress on John 20:30: “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book.” It separated, therefore, what had previously been united, and solved the problem posed by doctrines that appeared to lack any direct scriptural grounding by affirming the existence of a second source of revelation, an extrascriptural oral tradition stemming from Christ and handed down to their episcopal successors by the apostles.

Of the existence of such a notion there is little secure evidence earlier than Gratian’s influential Decretum, St. Basil (d. 370) had asserted: “We


32. See de Vought, Sauras, p. 294: “En réalité ces idées et ces interprétations sont confondues dans les esprits de l’âge médiéval, sans en excepter Wiclif, ce sens exclusif et littéral que nous lui accordons aujourd’hui.”

33. De Vought, Sauras, especially pp. 233, 259–60. Hurley, especially pp. 276–79, 337–52, has dissented from his view of Wyclif’s position, but see the pertinent reply in Oberman, Harrow, p. 375, n. 41.
accept some of the ecclesiastical institutions from the Scriptures, others indeed, from apostolic tradition. It is true also that this text cannot simply be dismissed as irrelevant on the grounds that it deals with liturgical practices rather than truths of the faith, for patristic and medieval theologians were by no means averse to drawing doctrinal conclusions from the existence of liturgical practices. It is true, again, that Gabriel Biel, in defending the newer two-sources theory, made a point of citing St. Basil’s statement, so that it has been possible to claim that it was now “firmly grafted onto the theological tradition.”

But since, in the same text, St. Basil went on to accord the same respect to postapostolic tradition as he had previously accorded to Scripture and apostolic tradition, it hardly seems likely that he was concerned to state an opinion about the sources of divine revelation. Nor does the available evidence suggest that in bending it to that purpose Biel was following any path particularly well trodden by earlier theologians. Least of all should the mere fact that the text was included in Gratian’s Decretum be taken to justify the claim that “for the canon lawyer . . . the two-sources theory has been established.”

The context in which Gratian introduces the text reveals that his concern in so doing was with ecclesiastical tradition conceived as no more than human custom, and the later decretist glossators were no more inclined than was he to stretch that tradition to include revealed truths of faith. In fact, the contextual matters apart, it would have been very odd indeed had they been tempted to do anything of the sort. For

34. St. Basil, De spiritu sancto, 66, in Migne, PG XXXII, 388. As rendered in Latin in the Decretum the text runs as follows: “Ecclesiasticum interpres immersum quasdam scripturas, quasdam vero apostolica traditione per successores in ministerio confirmatas acquirimus; quasdam vero consequentiae roborata approbavit usus, quibus pars ritus et idem utriusque pietatis debet affectus” (D. 11, c. 5; ed. Friedberg, 1:24).


36. Though the English theologian William of Woodford (d. ca. 1400), charged with the task of refuting the errors of Wycliffe at a synod in London, also made some use of the text; see de Vooght, Source, pp. 203–4.


38. In the course of the controversy over apostolic poverty, John XXII reaffirmed this understanding. His statement was included in the Extrait du Gesta Jeanne XXII (Tir. 14, c. 4 and 5; ed. Friedberg, 2:1230, 1236 and “no major canonists of the fourteenth century dissented from it”; see Tierney, “Sola Scriptura,” p. 358. 39. Tierney, Origins, p. 219.

40. Ockham, Dialogus, Lib. II, c. 2; in Goldast, 2:400–12.
Among them must also be listed Gabriel Biel, who in his formulation of the two-sources theory, Oberman has argued, comes "closer than any of his predecessors to the formulation of the Council of Trent: Scripture and Tradition should be held in equal esteem." 41

Omitted from this listing is a name that one might expect to find and that others would certainly be willing to include: that of Jean Gerson, d'Alilly's distinguished pupil. The omission is deliberate. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries witnessed the questioning of older unities and the appearance of a division between those who affirmed the single-source theory (the material sufficiency of Scripture and the older understanding of tradition) and those who espoused the newer two-sources theory. That much is certain, though disagreements still persist about the alignment of particular thinkers with one or other of the respective camps. 42 Only a little less certain, however, is the impossibility of aligning with either of those two camps every theologian who addressed the topic. Gerson is a case in point, and it has recently been argued that in one of his works he went beyond the two-sources theory, with which his name has certainly been linked, in that he took the radical step of assigning "to the Spirit-governed Church . . . the authority to judge and declare what the literal sense of Scripture is." As a result, for him, in contradistinction to the advocates of the two-sources theory, "the Bible itself has no theologically authoritative literal meaning," and "the possibility of argument from Scripture against the ecclesiastical [magisterium] is . . . programmatical and theoretically eliminated." 43

The correctness of this appraisal is doubtless debatable. But it is a valuable one if only because it suggests the existence at that time of a third position distinct from the two preceding. Whereas the advocates of the two-sources theory had shuttered the older unity by understanding tradition not simply as the handing down and authoritative interpretation of the Scriptures but as an extrascriptural oral tradition constituting a second source of revelation, the representatives of the third position tended in the direction of a further and more radical step. For they laid a wholly new emphasis on the active teaching role of the church, loosening the bonds that had previously limited the magisterium to the faithful elucidation of the Scriptures or of Scripture and tradition alike, freeing it to create "new tradition," attributing to it, in effect, the final authority to determine—even through novel dogmatic formulations—what the tradition must originally have contained. And in so doing they broke with Vincent of Lérins's (d. ante 450) time-honored definition of what constituted orthodox tradition—namely, what had been believed "everywhere, always, by all." 44

