praising interrelations and disjunctions among them. And if I group together in one place the sketches resulting from that attempt, it is precisely because those interrelations and disjunctions so often conspire to render the lives of my chosen subjects unassimilable, without undue coercion, to the confining role of exemplificatory vignette.

Vincent Ferrer (ca. 1350—1419): Saint

Then I saw another angel flying in midheaven, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; and he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the fountains of water." [Rev. 14: 6-7]

This apocalyptic reading sets the whole tone of the Dominican office for the feast of St. Vincent, Confessor, in which it forms the centerpiece. Its very words are echoed in Calixtus II’s bull of canonization (1453); its choice reflects the view of Vincent’s life at that time prevailing and long after dominant. Born at Valencia in 1350, destined early by pious parents for an ecclesiastical career, professed as a Dominican friar at the age of seventeen, first student and then teacher at several of the order’s schools, priest, religious superior, chaplain and counselor to Aragonese king and Avignonese pope, Vincent devoted himself to the great missionary journeys associated with his name only from 1399 to 1419, during the last twenty years of his life. Nonetheless, according to the view already prevailing at the time of his canonization, he was to be taken above all as “the preacher of the end of the world.” He was seen as a prophetic figure tirelessly crisscrossing France, Spain, northern Italy, and parts of Switzerland, where he delivered around 6,000 lengthy sermons to some 200,000 people, remorselessly focusing their attention on the imminence of the coming of Antichrist, the terrors of the impending des irae, the awful futilities of the Last Judgment. Small wonder, then, that he was remembered as the “angel of judgment,” the angel, as it were, of the Apocalypse, crying out with a loud voice, if not, indeed, that Babylon

CHAPTER 6 · VARIETIES OF LATE-MEDIEVAL SPIRITUALITY: THE WITNESS OF SIX LIVES

To bys God bryng us al and sum,
Christe, redemptor omnium.

—LATE-MEDIEVAL ANONYMOUS

The choice of the lives to be sketched here is not a particularly artful one. No compelling claims can be made for their representative quality. Each is drawn from a separate region in Europe, and deliberately so, but I do not mean thereby to insinuate that sanctity in the later Middle Ages was a peculiarly Hispanic virtue, reform a singularly French proclivity, or “heresy” a uniquely Bohemian vice. In view of the topic, it is hardly surprising that five of the six subjects are clerics; nevertheless, that all are men, or that the solitary layman is cast in the role of “sinner,” is not to be made the premise for any uninhibited deductions. More revealing, perhaps, is the fact that (at least for most of their lives) four of the five clerics were seculars rather than regulars—but less because it reflects any conscious choice on my part than because it does not. Given the nature of the sources and the persistent reticence of medieval writers when, to us at least, genuine self-disclosure would seem called for, the business of putting truly believable flesh on ungrateful medieval bones is never easy; often, indeed, it is altogether impossible. If I make the attempt, I do so simply out of a desire to illustrate the embodiment in concrete particularity of movements, phenomena, and developments already described in more abstract and general terms, and to capture the sometimes sur-
the Great was fallen, at least that a term had finally been set to her grossness and impurity.

The lack of any complete texts of his sermons, the problem posed by credulous interpolations in the reportata, or sermon notes, handed down, and the well-attested general difficulties in the way of coming to terms with his literary legacy have all helped to perpetuate the traditional picture. That picture could scarcely have survived, however, had it not possessed at least some firm grounding in reality. The celebrated letter he wrote to Benedict XIII in 1412 certainly attests powerfully to the depth of his preoccupation with the coming of the reign of Antichrist, the Last Judgment, and the end of time, and to the urgency of his conviction that those awful events were fast approaching. That preoccupation is also shown in his marked concern with the evangelization of the Jews in Spain, for he shared the traditional belief that their conversion would be one of the signs of the imminence of the last days.

It is well attested, moreover, that his movements across Europe were accompanied by great manifestations of excitement and public fervor; to his own shock and dismay, the crowds pressing around him frequently tried to seize fragments of his clothing to keep as relics. The moment of his arrival in a town (when all work, apparently, would grind to a halt) must have been very dramatic indeed, for it released a flood tide of emotion that frequently combined with the waves of his own rhetoric to reduce both preacher and hearers to tears. For St. Vincent did his traveling accompanied not only by a few Dominican confrères but also by a growing multitude of men and women assistants, followers, well-wishers, and hangers-on, including an organized band of flagellants (or disciplinati) drawn often from great distances by the compelling force of his message. Upon his entry into the town, having been welcomed and escorted by local clergy, magistrates, and crowds of curious onlookers, the whole group would assemble in some central place, the flagellants would bare their backs, and amid the usual scenes of gaping awe and dusty exaltation would commence their grim pattern of public self-mortification. Under some circumstances, as at Toulouse in 1416, their punitive extremities of self-abasement attracted considerable adverse attention. After that particular episode, Gerson and d’Ailly sent a worried letter counseling Vincent to be on his guard lest his own reputation be compromised by the excesses of his overenthusiastic followers. We do not have Vincent’s full reply to that letter, but, via Gerson (whom it appears to have satisfied), we learn that he apparently assured the two churchmen that his disciplinati were indeed under discipline, fully submitted to the directives of the ecclesiastical authorities. And we do know independently that as members of “the Company of Master Vincent,” they were in fact subjected to an organized regimen in accordance with the rule of life that he himself had drawn up for them.

The incident is revealing; it suggests that behind the sensational public memories and the hints of notorious extravaganzas lay a somewhat more sober reality. The more reliable collections of sermon notes taken down by his hearers strongly confirm that impression. These collections—notably one emanating from the Freiburg region of Switzerland in 1404 and another from Valencia in 1415—reveal (at least in the numbers of sermons devoted to those specific themes) a much less obsessive preoccupation with the coming of Antichrist and the threats of the Last Judgment than the traditional view would suggest. The organization of the sermons reveals the working of a highly ordered and logical mind clearly disciplined in the scholastic mold. Their content, however, reflects a reliance less upon the scholastic theology than upon the views of such great teachers as Gregory the Great, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Bonaventure, and less, in turn, upon the word of any commentator than upon the unmediated word of the Scriptures, with which he shows a well-developed and easy familiarity. And if the inspiration is indeed the word, the

1. For this letter, see Fagon, Historia, 1:322–26.

2. See Gerson, Epistolae ad Vincentium Foraminem contra se flagellantem, in Dupin, II, 659–60 (it concludes with d’Ailly’s endorsement); idem, Tractatus contra sectam flagellantium, in Dupin, 2:660–64 (especially 662 C–D).

3. For the former, see Brettle, pp. 173–75, who describes the whole collection and prints a transcription of the four sermons dealing with eschatological themes. For the latter, see Silvera.
focus is very much upon the Word, the incarnate Son, upon the successive phases of whose earthly life he bases repeated moral exhortations geared to the theme of the "imitation of Christ." He likens Christ's daily "gracious visitation" in the Eucharist to the visitation of a doctor who brings to us no ordinary remedy but rather the "precious medicine of his own body and blood." 4

The notes of the Freiburg collection are in Latin and therefore lack the flavor and immediacy of the versions of the Valencia collection, which are in Vincent's native Catalan. 5 They are nevertheless especially valuable because of their particular provenance and the reassuring credentials of their author: for they were preserved at the Franciscan monastery of Freiburg—in the region, therefore, where the original sermons were delivered—and they were the work of no simple or credulous auditor but of Friedrich von Amberg, a master of theology who at the time of Vincent's missionary visit in March 1404 to the then canton of Freiburg, was the superior of the Franciscan province.

Friedrich begins his transcription with the assurance: "I have reported from my own mouth, as best I could, all the sermons which he preached on that occasion, and . . . have written them down with my own hand." 6 The sermons in question number sixteen in all, delivered in various towns around the canton, sometimes to congregations of religious or of diocesan clergy but most usually to large popular gatherings, normally at the rate of one a day, but rising on March 21 to two and on the day preceding to three. In subject matter they fall into two groups. The first and larger group of eleven are markedly Christocentric, focusing on the fundamental building blocks for a life of Christian perfection; they bear such titles as "Concerning the Eight Ways of Praying," "Christ the Healer," "Concerning the Virtues of Christ in His Passion," "Concerning the Remission of Sins," and "Concerning the Ladder of Salvation." The remaining, smaller group

5. Because of this, Gore criticizes Brettle's reliance upon them and upon other Latin works of St. Vincent's (p. 79).

of four (the fifth is but a brief recapitulation) reflects the eschatological preoccupations that have often been incorrectly taken to characterize all of his preaching.

Here, as elsewhere, Vincent handles the topic of the Last Judgment in four distinct parts, the focus of which is accurately conveyed by the respective titles of the sermons: (1) "Antichrist," (2) "The End of the World," (3) "The Resurrection of the Body," (4) "The Fate of the Good and the Wicked." Here, as elsewhere too, we can see in their organization the workings of a highly ordered and logical mind; the first sermon sets up the line of march subsequently to be followed throughout the series and sets forth in somewhat doctrinaire fashion the points that will be elaborated in greater detail and with varying nuances in the other sermons. The content of the Antichrist sermons is by no means sensational; in skeleton form they seem mild indeed when compared with what we hear of the terrible cito et velociter of Savonarola later on. The thrust of the message conveyed is highly traditional and explicitly biblical. Whereas Vincent himself is clearly moved by the upheavals and tribulations of his own day to believe that the end is almost certainly nigh, he is not unaware that others before him have felt similarly and been proven mistaken. Accordingly, he is careful to avoid speaking of any fixed period of time within which Antichrist will make his dreaded appearance, and he explicitly reminds his hearers that to the disciples who had asked the risen Christ when his kingdom would come Christ had replied: "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority" (Acts 1:7). 7 His main concern is less with the precise timing of Antichrist's coming than with the use we make of the period remaining before that coming. For there is a remedy against the tribulation of Antichrist, and it is none other than the remedy that Christ himself urged against all future tribulations: namely, that of being vigilant at all times, praying morning and night, and fleeing the occasions of sin. One thing is truly certain: "The cross of Christ is the gate of salvation and

7. Sermo de extremo judicio [vitam] super bonus et males; in Brettle, p. 181. He stresses the same point in his letter to Benedict XIII; see Fages, Historia, 1:324.
papalists and had embraced with no apparent reserve the legitimacy of Clement VII's title to the papacy. In support of that claim he had in 1380 addressed his influential Tractatus de schismate to Pedro IV of Aragon (1336–87), and, in subsequent years, along with Cardinal Pedro de Luna, the future Benedict XIII, he had striven hard to persuade the rulers and people of the Spanish peninsula to give their allegiance to the Avignonese pontiff. During part of that time he was chaplain to the Aragonese king, and his political prominence reached its peak in 1412, when, as one of the judges struggling to settle the disputed succession to the Kingdom of Aragon, he helped put Ferdinand of Castile on the throne.

