

In the world had ever before
Known anything like it, so help me
God! And that's all I'm allowed
To tell you; I can say no more.
These pleasures I'm forbidden to report
Were the most wonderful known

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The most delightful. That night,
And all night long, Lancelot
Experienced incredible joy.
But the dawn came, against
His will, and he had to leave.

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DEVELOPMENTS IN RELIGIOUS SENSIBILITIES

6.22 Disciplining and purifying Christendom: *Decrees of Lateran IV* (1215). Original in Latin.

Called by Pope Innocent III (1198–1216), the Fourth Lateran Council was a turning point in the history of the Church. It codified many doctrines, policies, and practices that had hitherto been informal, local, or fuzzy. It meant to purify Christendom of the contaminating presence of heretics and Jews while determining the religious behavior and beliefs of those within the fold.

1. In what ways did the Fourth Lateran Council continue the Church reform movement begun in the eleventh century?
2. In what ways did it represent something new?

[Source: *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner, vol. 1: *Nicaea I to Lateran V* (London and Washington, DC: Sheed & Ward and Georgetown University Press, 1990), pp. 230–31, 233–36, 245, 257–58, 265–67 (notes modified).]

Constitutions

1. ON THE CATHOLIC FAITH

We firmly believe and simply confess that there is only one true God, eternal and immeasurable, almighty, unchangeable, incomprehensible and ineffable, Father, Son and holy Spirit, three persons but one absolutely simple essence, substance or nature. The Father is from none, the Son from the Father alone, and the holy Spirit from both equally, eternally without beginning or end; the Father generating, the Son being born, and the holy Spirit proceeding; consubstantial and coequal, co-omnipotent and coeternal; one principle of all things, creator of all things invisible and visible, spiritual and corporeal; who by his almighty power at the beginning of time created from nothing both spiritual and corporeal creatures, that is to say angelic and earthly, and then created human beings composed as it were of both spirit

and body in common. The devil and other demons were created by God naturally good, but they became evil by their own doing. Man, however, sinned at the prompting of the devil.

This holy Trinity, which is undivided according to its common essence but distinct according to the properties of its persons, gave the teaching of salvation to the human race through Moses and the holy prophets and his other servants, according to the most appropriate disposition of the times. Finally the only-begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ, who became incarnate by the action of the whole Trinity in common and was conceived from the ever virgin Mary through the cooperation of the holy Spirit, having become true man; composed of a rational soul and human flesh, one person in two natures, showed more clearly the way of life. Although he is immortal and unable to suffer according to his divinity, he was made capable of suffering and dying according to his humanity.

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Indeed, having suffered and died on the wood of the cross for the salvation of the human race, he descended to the underworld, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. He descended in the soul, rose in the flesh, and ascended in both. He will come at the end of time to judge the living and the dead; to render to every person according to his works, both to the reprobate and to the elect. All of them will rise with their own bodies, which they now wear, so as to receive according to their deserts, whether these be good or bad; for the latter perpetual punishment with the devil, for the former eternal glory with Christ.

There is indeed one universal church of the faithful, outside of which nobody at all is saved, in which Jesus Christ is both priest and sacrifice. His body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the forms of bread and wine, the bread and wine having been changed in substance, by God's power, into his body and blood, so that in order to achieve this mystery of unity we receive from God what he received from us. Nobody can effect this sacrament except a priest who has been properly ordained according to the church's keys, which Jesus Christ himself gave to the apostles and their successors. But the sacrament of baptism is consecrated in water at the invocation of the undivided Trinity—namely Father, Son and holy Spirit—and brings salvation to both children and adults when it is correctly carried out by anyone in the form laid down by the church. If someone falls into sin after having received baptism, he or she can always be restored through true penitence. For not only virgins and the continent but also married persons find favor with God by right faith and good actions and deserve to attain to eternal blessedness....

3. ON HERETICS

We excommunicate and anathematize every heresy raising itself up against this holy, orthodox and catholic faith which we have expounded above. We condemn all heretics, whatever names they may go under. They have different faces indeed but their tails are tied together inasmuch as they are alike in their pride. Let those condemned be handed over to the secular authorities present, or to their bailiffs, for due punishment. Clerics are first to be degraded from their orders. The goods of the condemned are to be confiscated, if they are lay persons, and if clerics they are to be applied to the churches from which they received their stipends. Those who are only found suspect of heresy are to be struck with the sword of anathema, unless they prove their innocence by an appropriate purgation, having regard to the reasons for suspicion and