All in all, a not too remote anticipation of the view that Mühler and the members of the Tübinger school taught in the nineteenth century and which has since become so prominent in Roman Catholic theology—the view of tradition, not as a set of passive historical "monuments" but as a living thing, one that finds its definitive expression in the faith of the church today and is crystallized not only in the lives of the faithful but also, and more precisely, in the authoritative pronouncements of the magisterium. 45

Not all Franciscans were advocates of this position. Ockham himself certainly was not; he specifically insisted that the determinations of the church could not in themselves constitute a distinct source of Catholic truth. Nor were all who sympathized with the view Franciscans; both Gerson and John Peper of Goch so stressed "the metaphysical priority of the Church over Scripture" as to insist "that the Church can even declare the grammatically less probable meaning of the text to the true literal sense." 46 Nevertheless (though here one must perforce speak very tentatively), it would appear that the vogue of a specifically Franciscan doctrine, and the problems attendant upon it, did much to sponsor the crystallization of this third position. For the doctrine of the absolute poverty of Christ and the apostles and the

43. See Preus., pp. 79–81 and n. 25.
44. Vincent of Lérins, Cenomantiorium., chap. 2; in Moson, p. 10.
45. See the useful brief discussion in Moson., pp. 38–42.
insistence that the renunciation of property, whether held individually or in common, lay at the very heart of Christian perfection had as little unambiguous foundation in apostolic tradition as it had in the Scripture itself. It reflected a new understanding of the Christian message; it was, in effect, as their enemies alleged and as prominent Franciscans themselves admitted, a “new tradition,” one that could be firmly grounded only in the teaching authority of the church itself. Hence the insistence of such distinguished Franciscan theologians as St. Bonaventure and Duns Scotus that “Catholic truth was not what the church had demonstrably always proclaimed but what the church was proclaiming then and there, in their own time.” 47 Hence, too, the assertion of the general chapter of the Franciscan order at Perugia in June 1322 that articles of faith derived “either from sacred Scripture or from the determination of the church,” thereby affirming the belief that “the church was a second source of divine revelation supplementary to Scripture.” 48 Hence, finally, though this time by way of reaction to Franciscan claims, John XXII’s evocation of the older view, and his insistence in Cum inter normales that to ignore the explicit scriptural base of doctrine would be “by taking away its proof” to render “the Catholic faith doubtful and uncertain.” 49

John XXII’s reaction is interesting. In modern Roman Catholic theology the position closest to the one he rejected—the notion of the church as itself a “living tradition”—has often been linked with the doctrine of papal infallibility. In the fifteenth century, however, the position cognate to it could be espoused by a conciliarist (Gerson) and a man traditionally portrayed as a “Reformer before the Reformation” (John Puffer of Coich). Similar perplexities attend upon any attempt to chart the subsequent careers of the other two positions outlined above. Thus the first and older position is not simply to be identified with the later Protestant appeal to scriptura sola. It was taught, after all, by Bonaccio at Trent and has been embraced during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries by men of as different sympathies as John XXII, the condemned heretics Wycliffe and Hus, and Guido Terreni, the proponent of papal infallibility. And if the second or two-sources theory did indeed feed into the mainstream of Counter-Reformation theology, it must nevertheless be remarked that it numbered among its adherents conciliarists as well as papalists. All of which might well lead one to suspect that the truly important ecclesiological disagreements of the era centered less on the specifically magisterial power of the church than upon its jurisdictional power in general. That suspicion would not be misplaced.

The Nature of the Church

The thirteenth century has been characterized as belonging still to “the prehistory of ecclesiology,” and James of Viterbo’s De regimine christiano (1301–2) has been called—not without justice—“the oldest treatise on the Church.” 50 In the Liber sententiarum, which became the standard textbook for medieval students of theology, Peter Lombard devoted no separate section to the topic De ecclesia; the same approach is evident in the theological works of Aquinas a century and more later. Only in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries did ecclesiology become a focus of intense concern among theologians. That shift in interest therefore calls for explanation.

It has been argued that the shift was due in part to the nominalist preoccupation with divine omnipotence and the understandable concern of nominalist theologians, therefore, with the historical institutional arrangements a covenanting God had actually chosen de potentia ordinata to make. This argument may be plausible, but it is not readily susceptible of either proof or disproof. A more concrete argument has pointed to the trials and tribulations that the ecclesiastical institu-

—50 Lagarde, 5:4; Arquilière. There is room, of course, for some disagreement about the accuracy of that designation; see Thulis, pp. 243–44; Hendrix, pp. 348–49, n. 5.
tion was forced to endure during these centuries and to the flood of publicistic literature they helped engender. Among those trials three stand out: first, the conflicts between Boniface VIII and Philip IV of France and between John XXII and Lewis of Bavaria; second, the long dispute over the Franciscan doctrine of apostolic poverty, which had surfaced during the conflict between mendicants and seculars at Paris in the 1250s and racked both the order and the church at large for the better part of the century following; third, the unprecedentedly grave split in the Latin church from 1378 to 1418, which has gone down in history as the Great Schism of the West.