By the time of Ferdinand's succession, however, he had long been embarked on his great preaching mission, but not before spending several years at the papal court in Avignon as counselor to Benedict XIII and from 1395 to 1398 as his personal confessor, too. There, in company with his brother Boniface, the general of the Carthusians, Vincent came into contact with such rising ecclesiastical luminaries as Nicholas of Clémentes and Pierre d'Ailly and became acquainted with the intense diplomatic activity that swirled around the curia and in which those men were deeply involved. But despite this exposure to the harsh and complex realities of ecclesiastico-political life, something touchingingly unworlly clung to his deportment—his obvious antipathy not only to the pressures the French king was bringing to bear on Benedict but also to the pope's own understandable willingness under military attack to employ armed force to defend the papal palace; the high hopes he placed in Benedict's willingness, in the interest of church unity, to lay down his high office; the keen and bitter disappointment he obviously felt when those hopes were repeatedly dashed; the frazzled and anguished loyalty that kept him nevertheless in Benedict's camp even after John XXIII's deposition and Gregory XII's abdication, right down to the bitter moment in 1416 when finally he broke with him at Perugia. Thus in 1408, even when a man of such unimpeachable moderate credentials as d'Ailly's had reluctantly abandoned any lingering hopes that the goodwill of the rival pontiffs would bring an end to the schism and approached

8. Ibid., p. 60.
10. Thus we have a letter dated 14 March 1411, from a municipal official of the town of Orvieto, where St. Vincent had preached, describing to the local ordinary the overflowing churches, the increase in the numbers of communicants and of confessions, the decline of sorcery and blasphemy, the reconciliation of enemies, and so on; see Gorce, pp. 96–98.
him in the course of his efforts to marshal support for the Council of Pisa, Vincent held aloof and did not respond. Nor did he intervene later when his brother Boniface launched a singularly intemperate and highly personal attack on d’Ailly and the role he had played in relation to Pisa.

But Boniface’s Avignonese loyalties appear to have been a good deal less unqualified than Vincent’s, and the physical and spiritual crisis in the latter’s life that preceded his decision to embark upon his preaching mission was connected with the unbearable tensions he was beginning to feel between his loyalty to the papacy as the instrument and symbol of the church’s unity and his deepening anguish at what was emerging as a papally protracted schism—between his conviction that Benedict XIII was indeed the legitimate pope and his dawning realization that that pope was nevertheless emerging as the single greatest obstacle to the ending of the schism. His crisis, however, was resolved in a way true to his earliest and most fundamental commitments. It was no accident, or so it may be suggested, that the mission allotted to him in his vision should have been one of preaching and teaching or that he believed himself charged with that mission by St. Dominic and St. Francis. If it is sometimes difficult to see Vincent’s evangelical preaching and his involvement in the public arena of dynastic and ecclesiastical diplomacy as very much of a piece, the same cannot be said of that preaching and his earliest vocation. He was in many ways the quintessential friar, and the arduous missionary efforts that filled the last twenty years of his life can best be understood in the context both of his own earlier formation within the Dominican order and of the goals (both educational and missionary) for which the order itself had striven ever since the days of its founder.

It was in 1367 in the Dominican house in his native town of Valencia that Vincent began his monastic career. That career took him for nine years through a cycle of studies embracing logic, natural philosophy, biblical studies, and theology, which he pursued at Lérida, Barcelona, and the University of Toulouse as well as at Valencia. He was clearly a young man of no ordinary intellectual gifts, and during those years he not only put in a period as professor of logic at Lérida but also wrote the two treatises De suppositionibus dialecticis and De natura universalis. After his ordination as a priest in 1379, he was for a few years prior to the Dominican house in Valencia before being called upon to teach theology at the cathedral in that town, where he gave courses of lectures aimed particularly at improving the level of doctrinal and theological formation among the secular clergy of the diocese. It may well be that it was during this phase of his life that he wrote for a group of brethren in the religious life his Tractatus de vita spiritualis—no work of mystical theology, as the title might be taken to suggest, but a very concrete work of spiritual counsel, possessing much of the clear, balanced, logical, and practical character that distinguished his later missionary sermons. In it he devoted a whole chapter to the topic of preaching, stressing “that the words should appear to proceed not from a proud or angry spirit, but from the very heart of charity and paternal compassion,” and that the preacher should be like the mother who nurtures her children and “rejoices at their progress and at the glory of paradise that she hopes for them.”

Both in tone and in aspiration, the ties that bind those sentiments and the whole direction of his early career with the great mission of his final years are clear and firm. During his missionary years, despite his own preoccupation with the terrors of the Last Days, he appears to have been well aware that the road to true and lasting repentance was one along which men had to be beckoned by encouragement and hope rather than driven by fear. The nature of that mission, moreover, can best be understood if it is seen in the context of the purpose of the early Dominicans to bring the Gospel in all its rigor and beauty to the comparatively unchurched peoples in the rural areas of southern Europe, to bring the pure nourishment of the Word to the hungry sheep, who, looking up and not being fed were succumbing to heresy. Vincent was surely mindful of that heritage when, often taking the key scriptural texts for his sermons from the Dominican office of the day, he sought to evangelize the heavily Waldensian regions of the Dauphiné and Piedmont.

11. Tract. de vita Spirit. , chap. XIII; ed. Fages, 1:34.
Both as teacher and preacher, he sought in true Dominican fashion to deliver souls from the darkness of ignorance and the beguiling twilight of sin. It is hard to know what to make of the gift of tongues that men ascribed to him or of his alleged successes as a faith healer. But the words that no less a witness than the king of Aragon described him as being accustomed to use when he placed his hands on the sick may serve as example of a prayer expressive also of his broader and most heartfelt aspirations when he surveyed a poorly catechized, war-ridden, divided, and scandalized Christendom groaning in travail:

"May Jesus, son of Mary, who hast led thee into the Catholic faith, preserve thee in that faith, and restoring thee deliver thee from this infirmity." 12

Francesco di Marco Datini (ca.
1335–1410): Sinner

That we can speak at all about the spiritual life of the merchant Francesco di Marco Datini reflects the characteristic force with which Francesco insisted that his branch managers preserve all their business documents and letters, the conscientiousness with which he did likewise, the foresight that led him to provide in his will for the collecting of all these materials in the house he was bequeathing to his native city, and the fortunate historical accident that kept them preserved intact in that same house for more than four and a half centuries, until in 1870 they were rediscovered bundled together "in sacks in a dusty recess under the stairs." 13

The house still stands in Prato, the small city in the Tuscan plain not far from Florence where Francesco was born around 1335, one of four children sired by Marco di Datino, taverner, minor landowner, and small businessman. Orphaned by the Black Death and briefly in the care of a foster mother, he made his way via Florence to Avignon and returned to Prato only after he had amassed considerable capital. He came back ready to make a strong entry into the clothmaking trade, upon which the economy of the city depended. There he established the central office of his far-flung and variegated mercantile enterprises and built the great fortune whose vast bulk (along with his house, possessions, and farms) he was to bequeath as a foundation to serve the needs of the city's poor. 14

Two mementos signal the gratitude felt toward him by his fellow citizens and their wish to celebrate his generosity. Over the door of his house they carved the inscription:

The Foundation of Francesco di Marco Merchant of Christ's Poor of which the commune of Prato is the dispenser
Left in the year 1410. 15

Forty years after his death they commissioned Fra Filippo Lippi to paint the panel that portrays Francesco very much in the manner of "the merchant of Christ's poor," kneeling in rapt adoration at the Virgin's feet, along with the four baromini (elders) appointed by the commune of Prato to administer the charitable foundation he had established.

Generosity and piety are the qualities memorialized, and the careful stipulations he made in his will enhance that impression. The generosity, of course, seems obvious enough, and it is underlined by the ancillary list of specific bequests to individual servants and dependents. Nor is the piety qualified by the explicit insistence that the foundation was in no way to be "under the church or of officials or prelates or any other member of the clergy," or by the eloquently re-

13. Origo, p. vi. These papers, wholly extraordinary in their completeness, include—besides account books, ledgers, deeds of partnership, and so on—no fewer than 250,000 letters, among them the private correspondence between Francesco and his wife and between him and his closest friend, the notary Ser Lupo Mazzai. Guasti published the latter series in his Ser Lupo Mazzai; Origo's book, however, is the first to exploit in any systematic fashion the full range of the private correspondence. Unless otherwise indicated, all passages quoted, along with the English translations, are taken from her Merchant of Prato, to the pages of which the numbers in parentheses refer.
14. "For the love of God, so as to give back to His Poor what has been received from Him, as His gracious gift" (168). The will itself, along with its codicils, is printed in Guasti, ed., II, 273–310. The passage cited appears at 290.
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it goes a long way toward explaining the dimensions of his success as a merchant, goes some of the way, also, toward explaining the extent of his failure as a man. Despite his later renown as the greatest merchant produced by Prato, one who had returned to his native city in 1383 after having made good at Avignon during the preceding thirty-three years, he had experienced tragedy and struggle in his early years. Having lost his family (with the exception of one brother) in the Great Plague of 1348, and having spent but a few months as an apprentice in Florence, he had gone, at the age of fifteen, to seek his fortune in the bustling, corrupt, overcrowded, and costly city of Avignon. As none of his private letters before 1371 were preserved, we know little of his early years at Avignon, beyond the fact that he dealt chiefly at first in armor. We know that he did not scruple to sell that armor both to the soldiers of fortune who ravaged the south of France during the last two decades before the onset of the great schism and to the communes struggling to defend themselves against the depredations of those adventurers. We can only guess that the qualities that enabled him to claw his way to mercantile prominence must have been those that continued to characterize him in later years—shrewdness, opportunism, greed, remorseless drive, and truly formidable industry.

During those later years, his wife, doctors, business associates, and spiritual advisers all urged him repeatedly to relax a little his grip on affairs, to settle back now and enjoy the fruits he had harvested by dint of so much labor and worry, to value his riches, as Ser Lapo said, "at their true worth, that is, own them as if they were not [his]," or, again, to "put some order in [his] life" (237). This, however, he clearly could not do. Like many another businessman who has made good on his own, he never mastered the art of delegating responsibility. Even in his old age, at the expense of sleep and health, he drove himself to write all the correspondence of his firm. "I am not feeling very well today," he confessed in one of his letters when he was over sixty, "on account of all the writing I have done in these two days, without sleeping either by night or by day, and these two days eating but one leaf" (viii). One gets the impression of a life of harried labor and compulsive worry, worry extended without any measure to the

petty as well as the portentous. Not that it was a life untouched by pleasure: he liked his wines, he liked his food, he liked his women. Of his description of the pilgrimage he went on, Iris Origo justly comments that "it is difficult not to receive the impression of a nine-day picnic only occasionally punctuated by sermons and prayers" (361). 17 While at Avignon he fathered at least one bastard and after his marriage at least two more, one by a household servant, the other by his slave girl Lucia. In humiliating and destructive contrast, however, his marriage was childless, his relations with his wife sadly acrimonious (as turbulent, indeed, as those with many of his employees), and even in his final years he never quite succeeded in piloting his day-to-day life into anything remotely resembling tranquil waters.