the character of the person. Let such persons be avoided by all until they have made adequate satisfaction. If they persist in the excommunication for a year, they are to be condemned as heretics. Let secular authorities, whatever offices they may be discharging, be advised and urged and if necessary be compelled by ecclesiastical censure, if they wish to be reputed and held to be faithful, to take publicly an oath for the defense of the faith to the effect that they will seek, in so far as they can, to expel from the lands subject to their jurisdiction all heretics designated by the church in good faith. Thus whenever anyone is promoted to spiritual or temporal authority, he shall be obliged to confirm this article with an oath. If however a temporal lord, required and instructed by the church, neglects to cleanse his territory of this heretical filth, he shall be bound with the bond of excommunication by the metropolitan and other bishops of the province. If he refuses to give satisfaction within a year, this shall be reported to the supreme pontiff so that he may then declare his vassals absolved from their fealty to him and make the land available for occupation by Catholics so that these may, after they have expelled the heretics, possess it unopposed and preserve it in the purity of the faith—saving the right of the suzerain [ruler] provided that he makes no difficulty in the matter and puts no impediment in the way. The same law is to be observed no less as regards those who do not have a suzerain.

Catholics who take the cross and gird themselves up for the expulsion of heretics shall enjoy the same indulgence, and be strengthened by the same holy privilege, as is granted to those who go to the aid of the holy Land. Moreover, we determine to subject to excommunication believers who receive, defend or support heretics. We strictly ordain that if any such person, after he has been designated as excommunicated, refuses to render satisfaction within a year, then by the law itself he shall be branded as infamous and not be admitted to public offices or councils or to elect others to the same or to give testimony. He shall be intestable, that is he shall not have the freedom to make a will, nor shall he succeed to an inheritance. Moreover nobody shall be compelled to answer to him on any business whatever, but he may be compelled to answer to them. If he is a judge, sentences pronounced by him shall have no force and cases may not be brought before him; if an advocate, he may not be allowed to defend anyone; if a notary, documents drawn up by him shall be worthless and condemned along with their condemned author; and in similar matters we order the same to be observed. If however he is a cleric, let him be deposed from every office and benefice, so that

the greater the fault the greater be the punishment. If any refuse to avoid such persons after they have been pointed out by the church, let them be punished with the sentence of excommunication until they make suitable satisfaction. Clerics should not, of course, give the sacraments of the church to such pestilent people nor give them a Christian burial nor accept alms or offerings from them; if they do, let them be deprived of their office and not restored to it without a special indult [privilege] of the apostolic see. Similarly with regulars,¹ let them be punished with losing their privileges in the diocese in which they presume to commit such excesses.

There are some who "holding to the form of religion but denying its power" (as the Apostle says),² claim for themselves the authority to preach, whereas the same Apostle says, "How shall they preach unless they are sent?"³ Let therefore all those who have been forbidden or not sent to preach, and yet dare publicly or privately to usurp the office of preaching without having received the authority of the apostolic see or the catholic bishop of the place, be bound with the bond of excommunication and, unless they repent very quickly, be punished by another suitable penalty. We add further that each archbishop or bishop, either in person or through his archdeacon or through suitable honest persons, should visit twice or at least once in the year any parish of his in which heretics are said to live. There he should compel three or more men of good repute, or even if it seems expedient the whole neighborhood, to swear that if anyone knows of heretics there or of any persons who hold secret conventicles or who differ in their life and habits from the normal way of living of the faithful, then he will take care to point them out to the bishop. The bishop himself should summon the accused to his presence, and they should be punished canonically [according to canon law] if they are unable to clear themselves of the charge or if after compurgation⁴ they relapse into their former errors of faith. If however any of them with damnable obstinacy refuse to honor an oath and so will not take it, let them by this very fact be regarded as heretics. We therefore will and command and, in virtue of obedience, strictly command that bishops see carefully to the effective execution of these things throughout their dioceses, if they wish to avoid canonical penalties. If any bishop is negligent or

remiss in cleansing his diocese of the ferment of heresy, then when this shows itself by unmistakable signs he shall be deposed from his office as bishop and there shall be put in his place a suitable person who both wishes and is able to overthrow the evil of heresy.