The first of these disastrous trials led to an outpouring of publicistic literature concerning the proper relationship between temporal and spiritual authorities, one paralleled in importance during the Middle Ages only by the earlier outburst during the Gregorian era. Critical though this issue was, it cannot concern us here. More significant for our purposes is the simple fact that the initial conflict between Boniface VIII and Philip IV spawned the first group of important treatises devoted specifically to the church or to aspects of its power: the De regimine christiano of James of Viterbo, Aegidius Romanus's De ecclesiastica potestate (1302), and John of Paris's De potestate regis et papae (1302–3). These tracts already manifest the anxious scrutiny of church structures and far-reaching speculation concerning the nature and location of ecclesiastical authority that were to characterize the publicist and theological writings connected with the two other great challenges to the church's traditional order. Taken as a whole, then, along with the canonistic commentaries on which they so often drew, the writings produced by all three crises confront us with a body of thought on matters ecclesiastical at once more extensive, more varied, more developed, and more systematic than anything emerging from the centuries preceding.

51. The question of apostolic poverty did as much as that of papal privileges to mold Franciscan thinking concerning scriptural and ecclesiastical authority in general and papal authority in particular. Tertnay, Origins, pp. 65–66, asserts that "the main lines that this whole theoretical controversy [concerning papal privilege] followed were determined by the first exchange of polemical treatises at Paris in the years 1255–1256."

In its most radical and extreme manifestations, this body of thought measured the institutional church of its day against a would-be historical understanding of the conditions prevailing in the primitive Christian communities of the apostolic era and, finding that church understandably wanting, pursued its own becomings ideals across the shadowy and fluctuating border that separated prophetic criticism from outright heresy. More commonly, however, it erected its own varying but imposing structures upon the extensive foundations laid by the theological controversies and canonistic formulations of earlier centuries.

Among these foundations, two stand out as central, one theological, the other canonistic. The theological foundation is the position that Augustine had adopted in his conflict with the Donatists, which was consciously challenged during the Middle Ages only by those hardy spirits susceptible to the lures of heresy. The canonistic foundation is the practice whereby the medieval canonists had come to treat the universal church as a single corporate entity akin to other corporations, a practice that helped shape the single most important ecclesiastical debate of the era. The first pertained to the nature of the holiness that was to be required of the church; the second to the nature of the unity that the church could be said to possess. We will take them up in turn.

Of the four marks of the church designated in the Nicene Creed— one, holy, catholic, apostolic—the mark of holiness appeared earlier and more often in the various creeds than did the other three. It was also the characteristic that gave rise to some of the earliest ecclesiastical controversies. All agreed that the church—the body of Christ, the body wherein, via the sacraments, the saving grace of God was mediated to sinful man—had to be holy. Already in the third century, Cyprian, bishop of Carthage (d. 258), had become embroiled in disputes concerning the way in which that holiness was to be defined and what it implied for the sacraments of baptism and penance. On this issue, however, as on so many others, the later contribution of Augustine proved determinative.

The birthplace of Donatism was the North African province of the
Roman Empire. There, by Augustine's lifetime, it had split the Christian community into bitterly opposed orthodox and schismatic churches. Its point of departure had been the great persecution of DIOCLETIAN (285–305), under the pressure of which some of the clergy had apostatized. After that persecution a group of zealots had challenged in particular the authority of the bishop of Carthage (or the grounds that he had been ordained by one who had repudiated his faith and thereby lapsed into mortal sin), had questioned in general the validity of sacraments administered by clergy of immoral or unworthy behavior, had adopted the position that the church had forfeited its claim to be holy if it tolerated within its ranks members guilty of the cardinal sin of apostasy or clergy morally unworthy of their high office, and had insisted, in effect, on making "the unity and the catholicity of the church contingent on its prior holiness." 52 For these Donatists, that holiness was to be judged solely in terms of the moral rigor with which its individual members conducted their lives. The church was for them to be a body of the elect, its members, clerical as well as lay, restricted to the ranks of the righteous—it was, in Ernst Troeltsch's categories, to be a sect. This being so, the Donatists were eventually willing to make the startling claim that their own church, limited though it was to the North African province, and schismatic at that, alone possessed the sacraments, the primary instrumentalties through which grace was mediated, and alone could claim to be the one and true Catholic church.

If the Donatists made the unity of the church contingent upon its holiness, Augustine, by way of reaction, went a long way toward making its holiness contingent upon its unity. For him, it was schism far more than the individual unworthiness of its ministers that struck at the very life of the church. Cut off, indeed, from "the unity of the body of Christ," and, as a result, from the grace that, by divine ordination, the church and its sacraments mediate to man, nobody could attain true holiness. For the holiness of the church did not reside in the subjective righteousness of its individual members but rather in its own institutional sanctity as the locus of the regenerative working of divine grace. "The church is one, and its holiness is produced by the sacraments," Optatus, another anti-Donatist, had said. "It is not to be considered on the basis of the pride of individuals." 53 The emphasis, therefore, was on the objective and the sacramental, and the authenticity and holiness of the sacramental channels of divine grace were seen to depend upon the personal moral worthiness neither of minister nor of recipient. So that while Augustine, in his confrontation with Pelagianism, was led to state his belief in predestination in a particularly uncompromising form, thus identifying the true church not with any institution or visible fellowship of men but with the invisible body of the elect foreknown to God alone, in his writings against the Donatists he was led to identify the visible, institutional church, with its saints and sinners, hierarchy and sacraments, as the one true Catholic church and the sole ark of salvation. If the membership of that church is more inclusive, strictly speaking, than that of the "essential" or "invisible" church, it is not God's will that we, like the Donatists, should presume to do what he himself will not undertake to do before the Last Judgment—namely, to separate the wheat from the chaff, the saints from the sinners.