Wine and women, then, but certainly not song. Understandably enough, Francesco was not content with it all. During his later years a note of somewhat mawkish melancholy begins to invade his letters. "Fate," he wrote to his wife in 1395, "has so willed it that, from the day of my birth, I have never known a whole happy day. . . . Yet if my end be a good one, I care little for the rest. But I greatly fear it will not be, and I think of little else" (185). A gloomy exaggeration, no doubt, but his words properly suggest that one must seek his credentials as an appropriately qualified sinner less in any noteworthy achievement of vice than in the gloomy interstices of his everyday miseries.

Anger and greed, the vices against which the preachers of his day repeatedly railed, these he had in richly overabundant measure, and it would be easy to make much especially of his greed—a professional failing that, by the end of his life, had become almost instinctive with him. From the safety of Bologna, to which he and his family had fled in 1400 to avoid the wave of plague inundating Florence and Prato, he did not hesitate to dun his debtors still resident in those ravaged cities, drawing from Ser Lapo, who had stayed behind and seen two of his children die, the anguish plea to desist, to grasp the fact that "there is a time to chastise, and one to forgive" (373). Nevertheless, it was neither greed nor questionable business practices, nor anger, nor lust, that Ser Lapo focused on when he sought to identify for an anxious Francesco the very roots of his failings; it was rather his coldness of heart and the willfulness of temperament that led him so persistently to assume that his very destiny was his to shape in accordance with the immediacy of his own desires.

That the diagnosis was a shrewd one, even Francesco appears to have admitted. But, the overwhelmingly conventional and proprietary pieties of his last years notwithstanding, he does not really seem to have been able to do much about it. The coldness is especially marked in his relations with his wife. It is well exemplified in the meanness of spirit that led him to rebuke her lest she waste in reading the time that should be devoted to her household duties—despite the fact that she had just succeeded, at the age of thirty, in painfully mastering the skills of reading and writing in order to be able to conduct her own correspondence with a distressingly and almost continuously absent husband. The willfulness is similarly evident in his un readiness to let go a little, to find more space in an unnecessarily harried life of getting and spending for the simplicities of human affection and the solace of religious devotion, in the impatient desire to control his eternal destiny with the same degree of imperious mastery as he had exercised over his partners, his employees, and his far-flung commercial enterprises. It is evident, too, in his dying, in which resigna tion, it appears, was no more manifest than it had been in any of his living. Into "that good night" he had no intention whatsoever of go-
ing gently, and we have it on Ser Lupo’s authority that despite his advanced years, “it seemed to him very strange that he should have to die, and that his prayers should be of no avail” (384).

If we were to select a motto that would characterize the bold public man, the great merchant of Prato, we could hardly do better than to choose the one that appears as superscript on so many of his great ledgers: “In the name of God and of profit.” But the wistful interior discomfort of Francesco di Marco Datini, the uncertain private man who importuned his wife and friends with his anxieties no less than he burdened them with his demands, is better caught by the words he wrote in 1399, when the plague that had orphaned him in 1348 and almost killed him in 1374 was now advancing once again on Tuscany: “May God give me grace, if it be His pleasure, to lead a better life than in the past, for it is a dog’s life—and it is all through my own fault” (161).

Jan van Ruysbroeck (1293–1381): Mystic

From the workaday writings spawned in the course of a lifetime’s remorseless pursuit of externalities, it is clearly possible to get a lively sense of what Francesco di Marco Datini must have been like to know. His self-revelation, though unwriting, is surprisingly complete. From Jan van Ruysbroeck’s eleven authenticated writings, most of them concerned with the interior life of the spirit and revealing enviously developed powers of introspection and self-analysis, however, it is extremely difficult to extract any firm profile of his personality. About himself and what he was he tells us in all that writing next to nothing. One gets the sense of a warm and compelling personality, and this his early biographers confirm. But that is all.

About the external events of his life we are not much better informed, but what we know, at least, is clear. Born in 1293 in the village of Ruysbroeck near Brussels, he was sent at the age of eleven to live in that city with his uncle John Hencakraet, priest and canon of the collegiate church of St. Gudule and a man of more than formal piety.

Educated in Brussels, Ruysbroeck was ordained a priest in 1317 and spent the next twenty-six years serving as vicar of St. Gudule’s and pursuing a life of austerity (and probably also of study) in the company of his uncle and another canon of saintly reputation, Francis van Coudenbergh. Seeking a more contemplative life of greater solitude, the three men withdrew in 1343, when Ruysbroeck was already fifty, to a hermitage at nearby Groenendaal. Joined there by a group of disciples, they organized themselves in 1349 into a community of canons regular, adopting the Augustinian rule. Of that monastery Francis van Coudenbergh became the first provost and Ruysbroeck the first prior. There he spent the rest of his long and apparently uneventful life completing some of the writings he had begun as a diocesan priest and contriving to keep in contact with both the reformers and mystics of his day. There he was visited certainly by Geert Groote, perhaps also by Tauler. There he died in 1381 in his eighty-eighth year.

In its externalities, then, a life so provincial and uneventful as to fade into insignificance when placed beside that of either St. Vincent Ferrer or Francesco di Marco Datini, or, indeed of any other of our subjects. In its interior dynamics, however, it was a richly textured life of passion and great drama. And about that interior life, despite the deliberately self-effacing nature of his writings, we can assume ourselves to be more than usually well informed. Not that we can altogether divorce those writings, or indeed his understanding of the interior life, from the external happenings of his region—at least, not from those happenings that pertained to the spiritual life of his day. Much of his writing dates to the years he spent as a diocesan priest and reflects an effort to respond to the thirst for spiritual guidance that was manifesting itself among the comparatively highly urbanized and spiritually demanding populace of the Netherlands. Thus, one of those works, Van den Kerstenen Gheslere (On the Christian Faith), is a commentary on the creed designed for use by priests. Another, Van den XII Beghinen (The Twelve Beguines), consists of a series of pious meditations. The latter work, moreover, like such earlier works of his as Het Rijtke der Gheslere (The Kingdom of Loves), De Gheseleike Bru-
outside world, in their hearts,” he insists, “they are submissive to no-one, neither in will nor in deed, for they believe that they are empty of all matters which Holy Church observes.” Hence it is Ruysbroeck’s harsh conclusion that though “they believe themselves to be the holiest,” they are in fact “the evilest and most harmful men that live.” 21

Similar protestations are broadcast throughout his works, both early and late. They urge the necessity of obeying the church, of receiving her sacraments, of practicing her virtues, of remembering always that we cannot become one with God simply by nature and without his grace, of realizing, too, that in so becoming one with God we must nevertheless remain eternally other than him. Thus in The Spiritual Exposals, one of his earlier works, he tells us that the properly humble man will be “humble and reverent before Holy Church and the sacraments,” and in the Eucharist will benefit from “the heavenly secret working of Christ” and will experience “the second coming of Christ our Bridegroom.” 22 Again, in The Twelve Beguines, a later work, he affirms that “we cannot issue out of ourselves into God and lose our created nature; and so we must remain eternally different from God and remain created creatures. For no creature can become God nor can God become any creature.” 23 In The Little Book of the Enlightenment (Dat Bucckien der Verklaringhe), one of his last works, he warns once more against those ignorant and prideful men who believe “that out of their own natures they have found within themselves the indwelling of God and who wish to become one with God without His grace and without the exercise of virtue, and in disobedience to God and to Holy Church. And they wish by nature to be the sons of God, as do all those of whom I have spoken who live in error.” 24

19. Noting that “whenever man is empty and undistracted in his senses by images, and free and unoccupied in his highest powers, he attains rest by purely natural means” and “without the grace of God,” Ruysbroeck goes on to say that some men fall into the tragic error of mistaking that emptiness for union with God:

Through the natural rest which they feel and have in themselves in emptiness, they maintain that they are free, and united with God without mean, and that they are advanced beyond all the exercises of Holy Church, and beyond the commandments of God, and beyond the law and beyond the virtuous works which one can in any way practice.... And therefore they remain in mere passivity without the performance of any work directed up towards God or down towards man. 20

Such men, however, “wish to be free, and obedient to no-one, not to pope, nor bishop nor parish priest. Though they may feign it to the

18. Better known, perhaps, as The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, from the title given to the Latin translation made by Ruysbroeck’s disciple Willem Jordans—De Ornata Spiritualium Nuptiarum (Paris, 1512).

19. This is the view of Lernet, Henry, pp. 190–95. For the relevant passages, see De Gebrechliche Brulght, II, 40–43, in Pookens and Reppens, eds., 1:103–249 at 228–54; English trans. in Collège, The Spiritual Exposals, pp. 166–73; Guarnieri, pp. 415–44, notes that the passages in question have the appearance of being a condensation of Marguerite Porete’s Mirror of Simple Souls.


We find indications that he was well aware of the danger of being misunderstood: the very frequency of his protestations; that he had not wanted his difficult early work *The Kingdom of Loners* to be circulated; his later decision to write *The Little Book of Enlightenment* in order to clarify "with short words" what he had taught in the early works written for those advanced in contemplation. He was misunderstood all the same, and by no less a figure than Jean Gerson. On the basis of the description of contemplative union with the divine in the third book of *The Spiritual Epistles*, Gerson attributed to Ruysbroeck errors similar to those Ruysbroeck himself had attacked earlier in the same work and which we have described as pertaining to the heresy of the Free Spirit. In so doing, Gerson may have been misled by the free and often unfaithful Latin translation by William Jordaeus which he appears to have used. Despite such contingencies, however, it must be admitted that the un guarded nature of some of Ruysbroeck's formulations in that work and the very density of his thought in general conspire to render the possibility of misunderstanding unusually high. Though he was a staunch admirer of Ruysbroeck, Geert Groote, it will be recalled, was nervous about that potential for misunderstanding. Only a close reading of the writings can fully convey both the grounds for that nervousness and the degree to which Ruysbroeck himself strove, especially in his later works, to remove them. But some sense of what is involved and some feeling for the shape of his thinking at it unfolds in two important works can be conveyed by taking a brief glance at *The Spiritual Epistles* and *The Sparkling Stone*—the first an early and comparatively lengthy work, probably his masterpiece, the second a short work written later on his life, both following the same pattern and both happily available in English translations made directly from the original Flemish.