4. ON THE PRIDE OF GREEKS TOWARDS LATINS

Although we would wish to cherish and honor the Greeks who in our days are returning to the obedience of the apostolic see, by preserving their customs and rites as much as we can in the Lord, nevertheless we neither want nor ought to defer to them in matters which bring danger to souls and detract from the church's honor. For, after the Greek church together with certain associates and supporters withdrew from the obedience of the apostolic see, the Greeks began to detest the Latins so much that, among other wicked things which they committed out of contempt for them, when Latin priests celebrated on their altars they would not offer sacrifice on them until they had washed them, as if the altars had been defiled thereby. The Greeks even had the temerity to rebaptize those baptized by the Latins; and some, as we are told, still do not fear to do this. Wishing therefore to remove such a great scandal from God's church, we strictly order, on the advice of this sacred council, that henceforth they do not presume to do such things but rather conform themselves like obedient sons to the holy Roman church, their mother, so that there may be "one flock and one shepherd."⁵ If anyone however does dare to do such a thing, let him be struck with the sword of excommunication and be deprived of every ecclesiastical office and benefice....

21. ON CONFESSION BEING MADE, AND NOT REVEALED BY THE PRIEST, AND ON COMMUNICATING AT LEAST AT EASTER

All the faithful of either sex, after they have reached the age of discernment, should individually confess all their sins in a faithful manner to their own priest at least once a year, and let them take care to do what they can to perform the penance imposed on them. Let them reverently receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least at Easter unless they think, for a good reason and on the advice of their own priest, that they should abstain from receiving

¹ I.e., monks.

² 2 Tim 3:5.

³ Rom. 10:15.

⁴ A procedure whereby witnesses swear to the innocence of the accused.

⁵ John 10:16.

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it for a time. Otherwise they shall be barred from entering a church during their lifetime and they shall be denied a Christian burial at death. Let this salutary decree be frequently published in churches, so that nobody may find the pretense of an excuse in the blindness of ignorance. If any persons wish, for good reasons, to confess their sins to another priest let them first ask and obtain the permission of their own priest; for otherwise the other priest will not have the power to absolve or to bind them.¹ The priest shall be discerning and prudent, so that like a skilled doctor he may pour wine and oil² over the wounds of the injured one. Let him carefully inquire about the circumstances of both the sinner and the sin, so that he may prudently discern what sort of advice he ought to give and what remedy to apply, using various means to heal the sick person. Let him take the utmost care, however, not to betray the sinner at all by word or sign or in any other way. If the priest needs wise advice, let him seek it cautiously without any mention of the person concerned. For if anyone presumes to reveal a sin disclosed to him in confession, we decree that he is not only to be deposed from his priestly office but also to be confined to a strict monastery to do perpetual penance....

50. ON THE RESTRICTION OF PROHIBITIONS TO MATRIMONY

It should not be judged reprehensible if human decrees are sometimes changed according to changing circumstances, especially when urgent necessity or evident advantage demands it, since God himself changed in the New Testament some of the things which he had commanded in the Old Testament. Since the prohibitions against contracting marriage in the second and third degree of affinity, and against uniting the offspring of a second marriage with the kindred of the first husband, often lead to difficulty and sometimes endanger souls, we therefore, in order that when the prohibition ceases the effect may also cease, revoke with the approval of this sacred council the constitutions published on this subject³ and we decree, by this present constitution, that henceforth contracting parties connected in these ways may freely be joined together. Moreover the prohibition against marriage shall not in future go beyond the fourth degree of consanguinity and of affinity, since the prohibition cannot now generally be observed to further degrees

without grave harm. The number four agrees well with the prohibition concerning bodily union about which the Apostle says, that "the husband does not rule over his body, but the wife does; and the wife does not rule over her body, but the husband does";⁴ for there are four humors in the body, which is composed of the four elements. Although the prohibition of marriage is now restricted to the fourth degree, we wish the prohibition to be perpetual, notwithstanding earlier decrees on this subject issued either by others or by us. If any persons dare to marry contrary to this prohibition, they shall not be protected by length of years, since the passage of time does not diminish sin but increases it, and the longer that faults hold the unfortunate soul in bondage the graver they are.

51. ON THE PUNISHMENT OF THOSE WHO CONTRACT CLANDESTINE MARRIAGES

Since the prohibition against marriage in the three remotest degrees has been revoked, we wish it to be strictly observed in the other degrees. Following in the footsteps of our predecessors, we altogether forbid clandestine marriages and we forbid any priest to presume to be present at such a marriage. Extending the special custom of certain regions to other regions generally, we decree that when marriages are to be contracted they shall be publicly announced in the churches by priests, with a suitable time being fixed beforehand within which whoever wishes and is able to may adduce a lawful impediment. The priests themselves shall also investigate whether there is any impediment. When there appears a credible reason why the marriage should not be contracted, the contract shall be expressly forbidden until there has been established from clear documents what ought to be done in the matter. If any persons presume to enter into clandestine marriages of this kind, or forbidden marriages within a prohibited degree, even if done in ignorance, the offspring of the union shall be deemed illegitimate....