In an even more direct and thoroughgoing fashion than his doctrine of grace, Augustine's teaching on the church succeeded in defining the terms of medieval orthodoxy and in establishing the boundaries within which ecclesiological discussion, if it aspired to be orthodox, had necessarily to be conducted. It also laid the requisite foundation on which the scholastic theologians were able to develop a sacramental theology and the canonists to erect an analysis of hierarchical and ecclesiastical power. By the fourteenth century, both of these bodies of thought had undergone very considerable elaboration, but it is the latter—the canonistic investigation of the structures of ecclesiastical power—that must concern us here. For it funneled directly into the great late-medieval debate concerning the nature of the church's unity.

To say that, however, is not to deny the impropriety of too insistent a separation between the concerns of the theologians and those of the

52. Pelikan, 1: 309.

canonists. In the twelfth- and thirteenth-century definitions of the church, it was still customary to give a prominent place to the sacraments, especially to the Eucharist. Was not the church, after all, itself the body of Christ, a prolongation of Christ’s presence in the world, one that incorporated the faithful in a mysterious community of salvation? During those same centuries, nevertheless, the diminution in the sense of the organic connection between Christ’s self-immolation and the priest’s eucharistic act, which we noted in discussing medieval liturgical developments, was paralleled by and linked with a comparable diminution in the sense of organic connection between Christ and his church. In the patristic era, those connections had been so deeply felt that the church could be referred to as the “true” body of Christ (corpus Christi verum) and when, during the Carolingian era, the term “mystical body of Christ” (corpus Christi mysticum) became prominent in theological literature, it had been used to denote not the church but the Eucharist. From the mid-twelfth century onward, however, something of a reversal took place.54 Perhaps under the impact of the great controversy of the previous century concerning the nature of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist, theologians became anxious to emphasize the real—as opposed to a mystical or merely spiritual—presence of Christ in the sacrament. As a result, it became common to designate the Eucharist not as “the mystical” but as “the true body of Christ,” and the term corpus Christi mysticum, applied now to the church in the manner familiar to us today, fell victim to a progressive secularization.

In St. Bonaventure, and, more frequently, in Aquinas, we may find the analogy of the church as a mystical body being drawn not from the sacramental body of Christ but from natural bodies or bodies in general, so that Aquinas can speak of “the mystical body of the church” (corpus ecclesiae mysticum).55 This is an expression almost devoid of sacramental associations and one already on the way to acquiring those juridical connotations that were fully exploited during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries by canonists and publicists alike. Already in the thirteenth century, Innocent IV had identified the aggregatio fidei with the corpus Christi, and Tiemey has commented that “in assuming that the Church, defined as the corpus Christi, was an entity capable of the quite prosaic function of property ownership, Innocent was apparently regarding it not only as a corpus mysticum but as something akin to a legal corporation.”56 By the early fifteenth century, when Pierre d’Ailly expressed sentiments almost identical with those of Innocent IV, the equation had become a commonplace: the church had come to be “interpreted as a polity like any other secular corporation,” and “the notion corpus mysticum itself,” charged now “with secular political contents,” had come to be almost a synonym for “moral and political body” (corpus morale et politicum).57

The importance of this development is not to be gainsaid. In the first place, it accelerated the process (already well advanced among the canonists) whereby categories and concepts drawn from secular legal and political thinking were applied to the church. Of the traditional categories of ecclesiastical power, indeed, it was the power of jurisdiction and in particular the potestas jurisdictionis in foro exteriori—its public, coercive, most unambiguously nonsacramental and political subdivision—that was classified as pertaining to the corpus mysticum.58 In the second place, by opening up a certain distance between the sacramental and governmental aspects of the church, it made possible (without any challenge to the traditional Augustinian teaching on the church’s holiness) the initiation of a great debate concerning her unity. Indeed, not only did it make such a debate possible, it positively invited one. For the notion that the church as a mystical body was an entity akin to a legal corporation suggested conclusions of several types. And during the century and more preceding the onset of

55. Kantorowicz, pp. 203, 211–12. Than d'Ailly, Tractatus de ecclesiastica potestate, in Dupin, 2:942: “et ipsa interfinguntur esse oblasta Christo, id est Communari Feudum, quae est Corpus Christi.
56. The sacerdotal or sacramental power (potestas ordinis) was said to pertain to the corpus Christi verum. There was some disagreement about the degree to which the potestas jurisdictionis in foro exteriori was to be regarded as truly juridical in essence or aligned with the potestas ordinis. On these points, see Ockley, “Figgis,” pp. 380–82, and the literature referred to therein.
the Great Schism, the canonsists, in their attempts to rationalize the structure both of the individual churches of Christendom and of the universal church itself, had been led to develop two separate doctrines concerning the church's unity. "The more conspicuous one, which has usually been regarded as the canonical doctrine par excellence, insisted that the unity of the Church could be secured only by a rigorous subordination of all the members to a single head." Hence the doctrine of absolute papal monarchy that dominated most of the canonistic glosses of the fourteenth century and attained its least inhibited expression in the works of such high-papalist publicists as Aegidius Romanus, Augustinus Triumphus (d. 1328), Alvarus Pelagius (d. 1352), and John of Turrecremata (d. 1468).