26. The late André Combes made this whole issue the subject of a massive investigation, resulting in his *Essai sur la critique de Ruysbroeck par Gerson*.
27. For the infelicities of that translation, see Collège, pp. 12–13.
28. The parenthetical page references to *The Spiritual Epistles* are to Collège's translation. Those to *The Sparkling Stone* are to the translation printed in Perny, pp. 299–320, which itself is from John of Ruysbroeck: *The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage*, *The Sparkling Stone*, *The Book of Sapient Truth*, ed. G. A. Wyschenk and Evelyn

Here, as elsewhere in Ruysbroeck's writings, the reader confronts two difficulties related to the charge of quietism or pantheism (or autautism) sometimes leveled against him. In the first place, while insisting on the need for the Christian to cultivate the church's sacraments and to grow in the life of virtue and good deeds, he can also describe the contemplative experience of union with God as pertaining to a higher place of spiritual development than the active life of virtue and can say that for a man to attain to that plane he must be "empty of all outward works, just as though he performed nothing. For if within he is preoccupied with any work of virtue, so he is distracted by images" (Eposauls, III, 2, p. 181; compare 4, p. 185). In the second place, while insisting that even in the contemplative experience "we cannot wholly become God and lose our created being" (Sparkling Stone, 9, p. 309), he can also boldly describe that experience as "a uniting in the essential unity of God." (Eposauls, III, Prol., p. 179) and as being "embraced in the Holy Trinity," "an eternal remaining in the superessential unity in rest and delectionation" (Eposauls, III, 6, p. 185).

If we keep in mind, however, Ruysbroeck's characteristic exemplarism, though we cannot dismiss the difficulties raised by such formulations, we can at least open some sort of route around them. Thus, if man cannot wholly become God, we must not lose sight of the fact that God has made man's nature "in the image and likeness of Himself" (Eposauls, Prol., p. 43), that "he has created every man's soul as a living mirror (levend spiegel), upon which he has imprinted the image of his nature." That is to say—for Ruysbroeck can hardly be classified as either a theocentric or a Christocentric mystic—we mirror in ourselves not only as unity but also God as trinity. And we can be said to do so in two intersecting ways: the one, as it were, dynamic and concerning the movement of our spiritual lives,
the highest, "above our intellectual comprehension," in unity and rest in God "beyond all intention and beyond ourselves and beyond all things."

This doctrine of the threefold unity Ruysbroeck uses to organize the development of his argument—both in The Spiritual Espousals and in The Sparkling Stone. Thus, in the latter, having disposed of the "hiring," he treats in turn of what he calls the "faithful servants of God" (chaps. 6 and 7; pp. 300–303), the "Secret Friends of God" (chaps. 7–8, pp. 302–6), and the "Hidden Sens of God" (chaps. 8–14, pp. 304–20). He devotes Book I of The Spiritual Espousals to the "active life" needful to all men who wish to be saved, Book II to "the interior, exalted, yearning life to which many men attain by virtues and the grace of God," and Book III to "the supernatural life of the contemplation of God, which a few men can achieve" (Prol., p. 43). These two traits should be aligned with each other. Thus the faithful servant of God is none other than the good man making proper use of his lower powers to pursue an active life of external works of virtue and mortification; the secret friend of God is the good man properly exercising his rational and spiritual powers in an inward life of yearning, "of loving and inward cleaving to God" (Sparkling Stone, chap. 7, p. 302) through such "means" as faith, hope, and love and without abandonment of selfhood; the hidden son of God is he who has received the Holy Spirit in the spark of his soul, who has transcended selfhood "above every exercise of virtue" and has been "swallowed up above reason and without reason in the deep quiet of the Godhead" (in die dichte stilheit der Godheit) (Sparkling Stone, chap. 9, pp. 507, 509).

If but few are called to this highest state—the contemplative life of unity with God—it is not to be supposed that those who are called are drawn wholly into God and abandon thereby the active life of outward virtue or the inward life of yearning. For Ruysbroeck, it must once more be insisted, the unity and trinity that we find in God is imaged in the unity and trinity we find also in man—unity of body, "spirit."

and "soul," unity therefore of the active, yearning, and contemplative lives. As he says when he begins to discuss the contemplative life, "The inward lover of God [that is, the hidden son of God] possesses God in delectable rest, and himself [that is, his spiritual powers] in a compelling and active love, and all his life [that is, his physical or lower power] in virtues with justness and due proportion" (Espousals, III, Proliq., p. 179). Or, as he puts it in a simpler and less complete formulation in The Sparkling Stone (chap. 7, p. 303), those foolish men who would be so inward that they would neither act nor serve, even in those things of which their neighbor has need," are "neither secret friends nor faithful servants of God, but are altogether false and deceived. For no man can follow the counsels of God who will not keep His commandments."

If but few are called to the contemplative life of unity with God, it must also not be supposed that even those few do so by virtue of any superior penetration of the questing intellect into God or, indeed, by virtue of any activity whatsoever that they can fully call their own. Given Ruysbroeck's pervasive Trinitarianism, I have already suggested, it would be pointless to try to classify him as either a "theocentric" or a "Christocentric" mystic, and to attempt to apply to him the related distinction between speculative and affective mysticism, if not quite pointless, would be almost as difficult. Although it would be improper to deny the role ascribed by Ruysbroeck to the "higher power" of reason in the movement of man's spiritual life, it has to be noted that it is a role that is limited to the interior life of yearning pursued by the secret friends of God. It is supposed when, as hidden souls of God, we enter the contemplative life of union, going forth "into God with our feeling above reason," following "the brightness above reason with a simple sight, and with a willing leaning out of ourselves," to be caught up in the "storm of love" where "our activity is above reason and wayless" (Sparkling Stone, chaps. 9 and 10, pp. 307, 312–13). It is instead "the will, which is the capacity for loving," (Espousals, II, 33, p. 158) that presses on when "reason and understanding fail before the Divine clarity" (Espousals, II, 21, p. 140), though if it reaches its goal and encounters the divine in ecstatic embrace and "supersensational" contemplation, it does so not because of any attribute or exercise of its own but rather because it is God's "good will to have it so" (Espousals, III, Proliq., p. 179; Sparkling Stone, chap. 13, p. 318).

Here once again, it may be suggested, we can appreciate the relevance of the theological distinction between the absolute power and the ordained (or ordinary) power of God to an understanding of the claims being made by the medieval mystics. In The Sparkling Stone Ruysbroeck explicitly contrasts the life we lead "in the ordinary state of grace," in which "we carry our works before us as an offering to God" (chap. 9, p. 307), with "the wayless state," in which we feel "the indrawing touch of God," making known to us his "wide-opened good pleasure" and demanding that we should be one with him. And the image Ruysbroeck evokes for this latter state is that of the transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor, with the Father saying "to all his chosen in his eternal Word: 'This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased'" (chap. 12, pp. 316–17). As he puts it in The Spiritual Espousals (III, 9, p. 190), "This is the dark silence in which all lovers are lost," a participation in "the rich embrace" of the Trinity's "essential unity," "an eternal resting in a delectable embrace of the flowing-out of love." Were it possible for us to attain it by any exercise of virtue of our own, "we should then," he says, "hasten to divest ourselves of this our mortal flesh, and... launch ourselves on the waves of this blessedness, and no creature could ever call us back again." But this, of course, it is not given to us to do—hence the heartfelt and wholly characteristic prayer in which he concludes the work: "That we in devotion may possess this essential unity, and that we may clearly contemplate Unity in Trinity, grant us that love which denies no prayer addressed to its Divinity. Amen. Amen."

Richard Fox of Winchester (1448–1528): Bishop

In its broad outlines Fox's life falls into three clear and easily definable phases. About the first we know next to nothing that is certain. Born in Lincolnshire in 1448 of a family somewhat above the yeoman
class, Fox—according to such late accounts as that of Greneway, president of Corpus Christi College, Oxford (written no earlier than 1566)—pursued his grammatical studies at Boston before going to succession to Magdalen College, Oxford, to Pembroke College, Cambridge, and to the University of Paris to complete his education with the study of canon law. His name first crops up in the official record in January 1485, when Richard III indicated that he was abroad in the service of the rebel Henry Tudor. Before that year was out, the tables had been turned. Fox was present on August 22 at the crowning of the victorious Henry VII on Bosworth field, and was appointed (November 10) a councillor to the new king.

With that appointment the second phase in his life began, and about it we are much better informed. In the years after 1485 he rose rapidly in the service of Henry VII, becoming one of the king’s closest and most trusted advisers. In February 1487 he was appointed lord privy seal, a position he was to hold for almost thirty years. After Henry VII’s death in 1509 Fox effected a smooth transition to the changed conditions and shifting policies of the new reign and worked closely with Thomas Wolsey, who in 1515 became lord chancellor of England.

In the course of his three decades of service to the new dynasty, Fox labored long and hard both to secure its uncertain position at home and to protect its interests abroad. In so doing, he came to discharge a considerable variety of duties—administrative, diplomatic, even military—and in France and Scotland as well as in England. Thus at various points in his career we can catch glimpses of him presiding as master of ceremonies over great events in the royal household and organizing the obsequies for his late sovereign; participating in complex and arduous diplomatic negotiations with the French at Etaples in 1492, with Philip, archduke of Austria, in 1496, and with James IV of Scotland in 1498; supervising the extension of the great hall of Durham castle and the work of the military engineers on the defenses of Norham castle; holding Norham against a besieging Scottish army; organizing the procuring, equipping, and victualing of ships for the king’s service; accompanying the army that Henry VIII sent to France in 1514; beseeching Wolsey, even from retirement, “to remembre the bill concernyme the kepers of the Kyngis breshouses, and gumners of the towne and blokhouse of Portismouth; which had no wages by a long season. And nedis they must be had.”

Fox discharged his multifarious responsibilities with great skill and efficiency and his career was attended by a high degree of success. Writing his life of Henry VII later on, Francis Bacon described Fox as “not only a grave counsellor for war or peace, but also a good surveyor of works, and a good master of ceremonies.” He possessed, moreover, the true diplomat’s ability to give “the smooth answer, as it was like oil unto the wound, whereby it began to heal.” Above all, he was “a wise man, and one that could see through the present to the future.” Nor, it would seem, was his manifest success bought at the cost of his humanity or fundamental decency. He eschewed the arbitrary, was careful to give reasons for the demands he made on others, and enjoyed a reputation for fair-mindedness, moderation, and mercy. His sympathy with the poor and the powerless is obvious; long after his retirement, in one of his last interventions in state policy, he did not forget to urge that the military commander on the Scottish border be careful not to burn the green corn. His generosity, equally, is evident in the obvious pleasure he took in commending those who had worked well for him and in helping them to achieve desired advancement. His dignity and sensitivity are illuminated in the impressive way in which he coped with the younger and less experienced Wolsey’s startling rise to a position of dominance, thinking even in his letter requesting retirement to commiserate with Wolsey in his “intollerable labours” and urging him to “laye a part all such busynesses fro vi of the clock in the evening forthward.”