67. ON THE USURY OF JEWS

The more the Christian religion is restrained from usurious practices, so much the more does the perfidy of the Jews grow in these matters, so that within a short time they are exhausting the resources of Christians. Wishing therefore to see that Christians are not savagely oppressed by

¹ The power to "bind and loose"—that is to impose penance and to absolve—is based on Matt. 16:19 and 18:18.

² See Luke 10:34.

³ The reference is to decisions of earlier councils.

⁴ 1 Cor. 7:4.

Jews in this matter, we ordain by this synodal decree that if Jews in future, on any pretext, extort oppressive and excessive interest from Christians, then they are to be removed from contact with Christians until they have made adequate satisfaction for the immoderate burden. Christians too, if need be, shall be compelled by ecclesiastical censure, without the possibility of an appeal, to abstain from commerce with them. We enjoin upon princes not to be hostile to Christians on this account, but rather to be zealous in restraining Jews from so great oppression. We decree, under the same penalty, that Jews shall be compelled to make satisfaction to churches for tithes and offerings due to the churches, which the churches were accustomed to receive from Christians for houses and other possessions; before they passed by whatever title to the Jews, so that the churches may thus be preserved from loss.

68. THAT JEWS SHOULD BE DISTINGUISHED FROM CHRISTIANS IN THEIR DRESS

A difference of dress distinguishes Jews or Saracens from Christians in some provinces, but in others a certain confusion has developed so that they are indistinguishable. Whence it sometimes happens that by mistake Christians join with Jewish or Saracen women, and Jews or Saracens with Christian women. In order that the offence of such a damnable mixing may not spread further, under the excuse of a mistake of this kind, we decree that such persons of either sex, in every Christian province and at all times, are to be distinguished in public from other people by the character of their dress—seeing moreover that this was enjoined upon them by Moses himself, as we read.¹ They shall not appear in public at all on the days of lamentation and on passion Sunday; because some of them on such days, as we have heard, do not blush to parade in very ornate dress and are not afraid to mock Christians who are presenting a memorial of the most sacred passion and are displaying signs of grief. What we most strictly forbid, however, is that they dare in any way to break out in derision of the Redeemer. We order secular princes to restrain with condign [appropriate] punishment those who do so presume, lest they dare to blaspheme in any way him who was crucified for us, since we ought not to ignore insults against him who blotted out our wrongdoings.

¹ See Lev. 19:19; Deut. 22:5 and 22:11.

² A reference to the Council of Toledo of 589, canon 14.

³ See Col 3:9.

⁴ See Eccles. 2:14 and 3:28.

⁵ See Deut. 22:11.

69. THAT JEWS ARE NOT TO HOLD PUBLIC OFFICES

It would be too absurd for a blasphemer of Christ to exercise power over Christians. We therefore renew in this canon, on account of the boldness of the offenders, what the council of Toledo² providently decreed in this matter: we forbid Jews to be appointed to public offices, since under cover of them they are very hostile to Christians. If, however, anyone does commit such an offence to them let him, after an admonition, be curbed by the provincial council, which we order to be held annually, by means of an appropriate sanction. Any official so appointed shall be denied commerce with Christians in business and in other matters until he has converted to the use of poor Christians, in accordance with the directions of the diocesan bishop, whatever he has obtained from Christians by reason of his office so acquired; and he shall surrender with shame the office which he irreverently assumed. We extend the same thing to pagans.

70. THAT CONVERTS TO THE FAITH AMONG THE JEWS MAY NOT RETAIN THEIR OLD RITE

Certain people who have come voluntarily to the waters of sacred baptism, as we learnt, do not wholly cast off the old person in order to put on the new more perfectly.³ For, in keeping remnants of their former rite, they upset the decorum of the Christian religion by such a mixing. Since it is written, cursed is he who enters the land by two paths,⁴ and a garment that is woven from linen and wool together should not be put on,⁵ we therefore decree that such people shall be wholly prevented by the prelates of churches from observing their old rite, so that those who freely offered themselves to the Christian religion may be kept to its observance by a salutary and necessary coercion. For it is a lesser evil not to know the Lord's way than to go back on it after having known it.