But side by side with this doctrine there existed another theory, applied first to the single churches and then at the beginning of the fourteenth century, in a fragmentary fashion, to the Roman Church and the Church as a whole, a theory which stressed the corporate association of the members of a Church as the true principle of ecclesiastical unity, and which envisaged an exercise of corporate authority by the members of a church even in the absence of an effective head.59

This theory, along with an older strand in canonistic thinking going back to the twelfth- and early-thirteenth-century commentaries on Gratian's Decretum (and especially to their discussions of the case of the heretical pope), laid the essential foundations for the pattern of conciliarist thinking that was to attain mature expression during the schism and its aftermath in the writings of such men as Conrad of Gelnhausen, d'Ailly, Gerson, Francesco Zabarella (d. 1417), and Nicholas of Cusa.

The ambivalence of the canonistic heritage blocked the crystallization of a coherently constitutionalist understanding of the church's unity until the imperative necessities of a protracted schism called such an understanding into being. That ambivalence also did something to impede the development of a rival doctrine of unity hinging upon papal absolutism, but did not ultimately prevent it. Indeed, to us, the curialist insistence on the pope's sovereign authority over the


church is surely the most familiar feature of late-medieval ecclesiological discourse. According to the anonymous papalist author of the pamphlet known as the Determinatio compendiosa (1342):

Especially is he, the pope, above every council and statute . . . he it is, too, who has no superior on earth; he, the pope, gives dispensations from every law. . . . Again, it is he who possesses the plenitude of power on earth and holds the place and office of the Most High. . . . He it is who alters the substance of a thing, making legitimate what was illegitimate . . . and of a monk making a canon regular, . . . he it is who by absolving on earth absolves [also] in heaven, and by binding on earth binds [also] in heaven. . . . Again, it is to him that nobody may say: "Why do you do that?" . . . He it is for whom the will is reason enough, since that which pleases him has the force of law (ex good plast, legis rigorem habeat). . . . he is not bound by the laws . . . (substante et legibus). Indeed, the pope is the law itself and a living law (lex vitæ), to resist which is impermissible. This then is the Catholic and orthodox faith, approved and canonized by the holy fathers of old, from which all justice, religion, sanctity and discipline have emanated. If anyone does not believe it faithfully and firmly, he cannot be saved, and without doubt will perish eternally.60

An extreme statement, perhaps, but one familiar enough in its claims to dull the apprehension of what precisely is involved and to blunt the perception of what is not. Three cavets, therefore, may be in order.

In the first place, this high-papalist doctrine made no special claims for the pope in relation to sacerdotal or sacramental powers; in that respect he was but a bishop among bishops and it was conceded that Christ had bestowed the "power of order" equally upon all the apostles, those first prelates in whose lineage later prelates stood. The doctrine was concerned, rather, with the distribution among the ranks of the hierarchy of the "power of jurisdiction in the external forum."

This power, it was asserted, Christ had bestowed in superior and

60. Scholz, Unbekannte kirchspolitischen Schriften, 2, 544. Extreme though it may seem, the anonymous author's list of papal prerogatives is not unrepresentative but follows closely a comparable list given by Gediminas Durandus (the Speculator), itself derived; it seems, from the glossa ordinaria to the Decretals, the author of which had taken it from an earlier gloss by Tancred (d. 1255). The claims involved are explicitly juridical: "They referred to the legislative and dispensatory powers of the pope within the framework of positive ecclesiastical law" (Tierney, Origins, pp. 26–27).
unique measure upon Peter, so that the plenitude of power that was claimed for the pope as successor to Peter was a plenitude of jurisdictional power in *fons exteriori*—in effect, a fullness of public, coercive, governmental power. Further, from the time of Innocent III until the completion of the full-fledged doctrine in John of Turrecremata’s great *Summa de ecclésia*, it was claimed with increasing frequency and growing elaboration that the pope was not only superior in jurisdiction to other prelates in the church but also the immediate source of the jurisdiction wielded by all those lesser prelates. As Augustinus Triumphus argued (with reference to Mart. 16:19):

> When Christ, therefore, granted the power of jurisdiction, he spoke not in the plural but in the singular, saying to Peter alone, “I shall give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven,” as if clearly to say: although I shall have given the power of order to all the apostles, I give that to you alone your power of jurisdiction, to be dispensed and distributed through you to all the others.

And because it is not Christ but the pope as successor to Peter who “thus confers the power of jurisdiction on the other prelates of the Church, in the same way he can take it away from them.”

In the second place, despite the understandable antipathy aroused by such a doctrine among the local ordinaries, the independent basis of whose jurisdictions it directly challenged, papal lawlessness was not its necessary corollary, nor was a doctrine of arbitrary despotism intended. For the papalists, canonists and publicists alike, invoked by way of analogy the covenantal pattern that, as we have seen, was so marked a feature of the theology of the day. Some of them distinguished between the pope’s absolute and ordained or ordinary powers. They directed the pope’s attention to the fact that God, his omnipotence notwithstanding, “nearly always” condescends to observe the laws that he has imposed upon the natural world, “producing the effects of secondary agents through the mediation of secondary agents.” They argued (as did Aegidius Romanus) that the pope likewise, his plenitude of power notwithstanding, ought to govern the church in line with the laws he himself has established, permitting “chapters to carry out their elections, and prelates to discharge their duties, and other churchmen to perform their tasks, in accordance with the form given them.”