Of course, by the time of his retirement in 1516, Fox’s own prominence was great and had already drawn him into those endeavors in the

33. Letter dated 23 April 1516, in Allen and Allen, eds., no. 52, p. 84.
field of higher education that were to employ so much of his energy in the third and remaining phase of his life, which won for him a Europe-wide reputation as a patron of learning, and which formed his most enduring legacy to later generations. By that time he had served as chancellor of the University of Cambridge and as master of Pembroke College in that university. At Oxford, meanwhile, he had become official visitor to Magdalen College and New College, had given new statutes to Balliol, and was well on the way to realizing the greatest of his educational achievements, the foundation of Corpus Christi College (1515–16). This college, "the definitive institution of Renaissance education in England" and "an English adaptation of the type of trilingual college already flourishing at Alcalá," provided the first permanent base for the new humanistic learning at Oxford. Provision was made for a public lecturer in Greek and for readers in Latin and theology who were to cover a very broad and Erasmian range of authors and, in the case of theology, to focus on the Latin and Greek fathers rather than the medieval scholastic authorities. Although Fox, unlike Ximénez, made no provision for the teaching of Hebrew, "his was nevertheless the most radical departure from traditional studies yet seen in England," and we have it on the authority of Erasmus that Cardinal Campeggio, Henry VIII, and Wolsey (as well as Erasmus himself) were all deeply interested in the venture. It was indeed through the good offices of Wolsey that humanists of the distinction of Juan Luis Vives, Thomas Lupset, and Nicholas Kratzer came to be associated with Corpus even though they were never fellows of the college.

Fox himself attracted to the new foundation the first fellows, including his own poor kinsman Thomas Fox and the future cardinal Reginald Pole; several of them, such as John Claymond, the first president, were from Magdalen College. Fox's letters to Claymond (which he always signed "your loving brother") reveal both his affection for the man and the warmth of his concern for the well-being of the college and its members. Thus, having acquired the site, made arrangements for the building, and chosen the president and fellows, he was active in "endowing them with lands in the counties around, sending up their kitchen stuff from London by river, while yet they 'live upon his purse,' collecting splendid books for their library, reading their verses, anxious for their health." Though he was a benefactor also of Magdalen College and of Pembroke College, Cambridge, and though he endowed schools at Taunton and in his own home town of Grantham (the latter of which Sir Isaac Newton was to attend), right up to the time of his death as a blind old man in 1528, it was clearly his cherished foundation of Corpus that won his affection and inspired his pride. Appropriately enough, over the centuries the members of his college have been mindful amply to reciprocate those sentiments.

All in all, Fox had a distinguished, well-rounded, and eminently satisfying public career, and there would have been nothing odd about it, in modern terms, had he not, while serving as a public official and being for some years the most important of Tudor statesmen, been successively priest, bishop, and for some years probably the most powerful of Tudor ecclesiastics. At the time, of course, such a combination of roles was not unique. His successive incumbencies of the bishoprics of Exeter (1487–92), Bath and Wells (1492–94), Durham (1494–1501), and Winchester (1501–28), with their respective annual revenues (appropriately graduated) of approximately £1,560, £1,642, £2,821, and £3,691, served in classically medieval fashion to provide his salary, his expenses, and a suitably handsome reward for his frequently supererogatory labors. A considerable historical interest attaches, however, to the way the performance of his duties was affected by that combination of offices. In regard to his political responsibilities his multiple roles entailed a degree and intimacy of contact with the dynasty he served not readily suggested by the title of lord privy seal: for example, he not only served as the trusted counselor of Henry VII and Henry VIII, he also buried the former and baptized the latter. In the present context, however, what the combi-

34. McGonigle, p. 82.
36. I draw these figures from Howden, ed., pp. xvii, xxii, xxxi, xxxii.
tion entailed for the discharge of his duties in ecclesiastical matters calls for a somewhat more extended comment.

For the first seven years of his episcopate he exercised his episcopal duties in absentia, failing even to visit his cathedral churches in the dioceses of Exeter and Bath and Wells, but appointing a vicar general to take care of all administrative tasks and a suffragan bishop to fulfill those sacramental functions that called for episcopal orders. Though Fox was later to express misgivings about the "innumerable sawles wherof I never see the bodies,"37 at the time he appears to have felt no qualms about his nonresidence. He appointed capable and conscientious men to the two main surrogate positions. William Sylke, indeed, his vicar general in both dioceses, and later on at Durham too, was a doctor of laws who himself eventually went on to become bishop of Norwich. The episcopal registers for both dioceses do not suggest that nonresidence under such circumstances had any immediately disastrous consequences; the routine work of property management, ordinations, induction into benefices, and so on appears to have gone ahead in a normal and uninterrupted fashion. For all their brevity and formality, however, the registers do reveal that in the absence of a bishop whose diocese was his chief concern, there was a less than active pursuit of tasks beyond the purely routine—the disciplining, for example, of indecorous or nonresident clergy, or the visitation of convents and monasteries and the rectification of abuses in such houses. Certainly, when Hugh Oldham became bishop of Exeter in 1504, he was to find much in the diocese that called for critical scrutiny and vigorous amendment.38

It was in 1494, when Fox went to Durham, that he became for the first time a resident bishop. He had been translated to that important bishopric presumably because Henry VII needed an experienced and trustworthy man in the position of prince-bishop, charged with re-

38. All four of Fox's episcopal registers are extant, but only two have been published: that of Bath and Wells by E. R. Batten, The Register of Richard Fox, Bishop of Bath and Wells (1889), and that of Durham by Howden. In her lengthy introduction to the latter, however, Howden analyzes (pp. xii–xiii) the contents of all four registers, devoting the bulk of her attention to the multivolume register for Winchester.

admotions, and, where necessary, the imposition of ecclesiastical discipline—"with such energy, indeed, that in 1527 he had to defend himself to Wolsey against charges of excessive rigor. 40 And even before his retirement he had instigated his vicar general to conduct visitations of the religious houses for men in 1501, 1507, and 1510, and in 1508 had commanded the archdeacon in the archdeaconry of Winchester to hold yearly parochial visitations and to make provision for the vernacular instruction of the people in the fundamentals of the faith. 41

The hard lessons learned in the course of all these efforts at a more systematic supervision of the religious life of his flock are reflected in his decision to exact pledges from new parochial incumbents to remain in their parishes, and in his move to amalgamate some benefices in Winchester in order to alleviate the poverty of the incumbents. They are reflected, too, in his translation of the Benedictine Rule (the first fruit, it seems, of his retirement) "into our modern tongue, common, playne, rounde, Englishe, easy and trede to be understande." He undertook that task at the request of the four convents of Benedictine nuns in his diocese, and his prefatory remarks reveal already a weary recognition of what he was up against. "For as moche as every persone ought to knowe the thynge that he is bounde to kepe or accomplishe," he begins,

we the sayd Bishoppe, knowing and consideringe the premisses and remembrance that we may not without like peryll of our soule suffer the sayd religiouse wemen, of whose sowles we have the cure, to continue in their sayde blindenenese and ignorance of the sayd Rule, to the knowledge and observance whereof they be professed; and especially to thenten that the yonge novices may first knowe and understande the

40. Letter dated 18 January 1527, in Allen and Allen, eds., no. 28, pp. 150–51. In that letter Fox makes the pungent claim that "except for Suthwarke, which is under the jurisdiction of tharchdeacon I trowe there be as little openly knowne sovrn or enyme crymes, both in persons spiritual and temporall, as is within any diocese of this realm." In regard to the religious houses for men in his diocese, he also says "I have never taken procurements of any of them for all the visitations of my tyme, by the space of xxx yere," thus claiming (correctly) that for him visitation was not a right (on the analogy of a benefice) but a solemn duty.

41. Howden, ed., p. xlvii.
involved therein," he says, is led to think "that if I dyd continuall penance for it all the dayes of my lyfe ... I cowde not yit make sufficient recompense therfor." Indeed, if he were to involve himself again in such matters and came to die, "I think I shuld dye in dypeyr." Even to be summoned to treat of such matters has had the effect of troubling "not a littell my spirts"—so much so that "I fere that I shall not by raion thereof be in such quettesses that I shall dar sy masse this next v or vi dayes." 44

These are not the words of the confident civil servant—bishop, secure in the knowledge of his abilities and of the value of the duties he was discharging, the younger man whose unruffled temperament and mood of calm acceptance is reflected in the motto _Est Deo Gratia_, which in the great kitchen of Durham castle adorns his device of a pelican vulning herself. But they do express the hopes and fears of the older and more chastened man, whose ambitions were now fixed on goals of a pastoral and educational nature, and who, assurance Wolsey that he sought neither "case of . . . bodye" nor "quietenesse of mynde" nor "lude of money," added in all simplicity, "I pray God I may lucrari animas." 45

John Hus (ca. 1370–1415): Heretic

About the external events of John Hus's life I have had much less to say than about the internal structure of his theology. Not much can be said about events before his appointment in 1402 as rector of the Bethlehem Chapel at Prague, for his early years are shrouded in obscurity. Born around the year 1370 at Husinec, in south-west Bohemia, he embarked on his studies at the University of Prague with his ambitions directed in wholly conventional fashion toward a career in the church. Or, at least, that is what the later Hus would have us believe; for at some point between 1395, when he received the master of arts degree, and 1400, when he was ordained to the priesthood, he underwent a conversion experience that left him an exponent of the

44. Letter to Wolsey dated 30 April 1517, in ibid., no. 57, pp. 93–94.
45. Letter dated 23 April 1516, in ibid., no. 52, p. 85.
the various claims that have been made, some are certainly less than convincing. It has been suggested, for example, that John XXIII saw in the trial of Hus "a great opportunity . . . to divert the attention of the council [of Constance] from his own unsavoury past and . . . to earn the applause of Christendom for destroying the enemy of the faith."46 But it is not so much Hus's trial that calls for explanation as its outcome, and that outcome was the work not of John XXIII but of the council that had by then already deposed him. More than one historian has considered this fact itself highly relevant. Thus, pointing out that Hus's judges were advocates of what he calls "the heretical conciliar view," de Vogeht has speculated that such men as d'Ailly and Gerson may well have needed "to reassure themselves as to their own orthodoxy," and so "seized the occasion and burned a heretic." But since he wrote on Hus, de Vogeht himself has veered toward the conclusion that such a negative view of the conciliar position is of modern ultramontane inspiration. As a result, he would now be prepared, presumably, to admit that it is anachronistic and misleading to depict conciliarist views as the source of any particular uneasiness in the consciences of those who adhered to them in the fifteenth century.47 Yet again, Zabarella, Gerson, and d'Ailly, the men who dominated the commission that finally condemned Hus, have been portrayed as heavily biased against him—to such a degree, indeed, that "it is obvious that Hus could expect no just treatment from them."48 That portrayal is grounded very much in the account written by Peter of Mladonivce, the principal source for Hus’s trial but one written, it should be noted, by a partisan of Hus. Nevertheless, even if Peter's account is taken at face value, and even if one concedes an initially negative bias in the commission's leaders, it is still puzzling that the actual course of the trial did nothing to erode that bias.