[71.] EXPEDITION FOR THE RECOVERY OF THE HOLY LAND

It is our ardent desire to liberate the holy Land from infidel hands. We therefore declare, with the approval of this sacred council and on the advice of prudent men who are fully aware of the circumstances of time and place, that

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crusaders are to make themselves ready so that all who have arranged to go by sea shall assemble in the kingdom of Sicily on June 1st after next: some as necessary and fitting at Brindisi and others at Messina and places neighboring it on either side, where we too have arranged to be in person at that time, God willing, so that with our advice and help the Christian army may be in good order to set out with divine and apostolic blessing. Those who have decided to go by land should also take care to be ready by the same date. They shall notify us meanwhile so that we may grant them a suitable legate *a latere*¹ for advice and help. Priests and other clerics who will be in the Christian army, both those under authority and prelates, shall diligently devote themselves to prayer and exhortation, teaching the crusaders by word and exam-

ple to have the fear and love of God always before their eyes, so that they say or do nothing that might offend the divine majesty. If they ever fall into sin, let them quickly rise up again through true penitence. Let them be humble in heart and in body, keeping to moderation both in food and in dress, avoiding altogether dissensions and rivalries, and putting aside entirely any bitterness or envy, so that thus armed with spiritual and material weapons they may the more fearlessly fight against the enemies of the faith, relying not on their own power but rather trusting in the strength of God. We grant to these clerics that they may receive the fruits of their benefices in full for three years, as if they were resident in the churches, and if necessary they may leave them in pledge for the same time.

6.23 Devotion through poverty: Peter Waldo in *The Chronicle of Laon* (1173-1178). Original in Latin.

Peter Waldo (d.c.1207), a wealthy merchant at Lyon, was inspired, like many people of his time, by the *Acts of the Apostles* in the New Testament. At some time in the 1170s, he rid himself of his material possessions and began to preach to his neighbors "to place your hopes in God and not in wealth." He and his followers (known at first as the Poor, or the Poor Men, but later on as the Waldensians) were initially embraced by the papacy but forbidden to preach. However, they continued to preach and were declared heretics in 1184. Their continued association with heresy may be seen in Jacques Fournier's *Episcopal Register*, p. 418 below. In the account printed here, written by an anonymous chronicler who was not entirely hostile to the movement, Peter is called Valdès, the original form of his name. Since the account is in a chronicle, some of the entries are preceded by dates.

1. How does this account of Peter Waldo's life compare with the autobiographical account of St. Francis in his *Testament* (below, p. 375)?
2. How do you explain the many different responses to Waldo's conversion?

[Source: *The Birth of Popular Heresy*, ed. and trans. Robert I. Moore (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), pp. 111-13 (slightly modified).]

At about this time, in 1173, there was a citizen of Lyon named Valdès, who had made a great deal of money by the evil means of usury. One Sunday he lingered by

a crowd that had gathered round a *jongleur*,² and was much struck by his words. He took him home with him, and listened carefully to his story of how St. Alexis had

¹ "A *latere*" means "from the side [of the pope]." The pope is here saying that a papal legate is necessary.

² A *jongleur* was an entertainer.

died a holy death in his father's house.¹ Next morning Valdès hastened to the schools of theology to seek advice about his soul. When he had been told of the many ways of coming to God he asked the master whether any of them was more sure and reliable than the rest. The master quoted to him the words of the Lord, "If thou wilt be perfect go sell what thou hast and give to the poor and thou shalt have treasure in heaven. And come follow me."²

Valdès returned to his wife and gave her the choice between having all his movable wealth or his property in land and water, woods, meadows, fields, houses, rents, vineyards, mills and ovens. She was very upset at having to do this and chose the property. From his movable wealth he returned what he had acquired wrongly, conferred a large portion on his two daughters, whom he placed in the order of Fontevault³ without his wife's knowledge, and gave a still larger amount to the poor. At this time a terrible famine was raging through Gaul and Germany. For three days a week, from Whitsun to St Peter-in-chains [May 27-August 1] Valdès generously distributed bread, soup and meat to anyone who came to him. On the Assumption of the Virgin [August 15] he scattered money among the poor in the streets saying, "You cannot serve two masters, God and Mammon."⁴ The people around thought that he had gone out of his senses. Then he stood up on a piece of high ground and said, "Friends and fellow-citizens, I am not out of my mind, as you think. I have avenged myself on the enemies who enslaved me when I cared more for money than for God and served the creature more faithfully than the creator. I know that many of you disapprove of my having acted so publicly. I have done so both for my own sake and for yours: for my sake, because anybody who sees me with money in future will be able to say that I am crazy; for

your sake, so that you may learn to place your hopes in God and not in wealth."