If those who wished to extend the reach of the pope’s authority might well be tempted to invoke the intervention of his absolute power (as, ironically enough, Henry VIII of England did on the divorce question), it was also possible for those who wished to oppose what they took to be such an extension to resist. They had grounds in that the action involved, though undoubtedly possible de potentia absoluata, was not permissible by his ordained power, regulated as it was by the provisions of the written law (de regulat et secundum iura scripta ordinata potestate usus).

In the third place, if, by his absolute power, the pope could clearly transcend the law, he was sovereign in relation to the positive canon law of the church. He was not superior to the limits imposed by natural law or freed on matters of faith from the bonds of the scriptural revelation. Nor is it to be supposed that this doctrine of papal sovereignty entailed necessarily or even usually a belief in papal infallibility. It is true that the medieval canonists, unlike some of their modern successors, were content to treat the magisterial power as an aspect of jurisdiction. It is also true that they certainly regarded the pope’s jurisdiction as embracing the right to render decisions in disputes pertaining to matters of faith. Christ’s promise to Peter that his faith would not fail (Luke 22:32) they took, however, to be a guarantee of the indefectibility of the universal church rather than of Peter himself, and certainly not of the infallibility of his papal successors. The *Decretum*, after all, contained allegations that past popes had fallen into error on matters of faith. It also contained a crucial and


much-glossed text (Dist. 40, chap. 6) indicating that if the pope were “caught deviating from the faith” he was not immune to human judgment. This ground would seem too stony to be hospitable to any notion of papal infallibility. When, indeed, that devoutly canonist John XXII encountered the doctrine in 1324, although he did not meet it head on, he did contrive to brush it aside as a “pestiferous doctrine.”

That he should have lost so little time in doing so appears to reflect his deeply felt sense that simply to admit the doctrine of papal infallibility would be to undercut the traditional doctrine of papal sovereignty. For if popes were infallible in their pronouncements on matters of faith, then the pronouncements of his predecessors on such matters were irrefutable and he himself was bound by them. And that is precisely what at least the Franciscan proponents of infallibility were out to suggest. The doctrine was something of a late-medieval novelty, first explicitly proposed, it has recently been argued, by Franciscan propagandists eager to defend the inviolability of Nicholas III’s bull *Exstat gai seminat* (1279), which endorsed the Franciscan doctrine of apostolic poverty as a matter of revealed truth. The doctrine grounded the irreformability of such decrees in the infallibility of their papal authors and entailed the corollary that any pope who (like John XXII) attempted to abrogate the teachings of a predecessor could be recognized for what he was: a pontiff “only in name and appearance,” a pseudopope who had been separated *ipso facto* from his papal office.

The doctrine of papal infallibility was a novelty designed, at least in its inception, “to limit the power of future popes, not to loose them from all restraints.” Understandably, despite the existence of a small group of “curial infallibilists” surrounding John XXII, the doctrine did not find much resonance even among papalist writers prior to

64. In the bull *Qua quorumdam* *Extremos Iuris ZZII*, Tit. 14, c. 5; ed. Friedberg, 2-1250.
65. Tierney, *Origins*, p. 130. Taking note of the further nuances indicated by Tarley, I follow in this Tierney’s illuminating and provocative treatment, judging its central thesis to have survived intact the onslaughts even of such distinguished critics as Seckler, Dempi, and Congar, as well as the distressingly personal attack launched by

John of Turrecremata in the fifteenth century. It was not destined to rise to prominence in Catholic theology until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Had it been powerful earlier, of course, the alternative, or conciliarist, understanding of the church’s unity would doubtless not have constituted so prominent a threat to the hegemony of the papalist position during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as it did. Indeed, the unexamined assumption that the doctrine of papal infallibility was widely held even in that period may well explain the frequency with which the conciliarist position has been misrepresented as an unorthodox ecclesiology of revolutionary vintage foisted upon the church by those dangerous radicals Marsilius of Padua and William of Ockham. Whatever the influence exerted on the conciliar thinkers by Ockham’s arguments, he was not, according to the usual general understanding of the term, a conciliarist at all. As he was something less than a conciliarist, Marsilius was something more. Marsilius denied the divine foundation of papacy and hierarchy, portraying the church as a merely spiritual community of believers linked solely by the common bond of a sacrament and creed, and denying to its members, accordingly, the exercise of any coercive jurisdictional power at all, any *petitas jurisdictionis in foro exteriori*. Marsilius’s views left some mark on the thinking of Dietrich of Niem (d. 1418) and Nicholas of Cusa, but were too radical to make their way into the mainstream of conciliar theory during the age of the great councils. For that theory was in fact an essentially moderate doctrine of ecclesiastical constitutionalism, with unimpeachably orthodox foundations in the cozy respectabilities of the pre-Marsilian era.

Remigius Baumer. For this last, see Baumer, “Um die Anfänge der päpstlichen Unfehlbarkeitslehre”; Tierney’s reply (and Baumer’s rejoinder): “On the History of Papal Infallibility.” For the most instructive exchange in English, see Seckler, “Papal Infallibility,” Tierney, “Infallibility and the Medieval Canonists,” Seckler, “Rejoinder to Professor Tierney.”