47. De Vogeht, *Heresia*, pp. 470, 474. For his later conclusions on the conciliar position and the dogmatic status of *Hus: sancta*, see his *Praecurio de concilio.*
them "many more and harsher" erroneous articles than in fact he did. 51

How well advised they were to place such weight on Pâœc’s testimony is, of course, a moot point. To Spinka, Pâœc was a depraved liar, unworthy of credence. 52 To Kaminsky, on the other hand, he was precisely the man who clearly saw the point at issue, who well knew "that whatever Hus might prove about the letter of his works, be in fact led a revolutionary movement." 53 But however one judges his role as Hus’s "principal enemy," and whatever motivations underlay that role, the form it took and the impact it had upon d’Ailly, Gerson, and Zabarella would ultimately be inexplicable without the powerfully adverse impression created both at Prague and later at Constance by Hus’s own behavior. To say that is to say also that the solution to the puzzle of Hus’s martyrdom must ultimately be sought less in the workings of any external factors than in the character of the man himself. And there we confront a "profound enigma." 54

It was Pâœc’s claim that the fatal flaw distinguishing Hus’s stance as reformer from that of his predecessors in the Bohemian reform movement was not his determination to attack the clerical corruption of the day but rather his defiance of the teaching authority of the Roman church and his responsiveness to the doctrinal errors of Wycliffe. The claim is at once cogent enough and a little simplistic. In the first place, although he was not the first of the Bohemian reformers to stimulate the wrath of the offended clergy by his moralizing censures, there was something notably unrestrained about the outraged invective he hurled against those whom he so readily identified as simoniacs or as the luxurious, worldly, and unworthy clerics of his day. In an analysis of the sermons that he delivered over the course of some years de Vooight has drawn attention not merely to the violence of his language but also to the degree to which, as time went on, that violence deepened. 55 He has also stressed that there was "something excessive" in Hus’s behavior that grated his critics into an unhinged fury of opposition. Other commentators, too, have noted his lack of diplomacy, the "daring" nature of his critiques of ecclesiastical authority, the "atmosphere of defiance that developed under his practical leadership," the "streak of exhibitionism" that "led him into gratuitous acts of bravado and . . . further incensed his enemies." 56

That exhibitionism comes out clearly in his apparent inability to refrain from sprinkling his arguments with statements drawn from Wycliffe or even from employing provocatively Wycliffite terminology when formulating perfectly orthodox positions. And that bravado is particularly evident in the move that cost him the support of so many of his sympathizers, colleagues, and friends at Prague—the decision in 1411 to challenge John XXIII’s "crusading" bull of indulgences, despite the fact that there was clearly room for genuine disagreement on one of the central points at issue. He publicized that challenge not only in the university by means of scholastic debate but also among an aroused and excited populace by means of sermons preached in Czech. In this particularly damaging stand there was much both of puritan zealotry and of academic idealism. But in this, again, as in his general stance toward ecclesiastical authority and toward the teachings of Wycliffe, one senses the presence of more troubling qualities sometimes regarded as equally characteristic of the academy.

Notable among these, and despite the degree of his concern with practical moral issues, was the disconcerting ease with which he was willing to reach for his principles, and to do so in situations where men of less abstractly theoretical but perhaps more reflective bent would have shown a more sober appreciation of the density, the complexity, the highly contingent particularity of human affairs. The eagerness with which he took his stand on principle set him on a collision course with the ecclesiastical authorities first at Prague, then at

52. Spinka, Biography, pp. 263, 274. But Spinka perforce admits (pp. 195–96) that in the disagreement over the actual contents of the papal bull of indulgences of 1411, on which he broke with Hus, Pâœc appears to have been correct.
56. Ibid., p. 277; Spinka, Biography, pp. 131, 139; Kaminsky, History, p. 40; Leff, Henry, 2:658.
Rome, and then at Constance, and encouraged such true radicals as Jakoubek of Sříbro and Nicholas of Dresden to pursue the logic of his position to its revolutionary end; yet at the same time he himself wavered, held back, and betrayed the curious streak of submissiveness that eventually proved fatal for him. As de Voocht has put it: "He excited the bull but had scruples about killing it." 57 It is as if in boldly challenging ecclesiastical authority he felt such filial respect for it that he desperately needed its approval for his very challenge. There is something of that submissiveness in his decision to leave Prague in 1412 at the very height of his popularity in order to spare the city the inconveniences of an interdict; there is a good deal more of it in his decision to go to Constance in order to submit his case to the judgment of the general council.

His disconcerting alternation between defiance and submissiveness at Constance, coupled with the lack of candor or clarity in his responses to some of the erroneous articles attributed to him, help more than anything else to explain the failure of his judges to penetrate the confusing screen of rumor, falsehood, charge, and countercharge. This screen had come to blur for them the outlines of a religious commitment that was certainly not Wycliffite, that was traditionally orthodox in intention, and that was within a hairsbreadth of being orthodox in actual fact. As a result of that failure he was condemned to die. But though the personal qualities that did so much to ensure his condemnation seem destined, now as in his own lifetime, to evoke mixed feelings, the nobility of spirit that sustained him through his last terrible days and saw him safely past the pitfall of recantation to his death as a heretic must surely evoke undying admiration. His enormous courage with which he died must be accorded a full measure of respect, for he cannot really be said to have sought martyrdom. Huss’s humble sense of his own frailty was clearly too acute for that, and it is well brought out in the prayer contained in a letter he wrote less than two weeks before his death:

O most kind Christ, draw us weaklings after Thyself, for unless Thou draw us, we cannot follow Thee! Give us a courageous spirit that it


Pierre d’Ailly (1350–1420): Reformer

We know next to nothing about Pierre d’Ailly’s childhood years. Born in 1350 at Compiègne in the Ille de France, d’Ailly was of bourgeois origins and the family name was drawn from the village of Ailly in Picardy. He entered the University of Paris in 1364 as a bursar at the College de Navarre, became a bachelor of arts in 1367, and during the following fourteen years surmounted the successive hurdles of the long course of studies leading to the doctorate of theology, revealing himself in the process as a creative proponent of Ockham’s nominalist theology. The closing decades of the century were the years during which he began to manifest the diplomatic skill and capacity for leadership that were later to win for him—especially in connection with the councils of Pisa and Constance—a position of international prominence. It is entirely fitting that when he died on August 9, 1420, at Avignon, he was there as a legate of the new pope, Martin V, still serving in public capacity the church for whose unity he had labored so long.

It was around 1375, during the years when Jan van Ruysbroeck, in seclusion at Groenendaal, was coming to the end of his long life, that d’Ailly, still a student of theology at the University of Paris, wrote his commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard. A little more than a hundred years later, that commentary was printed for the first time, appropriately enough under the aegis of the Brothers of the Common Life, whose peculiar vocation d’Ailly had staunchly defended at Constance. Between 1475 and 1495, while Richard Fox was rising to prominence in the service of Henry VII, other printed editions ap-

peared; Cardinal Campeggio, who we know was keenly interested in Fox's new foundation at Oxford, appears to have acquired a copy of one of the editions dating to 1500. At the turn of the century, indeed, interest in d'Ailly's literary legacy appears to have run high, and not only among the Gallicans of the theological faculty at the University of Paris, where Jacques Almain and John Major in their own conciliar tracts leaned heavily on his authority. Thus, for example, before his epoch-making trip to the New World in 1492, Christopher Columbus read and annotated what later became, as a result, d'Ailly's most widely known work—the highly derivative geographical treatise written in 1410, entitled Ynago mundi. Similarly, in his Babylonian Captivity of the Church, Martin Luther indicated that in his student days he had been greatly impressed by d'Ailly's Sentences, and especially by the view of the Eucharist expressed in the fourth book of that work. The survival of interest in his geographical, logical, philosophical, theological, and ecclesiological views is also reflected in the printing of works other than the Sentences. Among other of his writings, Ynago mundi, Conspectus et insubsidia, and Tractatus de anima all appeared between 1478 and 1505, and his Tractatus de reformatione was to be printed six times in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as well as being later included in such collections as those of von der Hardt and Louis Ellies Dupin.

The enduring popularity of this last work deserves emphasis, for it focuses attention on the aspect of d'Ailly's career that must concern us here. His career was of great richness and range. That he was personally acquainted with all three of our other five subjects who were his contemporaries, men as different as St. Vincent Ferrer, Francesco di

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Marco Durini, and John Hus, emphasizes that range. So, too, do the number of times and the variety of contexts in which his name has cropped up in the course of this book. We have already caught glimpses of him in his role as a prominent theologian of the Ockhamist persuasion, a thinker whose views on natural law, justification, predestination, the status of Scripture, the nature of the church, and several other related topics have found their place in the histories of those subjects. Many of the works in which he expressed those views date from his early years as student and teacher at the University of Paris, where he also served successively as proctor of the French nation (1572), rector of the College de Navarre (1585), and chancellor of the university (1589). Even had he not gone on to prominence in any broader public arena, it seems safe to assume that as an important university figure and the author of 170 works books, tracts, letters, poems, sermons, covering an astonishing variety of subjects—he would still have been remembered as a distinguished contributor to the intellectual life of his day.

But go on to more conspicuous activities of course he did, and we have also caught glimpses of him as ambassador at the papal court of Avignon, where at various times he represented both the University of Paris and the French king, as ecclesiastical trouble-shooter trying to drum up support for the impending Council of Pisa, as bishop of the great see of Cambray, presiding over the trial of a man who appears to have sympathized with the heresy of the Free Spirit. These roles were not unrelated. It was during his successive embassies to Avignon that d'Ailly caught the attention first of Clement VII and then of Benedict XIII, who conferred a series of minor benefices upon him (along with a dispensation to hold them in plurality), and then made him bishop of Puy in 1395 and of the more important see of Cambray in 1397—an office he retained until John XXIII elevated him to the cardinalate in 1411. The very rapidity of his advancement sponsored some adverse reactions. His successor at Puy, which he had never visited, was critical of his neglect of the diocese, and some of his colleagues at the University of Paris accused him to having permitted Benedict XIII to purchase his loyalty. It is difficult to assess the extent to which such
that Luther cited approvingly his heterodox sympathies concerning the Eucharist, his prominence as a conciliar theorist and the enduring popularity of his conciliarist views in Gallican circles, his firm and open commitment to the nominalist theology of Ockham—all of these things frequently conspired to encourage historians to see him as something of a radical. Until the last half-century or so, he was often portrayed as a “Reformer before the Reformation” or at least as a man of shaly and unsound doctrinal loyalties, at once an anticipator of Luther, an agnostic, a philosophical skeptic, perhaps even an Averroist. A perusal of the Tractatus de materia, moreover, reveals that he ventilated the possibility that the cardinalate, not being of divine institution, might well be allowed to lapse into disuse, and the place of the cardinals as papal assistants taken by prelates from the several kingdoms and provinces. A further perusal of that work, and of the Tractatus de sermonibus, suggests also, and surprisingly, that d’Ailly was quite taken with some of the views of Joachim of Fiore, whose writings he may have come across in 1385 in the library of the College de Navarre.