Next day as he was coming out of church Valdès begged a certain citizen, formerly a friend of his, for God's sake to give him something to eat. The man took him home, and said, "As long as I live I will provide you with the necessities of life." When his wife heard this story, she was very upset, and rushed distraught to complain to the archbishop that Valdès had begged his bread from someone other than herself. This moved everybody who was with the archbishop to tears. The archbishop requested the citizen to bring his guest before him. The wife seized her husband by his tattered clothes, and said, "Is it not better, my man, for me to redeem my sins by giving you alms than a stranger?" After this, by the archbishop's command, he was not allowed to accept alms from anybody in the city except his wife.

1177 Valdès, the citizen of Lyon whom we have already mentioned, who had vowed to God that he would possess neither gold nor silver, and take no thought for the morrow, began to make converts to his opinions. Following his example, they gave all they had to the poor and willingly devoted themselves to poverty. Gradually, both in public and in private, they began to inveigh against both their own sins and those of others.

1178 Pope Alexander III⁵ held a council at the Lateran palace.... The council condemned heresy and all those who fostered and defended heretics. The pope embraced Valdès, and applauded the vows of voluntary poverty which he had taken, but forbade him and his companions to assume the office of preaching except at the request of the priests. They obeyed this instruction for a time, but later they disobeyed, and affronted many, bringing ruin on themselves.

¹ In the story of St. Alexis, probably a conflation of several legends, the saint, member of a distinguished family at Rome, left his wife on his wedding night, went on a pilgrimage, and, upon his return to Rome, lived unrecognized as a beggar under the stairs in his father's house. After his death documents made his identity known and he was honored as a saint.

² Matt. 19:21.

³ Fontevault was a monastery founded by Robert of Arbrissel (c.1045-1116). It consisted of two houses, one for men and the other for women, both of which were presided over by the same female abbess.

⁴ Matt. 6:24; Luke 16:13.

⁵ Alexander III was pope from 1159 to 1181. In fact this council (Lateran III) was held in 1179.

6.24 Devotion through mysticism: Jacques de Vitry, *The Life of Mary of Oignies* (1213). Original in Latin.

Jacques de Vitry (d.1240) learned about Mary of Oignies while he was a regular canon (much like a monk but living according to the Rule of St. Augustine rather than Benedict) at Oignies, today in the north of France. Mary (1177–1213) led a nearby house of Beguines—a community in which women took no formal vows but nevertheless dedicated themselves to lives of piety. Jacques's support for the Beguines helped legitimize them: his biography made Mary into a kind of saint, while his direct appeal to the papacy in 1216 resulted in the Beguines' official recognition. Although they spent their days at simple tasks—caring for the sick, spinning, weaving—Beguines like Mary lived passionate lives, weeping cascades of tears as they contemplated the Lord.

1. Comparing this *Life* with that of Monegundis in the sixth century (see above, p. 38), how might you characterize the transformations that occurred in medieval conceptions of female piety?
2. How did the life of Christ inspire Mary of Oignies?

[Source: *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, trans. Margot King (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 179–81 (a few notes added).]

BOOK I

CHAPTER 16

The beginning of her conversion to you, O Lord, the first fruits of her love, was your Cross and Passion. She heard you hearing and was afraid,¹ she considered your works and feared. One day when she was reflecting on the blessings you had sent and visited upon her and which you had graciously shown forth in the flesh to mankind, and while she was considering your torment upon the Cross, she found such grace of compunction and wept so abundantly that the tears which flowed so copiously from her eyes fell on the floor of the church and plainly showed where she had been walking. For a long time after this visitation, she could not look at an image of the Cross, nor could she speak of the Passion of Christ, nor hear other people speaking of it without falling into ecstasy by reason of her enfeebled heart. She therefore would sometimes moderate her sorrow and restrain the flood of her tears and, leaving behind His humanity, would raise her mind so that she might find some consolation

in His unchangeableness. The more, however, she tried to restrain the vehemence of the flood, the more wondrously did her ardor increase it. When she considered how great was He who had allowed Himself to be so humiliated for us her sorrow was redoubled and her soul renewed with sweet compunction and fresh tears.