66. For this and what follows, I draw upon the extensive discussion of these and related issues in Ockley, *Political Thought of Pierre d’Ailly: Council over Pope’s* “Almain and Major”; “Conciliarism at the Fifth Lateran Council?” and “Conciliarism in the Sixteenth Century.”
In the extensive canonic discussions concerning Decretum Gratiani, Distinction 40, Chapter 6, and the possibility of a pope "caught deviating from the faith," two main schools of thought had emerged. According to one, a pope who lapsed into heresy ceased ipso facto to be pope. Only if he contumaciously persisted in his heresy would recourse be had to a judicial superior and then only to make it clear that he was guilty of heresy and to proclaim a merely declaratory sentence of deposition. According to the other school, however, an heretical pope did not cease ipso facto to be pope; he had instead to be subjected to trial, judgment, and deposition. And the body possessing the requisite superior authority enabling it to stand in judgment was the general council, since, even acting in opposition to the pope, it possessed a superior jurisdiction in matters pertaining to the faith. It is in the combination of this second theory of papal liability with the later canonistic understanding of church unity as residing in "the corporate association of the members" that we find the foundations of the strict conciliar theory. That theory received a precociously complete formulation in the Tractatus de potestate regis et papali of John of Paris but rose to prominence only in the years after the outbreak of the Great Schism.

The strict conciliar theory has often been misunderstood. It possessed no monolithic unity. One must avoid the fatal trap of confusing it with the type of conciliar thinking espoused earlier by Marsilius of Padua. And the version dominant at Constance and Basel was given more than one form by the various conciliar thinkers, who, in accordance with their differing temperaments, vocations, and circumstances, wove theories of differing dimensions and textures. They did so, nevertheless, around a shared pattern of belief.

Their basic assumption, which of course they shared with the papalists, was that of the divine institution of all ecclesiastical power. This power they divided, again like the papalists, into a power of order and a power of jurisdiction. About the former they had very little to say, for the pope did not base his claim to preeminence in the church on his possession of orders. His claims to invulnerability rested upon the nature of his jurisdictional power, and, more precisely, upon his power of jurisdiction in the external forum. It is this type of jurisdictional power alone that the conciliar theorists of the era of Constance and Basel had in mind when they asserted the superiority of council to pope. Upon an analysis of this jurisdictional power and of the precise manner in which it was distributed throughout the ranks of the faithful these men bent their efforts.

Against the claims of the high papalists they denied that Christ gave the power of jurisdiction to Peter alone and not to all the apostles and that the jurisdiction of inferior prelates must therefore be derived from the pope and not immediately from God. Against those claims, accordingly, they also denied that the plenitude of jurisdictional power can reside in the pope alone. They did not wish thereby to deny the divine origin of the papal primacy. But if the office itself is of divine institution, its bestowed upon a particular individual is the work of men. And when the cardinals elect a pope, they do so not in their own right but as representatives of the community of the faithful. For the final authority in the church, as in other more particular congregations, resides in the whole body of its members.

The authority of the whole body is not exhausted by the mere act of electing a head. Even after a papal election the fullness of power still resides in some sense in the church as well as in the pope. So that, as Zabarella put it, the plenitude of power is fundamentally in the whole church as in a corporate body, and only derivatively in the pope as the "principal minister" of that corporation. Or, in d'Ailly's version, the plenitude of power must be said to belong inaparably to the body of the church, representatively to the general council, but only inaparably to the pope, who is the subject who receives it and the minister who exercises it. 67 Thus, although the fullness of power may be ascribed to the pope by virtue of his superiority to any other single ecclesiastic and his normal exercise of it, he is not superior to the universal church or to the general council representing it, and he must exercise that power for the good of the whole church. It follows that, like any other corporation in relation to its head, the council has the right to set limits to

67 Zabarella, pp. 559–60; d'Ailly, Tractatus de ecclesiastica potestate, in Dupin, 2:945–46, 950–51.
his exercise of the *plentudo potestatis* in order to prevent his abusing it to the destruction of the church.

That right is conceived of as being exercised both under emergency conditions and on a more continuing basis. The emergency situation most readily envisaged (though by no means the only one) is that which occurs when a pope lapses into heresy, or, by being the occasion of schism, endangers the faith of the whole church. Under such conditions, the church—which, unlike the pope, possesses the gift of doctrinal inerrancy—possesses also the power to prevent its own ruin. Infalibility is not necessarily to be ascribed to the doctrinal decisions of a general council (to d’Ailly, for example, that was no more than a matter of pious belief). Yet, in the determination of orthodoxy, the council certainly does possess an authority superior to that of the pope and can therefore stand in judgment over him, correct him, and even, if need be, depose him.

The conciliar theorists were a good deal less precise concerning the exercise of this inherent ecclesiastical authority under nonemergency conditions. Some—notably Zabarella, d’Ailly, and Nicholas of Cusa—in response to the “oligarchic” views long since current among the canonists and at the papal curia (and given explicit theoretical expression by the canonists Hostiensis and Johannes Monachus) regarded the college of cardinals as sharing with the pope in the exercise of the reduced plenitude of power they allotted to him and as functioning, therefore, as a continuously operating institutional restraint on the abuse of that power. But some sort of continuing role was also envisaged for the general council in matters concerning the faith, and also, it seems, in decisions affecting the general state or well-being of the church. And for d’Ailly, Dietrich of Niem, Gerson, and Nicholas of Cusa, at least, regularly assembled general councils were to become a permanent rather than an exceptional part of the structure of church government, an innovation that would have involved a substantial shift in the church’s constitution.