His own “apocalyptic” sympathies, although not central to his thinking, were certainly real enough. He may affirm that knowledge concerning the timing of Antichrist’s coming and of the end of the world has not been revealed to us in the Bible, and, like St. Vincent Ferrer, he may go on to invoke Christ’s statement that it is not for us to know the times or seasons the Father has fixed by his own authority, but he also goes on to hedge about the latter statement with qualifications and to hazard the opinion that God could well permit the future revelation to us of knowledge concerning the time of Antichrist’s coming.

63. For some of these characterizations and comments about them, see Tschockert, pp. 305 f.; Salembier, Cardinal, pp. 297–98; Gandillic, 44.
64. Tract. de mat., pt. III; Oakley, Political Thought of Pierre d’Ailly, app. III, pp. 244–49 at 322–24 and 328; in the latter passage he indicates that he himself does not approve of the opinion there expressed to the effect that the cardinalate should be abolished.
66. See Reeves, pp. 422–24.
ing, and could do so not merely de potentia absoluta (that goes without saying) but even de potentia ordinata. Yet such sentiments, however deeply felt, do not bulk very large in his writings. They appear mainly to reflect a periodic sense of despair over the protracted nature of the schism, and the disarray it was generating in the church, as well as a fluctuating disposition, fueled perhaps by Joachite and certainly by pseudo-Joachite writings, to take the troubles of the time as evidence that the end of the world was fast approaching. Nor was his apparent irritation with the doctrine of “impanation” any more central to his thinking. It simply reflected his sense that that doctrine presented fewer problems, philosophically speaking, than did transubstantiation, and was coupled, as Luther himself noted, with the affirmation that it was, of course, excluded doctrinally or theologically speaking because the church has “determined otherwise.”

With the decline in recent years of the credence historians have been willing to give to those negative appraisals of the nominalist theology that were primarily of neo-Thomist inspiration or to those dismissive judgments of conciliar theory that were ultimately of ultramontane provenance, it becomes more difficult to cast d’Ailly convincingly in the role of radical with reference either to his theology in general or to his ecclesiology in particular. So far as his views on justification and predestination go, he appears to have swum very much with the most powerful theological currents of his day. He was certainly a committed and influential advocate of the strict conciliar theory, and therefore of constitutional reform in the church’s government, but we have seen that that theory was itself no radical or heterodox innovation but rather a constitutionalist position, rooted at least as deeply in the canonistic and ecclesiological tradition as was its high-papalist rival. Among the advocates of conciliar theory active in the era of the great councils, d’Ailly emerges as something of a moderate—the more so in that, after becoming a cardinal, he revised the Tractatus de materia in such a way as to blunt its more radical edges. He eliminated those passages critical of the cardinalate and in-


69. See Tract. de mat., pt. III; Oakley, Political Thought of Pierre d’Ailly, pp. 314–42, and app. V and VI, pp. 346–49, for the changes d’Ailly made when revising it as the Tract. de ref. The footnotes include cross-references to the disciplinary legislation of Trent.
Striking the theme of “downhill all the way,” which was then fashionable, the tract begins with a rather portentous introduction denouncing the corruption of the church and predicting further calamities if something is not done about it. Six sections follow, in the first of which d'Ailly insists that if the whole body of the church is to be reformed at all it will be necessary to hold both general and provincial councils far more frequently than was customary in the past. Among other things, the badly needed reform of the Roman curia can be undertaken only by a general council, and it is the failure to hold such councils that accounts for the long duration both of the Western schism and of the schism between the Greek and Latin churches and for many other evils as well. He proposes, therefore, that provision be made for provincial councils to assemble at least once every three years, and for general councils to assemble automatically at intervals of thirty or, at most, fifty years, without the necessity of any specific papal convocation or mandate.

In the second section he denounces, among other things, “that detestable abuse from which the present schism drew its origin”—namely, attachment of the papacy to any nation or kingdom for so long a time that the nation could almost claim it as its own. This abuse should be remedied, and it should also be decreed that no two successive popes could be drawn from the college of cardinals, since it is not to be presumed that cardinals are ineligible. As far as the cardinals themselves, the greater part of them should never be drawn from a single nation or kingdom, there should be no more than one cardinal from any single ecclesiastical province, their number should be reduced, and something should be done to eliminate the scandalous pluralism so prevalent among them. In addition, d'Ailly deplores the tendency of the curia to multiply the number of excommunications attached to its penal constitutions and to burden the faithful with an excessive number of statutes and canons obliging on pain of moral sin.

The third section concerns the plight of the episcopate, pleading that new provision be made to prevent the underaged, the ignorant, and the unworthy from being made bishops and to prevent bishops from involving themselves too deeply in secular affairs. Provision should also be made to cut down the evil of nonresidence, to prevent corruption and the imposition of unfair financial burdens on the faithful, and to improve episcopal administration in general. The multiplication of saints, feast days, images, and devotional novelties should be eschewed; liturgical reforms should be instituted. Finally, an attempt should be made to prevent the collection of any fees for the administration of orders or of the sacraments in general, or of burials, or for the performance of anything pertaining to spirituals.

In the fourth and fifth sections d'Ailly addresses himself to the need for reform among both the monastic clergy and the secular clergy. There are too many monastic orders and religious communities—far more than the available revenues can support or the existing need justify. The activities and numbers of the mendicants should be curtailed and monastic exemptions from episcopal jurisdiction eliminated. It is clear that his sympathies lie with the secular clergy, but here again reform is needed. Widespread clerical ignorance and a deplorable system of promotions have to be remedied—the former by providing theological libraries and teaching in theology at the cathedral churches, the latter by the appointment to major positions of the learned rather than the well-connected and of theologians rather than lawyers.

The final section concerns the need for reformation in the lives of the laity, especially of the princes. It consists of a wholly traditional lecture on the duty of Christian princes to set a good example to their subjects; to eschew immorality, blasphemy, the practice of the magic arts, and heresy; to attack the Saracens and to curb the activities of the Jews; to rule their people, in effect, on behalf of Christ and not merely for their own selfish ends.

Unquestionably it was a comprehensive and largely practical program of reform, but its anticipation, in its detail, of so many of the disciplinary decrees of Trent is indicative less of d'Ailly's prescience than of the persistent nature of the problems plaguing the late-medieval church. Few of his specific proposals for reform were entirely new; many echo the clichés of the reforming literature back to the
Council of Vienne and beyond; some reflect also his own personal experiences as bishop of Cambrai. In that capacity he had worked hard to promote the moral reform of his clergy, both regular and secular, conducting visitations of the religious houses—as, for example, the Cistercian abbey of Epinieux in 1401, encouraging the activities of the Brethren of the Common Life and renewing the privileges and statutes of the Windesheim Congregation. Like Groote before him, he had battled against clerical incontinence, not hesitating to invoke against prevaricators the canonical penalties of suspension and excommunication. But his concern reached beyond the mere restoration of clerical discipline. He made full use of the instrumentality of the diocesan synod to rally the support and kindle the enthusiasm of his clergy, attacking, in the discourses delivered at those synods, not only simony but also the building of new churches, the canonizing of new saints, the solemnizing of new feasts. He revised the version of the breviary in use in his diocese, strove to improve the level of education among his clergy, and, at Cambrai itself, built a library and saw to it that it was furnished with appropriate books. 70

In all of this activity, despite his public prominence and the multiplicity of his writings, it is surprisingly difficult to get a sense of the man himself, and the biographical picture one constructs is marred by an irredeemable externality. But we are not altogether without clues to the spirit that animated his reforming activities. And those clues point—unexpectedly perhaps, but certainly with no little insistence—to the centrality of his preoccupation with ecclesiastical authority. Even his early theological writings make unambiguously clear how very great an emphasis he was prone to place, in matters religious as well as moral and legal, on will, power, and authority. At its very deepest, according to him, the roots of obligation are engaged, not in the persuasive grounds of reason, but in the executive prescriptions of the will. It is not from the rational ends it serves, however compelling they may be, that every law, divine and natural, no less than human, derives its obligating force, but rather from the

command or prohibition of the competent superior authority. 71

Nor is this emphasis merely a matter of theoretical affirmation. His nervousness about the unilateral French withdrawal of obedience from Benedict XIII in 1398, his subsequent efforts to promote a restoration of obedience at least in the essential spirituals, if not in the accidental temporalia that had come to be attached thereto, and his later opposition in 1406 to a renewed withdrawal may all be taken to reflect a genuine worry about the illegitimate intrusion of the temporal power at the expense of the competent ecclesiastical authority. A similar concern is evident in his willingness to accept what was for him the philosophically problematic doctrine of transubstantiation because the magisterial authority of the church stood behind it. The conviction that underlay such worries and concerns, moreover, makes itself felt in the calm confidence with which he was willing, as bishop of Cambrai (and having satisfied himself by appropriate investigatory procedures), to confirm the authenticity of two characteristically late-medieval miracles of the bleeding-host variety, around which popular cults had grown in his diocese, and even to accord indulgences to those who participated in those cults. 72 It is the same conviction that speaks also in the decisive firmness of his manner toward Hu, a man, after all, who shared so many of his own reforming instincts.