CHAPTER 17

Once, just before Holy Thursday when the Passion of Christ was approaching, she began to offer herself up as a sacrifice to the Lord with an even greater flood of tears, sighs, and sobs. One of the priests of the church exhorted her with honey-tongued rebukes to pray in silence and to restrain her tears. Although she had always been bashful and would, with dovelike simplicity, make an effort to obey in all things, yet she knew that she could not restrain these tears. She therefore slipped quietly out of the church and hid herself in a secret place far from everyone, and she tearfully begged the Lord that he show this priest that it is not in man to restrain the impulse of tears when the waters flow with the vehemence of the blowing wind.²

¹ Hab. 3:2.

² See Ps. 147:18 and Exod. 14:21.

On that very day while the priest was celebrating Mass, it happened that "the Lord opened and none shut"¹ and "He sent forth waters and they overturned the earth."²

His spirit was drowned with such a flood of tears that he almost suffocated. The harder he tried to restrain this force, the more drenched he became and the more soaked did the book and the altar become. What could he do, he who had been so lacking in foresight, he who had rebuked the handmaid of Christ? With shame and through personal experience he was taught what he previously had not learned through humility and compassion. Sobbing frequently and with disordered and broken speech, he barely avoided total collapse, which one of his acquaintances has testified. After Mass was finished, the handmaid of Christ returned to the church and told the priest everything that had happened, as if she herself had been present. "Now," she said, "you have learned through personal experience that man cannot restrain the impulse of the spirit 'when the south wind blows.'"³

CHAPTER 18

When a constant outburst of tears gushed forth from her eyes both day and night and ran down her cheeks and made the church floor all muddy, she would catch the tears in the linen cloth with which she covered her head. She went through many veils in this way since she had to change them frequently and put a dry one on in place of the wet one she had discarded.

In my love for her I suffered with her in her long fasts and frequent vigils and while she was enduring many such deluges of tears. I therefore asked her whether she felt any pain or discomfort as one is accustomed to experience in such a state of exhaustion. "These tears," she said, "are my refreshment. Night and day they are my bread. They do not impair my head but rather feed my mind. They do not torment me with pain but, on the contrary, they rejoice my soul with a kind of serenity. They do not empty the brain but fill the soul to satiety and soften it with a sweet anointing. They are not violently wrenched out but are freely given by the Lord."

¹ Isa. 22:22.

² Job 12:15.

³ See Acts 28:13.

⁴ The Paschal Lamb, that is, the sacrificial lamb of the Jewish Passover, was understood to be a prefiguration of Christ.

⁵ A reference to the temptations of Antony, as depicted in *The Life of St. Antony*, above, p. 30. Simeon Stylites was another saint whose ascetic practices—particularly his long endurance on a pillar—were well known.

CHAPTER 22

Having once tasted the spirit, she held as nothing all sensual delights until one day she remembered the time when she had been gravely ill and had been forced, from necessity, to eat meat and drink a little wine for a short time. From the horror she felt at her previous carnal pleasure, she began to afflict herself and she found no rest in spirit until, by means of extraordinary bodily chastisements, she had made up for all the pleasures she had experienced in the past. In vehemence of spirit, almost as if she were inebriated, she began to loathe her body when she compared it to the sweetness of the Paschal Lamb⁴ and, with a knife, in error cut out a large piece of her flesh which, from embarrassment, she buried in the earth. Inflamed as she was, however, by the intense fire of love, she did not feel the pain of her wound and, in ecstasy of mind, she saw one of the seraphim standing close by her. Much later when women were washing her corpse, they were amazed when they found the places of the wounds but those to whom she had made her confession knew what they were. Why do those who marvel at the worms which swarmed from the wounds of Simeon [Stylites] and are awe-struck at the fire with which Antony burnt his feet⁵ not wonder at such strength in the frail sex of a woman who, wounded by charity and invigorated by the wounds of Christ, neglected the wounds of her own body?

BOOK II

CHAPTER 72

It frequently occurred that when the priest raised the Host, she saw between his hands the corporeal form of a beautiful boy and an army of the heavenly host descending with a great light. When the priest received the Host after the general confession, she saw in the spirit the Lord remain in the soul of the priest illuminating him with a wondrous brightness. If, on the other hand, he received it unworthily, she saw the Lord withdraw with displeasure and the soul of the wretched man would

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remain empty and dark. Even when she was not present in the church but remained in her cell, she prayed with her eyes covered with a white veil, as was her habit, and when Christ descended to the altar at the utterance of the sacred words, then, wondrously transformed, she felt His coming. If she was present at the reception of the sacrament of Extreme Unction by invalids,¹ she felt the presence of Christ when, with a multitude of saints, He tenderly strengthened the sick person, expelled demons, and purged the soul and, as it were, transfused Himself in light throughout the whole body of the invalid while the different limbs were being anointed.