Such was the theory that permitted the councils of Pisa and Constance to take the drastic steps necessary to end the schism and that found clear expression in the Constance decrees *Hac sancta synodus* and *Frequens*. The theory was predicated on a perfectly orthodox insistence that the unity of the church resided ultimately in the association of its members with one another and with Christ, their “principal” and “essential” head, rather than in its domination by the pope, its subordinate and “accidental” head. It involved, therefore, an essentially moderate insistence on the ministerial nature of papal authority, and only in the latter phase of the Council of Basel was it used to justify what amounted to an attempted seizure of the central administrative machinery of the church, and then with the result that some of its most distinguished advocates went over to the pope’s camp.

It has long been customary to suppose that the ignominious ending of Basel and the failure of the conciliar movement marked also the demise of conciliar theory. But though the late fifteenth century saw a great recovery in the prestige of the high-papaliste ecclesiologists, that ecclesiology still had to compete with its conciliarist rival for the loyalties of the faithful. Just as recent historical studies (notably those of Tierney) have made it abundantly clear that the conciliar theory was not so recent or revolutionary in its origins as it was once assumed to be, Jedim, Klotznor, Bäumer, and others have proved that its demise was neither so sudden nor so final as we had been led to suppose. Scotland, Italy, England, Germany, France, all produced their latter-day supporters of conciliar theory, especially the Parisian theologians John Major (d. 1550) and Jacques Almain (d. 1515), who gave the theory a classic expression right on the eve of the Reformation. Nor is it to be supposed that they did so as spokesmen for an alien ideology clearly branded as heterodox, destined for preservation only in the discredited propaganda of Gallican circles, or recognizable in retrospect as pointing in a Protestantizing direction.

Pius II’s bull *Exsurget filius* (1460) condemned as “erroneous and detestable” appeals from papal policies or decisions to the judgment of a

68. See Oakley, “Pierre d’Ailly and Papal Infalibility.”
future general council, and it has been said of the decree 
_Pastor aeternus_, promulgated in 1516 by the Fifth Lateran Council, that "to the papal prohibition of appeal to a Council was now added a condemnation of the [conciliar] theory itself." 70 But _Excruciatibus_ represented the views of only one faction in the church and the crucial phrases of _Pastor aeternus_ are too restricted in meaning to constitute any unambiguous condemnation of conciliar theory. In particular, it should be noted that _Pastor aeternus_ does not spawn the superiority decrees of Basel, nor is there any mention of Constance or any rejection of _Haece sancta_. Such a move would not have been regarded as redundant at the time, for Ferdinand the Catholic, in the instructions to his representatives at the council, had explicitly suggested the need for a formal repudiation of _Haece sancta_. But then, even Ferdinand did not think the notion of papal superiority to the council extended to an heretical pope or to one whose title was in doubt. 71 Without the marked persistence of such ecclesiastical hesitancies into the Age of Reformation, it would be hard to explain the failure of the Council of Trent, despite the challenge laid down by the novel Protestant ecclesiologies of the day, to promulgate any dogmatic decree on the nature of the Christian church.


71. See the text in Dunsingator, app. 50, p. 539: "Porporeres ante Su Santidad en e concilio que aquellos dos decreto se revocasen expresamente y se haga nuevo decreto que declare que el Papa es sobre el concilio cuestion en el caso de la regia consulta el camino. Si Papa XI. dij. y en el caso que dix a tres son oblogados en cusa por Sanos Pontifices que solo en estos dos casos el Concilio pueda consider y sea juez de la causa del Papa y no en mas" (italics mine).

CHAPTER 4 · DIRECTIONS OF HERESY: THE COMPLEXITIES OF DEVIATION

[Hus] writes [in his _De ecclesia_] that "the dissension has arisen because priests of Christ have preached against the pestiferous crimes of the clergy." But this is not true, for long ago, when Hus was still in his father's loins, there were sound and weighty _[autenticis et sollemnis]_ preachers in the realm of Bohemia who preached against the simoniacal heresy and against ... the avarice, sensuality, pride, and luxury of the clergy. But they did not mix the errors of Wyclif's forty-five articles into their sermons, and they taught the people to hold and believe what the Roman church held and believed ... and therefore dissension did not arise among the clergy of Bohemia then as it has today.

—STEPHEN PÁLEČ

The word "heresy," which denotes an individual choosing, is older than Christianity, and the religious phenomenon it has been used to denote is almost as old. Only during the doctrinal debates of the patristic era did the word come gradually to acquire the definition current in theological circles throughout the Middle Ages—namely, the pertinacious maintenance of doctrinal error by a Christian in defiance of ecclesiastical authority. Thus defined, it clearly possessed a disciplinary as well as a doctrinal dimension; what was involved was not simply error but rather the stubborn choosing to persist in error in the teeth of correction by the appropriate magisterial authority. And, as such, heresy posed a continuing threat to the medieval church from as early as the twelfth century.