What moved d’Ailly as a reformer, then, is some ways most deeply and certainly most consistently, was an almost instinctive concern to protect the integrity of ecclesiastical authority—from the popes and papal absolutists who had long abused or distorted it, from the princes and clerics who continued to bend or flout it, from the heretics who

71. See Oakley, Political Thought of Pierre d’Ailly, pp. 72–97.
72. For these cults, the first of which was connected with the church of St. Gudule in Brussels and the second with the chapel of Bon-Seigneur Isaac near Novelles in Brussels, see Salimberti, Cardinal, pp. 139–40. In the latter case, a corporal had been stained, allegedly by the blood flowing from the host, and, having kept that corporal for two years and subjected it to various tests, d’Ailly confirmed the authenticity of the miracle in the following terms: "Nous donnez prenant egard que les choses suspendues sont vrayes, et incitant a cestes supplications par l’autorité apostolique et à l’hostie et saign et toute autre chose contenue en ieucl et dipendant d’iuecl comme choses sacres, saintes et vrayes" (in Vincian, ed., 6:153).
stubbornly and frontally challenged it. This being so, and given that reticence about himself that has long frustrated his biographers, it may be suggested that the words Peter of Mladenovice attributes to him while addressing John Hus at a critical moment in the latter’s trial are more revelatory of the spirit that moved the man than are any of his wholly conventional prayers that have come down to us. To d’Ailly the issue at stake appears to have been so totally clear that, even on the most favorable and sympathetic of estimates, Hus’s obdurate scruples about submitting himself unreservedly to the decision of the council must have smacked of an unhealthy and dangerous scrupulosity. Hence the sternness with which he urged Hus, even as he had successfully urged William of Hildesheimen before him, to abjure all the errors that were being attributed to him, even if he could not himself recognize them as his own: “Master John! Behold,” he said, two ways are placed before you, of which choose one! Either you throw yourself entirely or totally on the grace and into the hands of the Council, that whatsoever the council shall dictate to you therewith you shall be content. And the Council . . . will deal kindly and humanely with you. Or if you still wish to hold and defend some articles of the fore mentioned, and if you desire still another hearing, it shall be granted you. But consider that there are here great and enlightened men—doctors and masters—who have such strong reasons against your articles, that it is to be feared lest you become involved in greater errors if you wish to defend and hold those articles. I counsel you— I do not speak as judge. 73


EPILOGUE

Before its erosion by the cautious qualifications and reservations evinced so often in the scholarship of the past few decades, the traditionally firm historical profile of religious and ecclesiastical life in the late-medieval centuries was distinguished by three commanding features. In the first place, it betrayed the conviction that in the long history of the Christian church the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were characterized by a degree of ecclesiastical decadence and religious decline so grievous as to be destined finally to alienate from the traditional pattern of churchly life the most truly committed and the most deeply devout. In the second place, it presupposed the congruent assumption that in certain critical respects the period was in sharp discontinuity with the great age of medieval religion preceding; the degradation of Boniface VIII at Anagni marked a critical turning point in the history of the papacy, signaling the incipient collapse of that whole structure of ecclesiastical governance within the framework of which medieval Catholicism had contrived to flourish. In the third place, it reflected the countervailing recognition, in the seemingly disparate phenomena that we identify as heresy, mysticism, conciliarism, humanism, and so on, of the redemptive stirrings of interrelated movements of reform. Those movements drew their impulse from the common wellsprings of religious vitality, pointed in the direction of the Protestant Reformation, and were destined at the end of the period to converge upon that great upheaval.

Nevertheless, whatever troubles beset the church of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (and like those in its day that beset society at
large, they were both multiple and various), we have found the doomed sense of continuous and accelerating decline—however revelatory of the mood of ecclesiastics and intellectuals—to be an inadequate index to the varied, fluctuating, but frequently vital realities of late-medieval religious life. We have found, moreover, no less in its weaknesses than in its strengths, that the continuities binding the late-medieval church with that of the earlier period are a good deal more insistent than they have been thought to be. Similarly, the alleged links binding the disparate stirrings of "reform," both with one another and with the later churches of the Reformation, are a good deal more problematic than the traditional picture suggests. Perhaps more worrisome than the inadequacies of the traditional view, given the necessarily rich complexity of whatever picture one attempts to construct in its place, is the continuing, unavoidable problem of relating that picture to the revolutionary religious upheavals of the following century: not, admittedly, the type of problem susceptible of solution in a few concluding comments; but neither is it one altogether to be sidestepped.

What, then, is to be said? Few, I assume, would want to question the presence in varying degrees during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries of most of the components out of which kings, princes, popes, and reformers (the magisterial reformers, their radical Protestant critics, and their Catholic opponents alike) were to construct over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the new religious order of the post-Reformation era. Nor would many want to contest the claim that much about that new order could be anticipated by a scrutiny of late-medieval religious and ecclesiastical life—from the apocalypticism and Donatism of the radical sects, for example, to the dominant role in religious life that national, territorial, and civic governments played in Catholic as well as Protestant Europe; or from the profoundly Augustinian preoccupation with the problems of free will, grace, and predestination to the sharpened focus on the nature, form, and status of divine revelation; or from the type of disciplinary reforms that Trent finally effected to the intensely individualistic nature of the forms of piety prevalent across so much of the Christian world. Protestant and Catholic alike. And so on—to construct a more elaborate and exhaustive list would surely pose few major difficulties.

But little in all of this suggests the inevitability of the process whereby the transition was made to the new religious order, and much, indeed, occasions surprise about the exact configuration assumed by that order. Not even the characteristically late-medieval tension between the deepening piety, enhanced religious expectations, and intense "churchliness" of the populace on the one hand and the increasing calcification of the ecclesiastical establishment on the other, with its inability to respond more than fitfully to the religious aspirations of the day—not even that tension suggests that there was anything necessary about the sort of explosive breakthrough that Luther actually succeeded in sponsoring. 2 No good grounds exist for assuming that however grave that tension, it could not merely have endured. Nor are there firm grounds for supposing that the oppressive anxieties it generated in the hearts precisely of the most devout might not in the long run have been dissipated through the gradual transformation of their thinking, perhaps by religious ideals of the Erasmian type, or even by that late-medieval species of Augustinianism that Johann von Staupitz personified so influentially for Luther, but which pointed also (and, perhaps, rather?) in the direction of the theology of grace espoused in the Tridentine era by the cardinals Contarini and Seripando. 3

What that tension may help account for, admittedly, is the warmth and enthusiasm of the initial reception given to Luther's views, especially among the lower orders in the cities of northern Germany and among those of humanist sympathies. But it throws little light upon the religious formation of Luther himself, who, like his closest followers, was a good deal more than a mere ecclesiastical critic, or upon the roots of those profound and novel views that he propagated with such conviction, passion, and force. Nor does it necessarily throw that

1. See especially Moeller, Spätmittelalter, pp. 32–44.
3. On this point and the contribution of "the Augustinian intellectual nexus" to the development of Luther's theology, see the contributions of Helio A. Oberman and Lewis W. Spitz in Oberman, ed., Luther and the Dawn of the Modern Era, pp. 40–116.
much more light on the commitment of those who rallied to his standard. Of seventeenth-century England Keith Thomas has said: "This was no simple unified primitive world, but a dynamic and indefinitely various society, where social and intellectual change had long been at work and where currents were moving in many different directions." 4 Of Luther's Germany it would be possible without impropriety to say something very similar, and recognition of that fact is prone understandably to promote a certain sobriety in one's generalizing. One can set aside those territorial princes and prince-bishops whose enthusiasm for the Lutheran cause would appear to have been proportional to the promise they saw in it for enhanced control over their territorial churches or for the profitable secularization of ecclesiastical lands. But even if one brackets such "political" conversions, a close scrutiny of groups that responded with immediate enthusiasm to Luther's views sometimes reveals how much they simply misconstrued them. More frequently, it reveals how greatly their response was limited to the negative or polemical dimensions of his message, to his bold attack on some prominent features of the old ecclesiastical order or on such traditional religious practices as the traffic in indulgences, and failed to extend to the rich and in some respects profoundly original commitments motivating that attack. 5 Thus, if the doomed and violent effort of the imperial knights led by Ulrich von Hutten and others to recover their former influence in German society was in some measure fueled by an appropriation of Lutheran ideas, it was indeed a very confused appropriation. And the gross misconstruction of his doctrine of Christian liberty by the peasantry during the catastrophic revolt of 1524–25 was a source of great anguish to Luther himself. More startling, however, is the degree to which even those moved more directly by clearly religious concerns missed the radical nature of his message. Thus, the annalist of

5. Thus Moeller, "Imperial Cities and the Reformation," in Imperial Cities, p. 74, comments that "in the eyes of the townpeople [who welcomed his views] the parallelism between Luther's antipathy for the Roman church and their own must have seemed clearer and more important than the difference in the foundations on which they built their arguments."

the Doeburg house of the Brethren of the Common Life, in reporting the impact of Lutheran ideas, makes no mention at all of the central doctrine of justification by faith. Indeed, he gives the impression that the main impact of the doctrine of Christian liberty on the Brethren had been to encourage the younger Brothers to refuse the complete shaving of the head customary in the Congregation and to hold out instead for a less thoroughgoing form of tonsure. 6 Even more striking, and given Moeller's bold formulation ("No humanism, no Reformation"), 7 a good deal more fateful, is the "constructive misunderstanding," which led the humanists during the critical early years to give Luther their enthusiastic and clamorous support. Thus they took him to be one of themselves, simply a more passionate and providentially effective exponent of their own Erasmian ideals—to such a degree that the young Martin Bucer actually expressed surprise that the Reformer's disputation theses at Heidelberg in 1518 denied the free will of man.

As time went on, of course, Erasmus and many other older humanists came to perceive the guilt that divided Luther from them and to realize (perhaps to their surprise) that their own sympathies bound them rather to the medieval Catholic past than to any future shaped in accordance with his religious vision. Even at the outset, however, not all of his supporters had misunderstood him. And even among those who had, many were younger humanists whose lives were transformed by their encounter with his teaching of a gracious God, who were moved by a process of conversion to embrace his teaching of justification by faith, and from whose ranks were subsequently to be drawn so many of the intellectual leaders of the Reformation. For the appeal of Luther's gospel, and the anguish of breakthrough by which he himself had attained to it, were both grounded in that great hunger for the divine that is one of the most striking features of late-
medieval religious life. Both reflected deeply felt religious needs, and the one is no more to be explained away than the other. But, because they are not to be explained away or ultimately "explained" at all, historians must still struggle to shed some light on their origins or antecedents. No easy task, of course. The ending of the fifteen century, however, coincided with something of a high point in medieval piety and "churchliness," and Luther was in his critical years himself shaped by one of the most rigorous of late-medieval monastic reforms. If, then, we are really to penetrate to any internal understanding of the man and of the followers who best understood him, we would do well to seek the wellsprings of their religiosity less in any reaction to the more obvious shortcomings of the medieval Catholic system at its weakest and most decadent than in the profound inadequacies they sensed in it even at its strongest and most pure. Luther's strength, it has been argued, and the very heart of his appeal, lay in the fact that he succeeded in giving new, "nonmedieval" answers to the essentially medieval religious questions that still troubled him and so many others in his day. More than any of the traditional solutions proposed by the late-medieval church his novel answers possessed, at least for some, a compelling measure of authenticity, the power to convince, and the force to assuage the persistent yearnings of the religious spirit. At one level, but arguably at the deepest level of all, the matter may have been no more complex than that.

8. See the comments of Ozenne, Reformation in the Cities, pp. 43--44; Moeller, "Probleme des kirchlichen Lebens in Deutschland vor der Reformation," in Jedin et al., Probleme der Kirchenpolitik, pp. 26--30. Cf. for the origins of the Reformation in France the similar comments of Felvire, especially p. 41.

9. Note, in this connection, their attack on sacramental confession. Having earlier expressed some reservations about Ozenne's argument in Reformation in the Cities, I must here acknowledge its force in relation to Luther's closest followers.


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