CHAPTER 88

Sometimes it seemed to her that for three or more days she held Him close to her so that He nestled between her breasts like a baby, and she hid Him there lest He be seen by others. Sometimes she kissed him as though He were a little child and sometimes she held Him on her lap as if He were a gentle lamb. At other times the Holy Son of the Virgin manifested Himself in the form of a dove for the consolation of His daughter or He would walk around the church as if He were a ram with a bright star in the middle of his forehead and, as it seemed to her, He would visit His faithful ones.

6.25 The mendicant movement: St. Francis, *A Rule for Hermitages* (1217-1221) and *The Testament* (1226). Original in Latin.

Saint Francis (1181/1182-1226) had an extraordinary impact on late medieval religious life. Born into a wealthy merchant family in Assisi, Francis, like Peter Waldo, had a conversion experience in his mid-twenties that led him to strip himself of all his belongings and take up the lifestyle of a poor person—a mendicant—who preached and begged for his daily bread and lodging. His effect in the cities of Italy was electrifying; Francis gained numerous followers (called “friars” from the Latin term for brothers). Women too were drawn to his example.

Although Francis disliked having to institutionalize his ideals, he was constrained by external demands to write (or rather dictate, in Umbrian dialect, words that were translated into Latin by his scribes) several rules. The *Rule for Hermitages* was probably meant as an “appendix” for one of his longer rules, even though hermitages seem to violate the Franciscan norm of mendicancy and itinerancy—of being “on the move.” Perhaps the hermits of the Franciscan Order were men already in hermitages before they joined; or perhaps they used the hermitage for a period of reflection. The *Testament*, dictated during the final days of Francis’ life, summed up the main points of his spirituality. Like Neophytos’s *Testamentary Rule*, it began with an autobiographical account.

1. How might you compare the sensibilities of Peter Waldo, Mary of Oignies, and Francis to arrive at a composite picture of what it meant to “follow Christ” at the turn of the thirteenth century?
2. In what ways did Francis’ *Rule* differ from—and in what ways was it similar to—the nearly contemporary *Testamentary Rule* of Neophytos (above, p. 310)?

[Source: *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 1: *The Saint*, ed. Regis J. Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Hellmann, and William J. Short (New York: New City Press, 1999), pp. 61-62, 124-27 (notes modified).]

¹ Extreme Unction is the sacrament of anointing the sick and the dying.

A Rule for Hermitages

Let those who wish to stay in hermitages in a religious way be three brothers or, at the most, four; let two of these be "the mother" and have two "sons" or at least one. Let the two who are "mothers" keep the life of Martha and the two "sons" the life of Mary and let one have one enclosure in which each one may have his cell in which he may pray and sleep.¹

And let them always recite Compline of the day immediately after sunset and strive to maintain silence, recite their Hours, rise for Matins, and "seek first the kingdom of God and His justice."² And let them recite Prime at the proper hour and, after Terce, they may end their silence, speak with and go to their mothers. And when it pleases them, they can beg alms from them as poor little ones out of love of the Lord God.³ And afterwards let them recite Sext, None and, at the proper hour, Vespers.

And they may not permit anyone to enter or eat in the enclosure where they dwell. Let those brothers who are the "mothers" strive to stay far from everyone and, because of obedience to their minister, protect their "sons" from everyone so that no one can speak with them. And those "sons" may not talk with anyone except with their "mothers" and with the minister and his custodian when it pleases them to visit with the Lord's blessing.⁴

The "sons," however, may periodically assume the role of the "mothers," taking turns for a time as they have

mutually decided.⁵ Let them strive to observe conscientiously and eagerly everything mentioned above.

The Testament

The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, thus to begin doing penance in this way: for when I was in sin; it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers.⁶ And the Lord Himself led me among them and "I showed mercy" to them.⁷ And when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body. And afterwards I delayed a little and left the world.⁸

And the Lord gave me such faith in churches that I would pray with simplicity in this way and say: "We adore You, Lord Jesus Christ, in all Your churches throughout the whole world, and we bless You because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world."⁹

Afterwards the Lord gave me, and gives me still, such faith in priests who live according to the rite of the holy Roman Church because of their orders that, were they to persecute me, I would still want to have recourse to them. And if I had as much wisdom as Solomon and found impoverished priests of this world, I would not preach in their parishes against their will. And I desire to respect, love, and honor them and all others as my lords. And I do not want to consider any sin in them because I discern the Son of God in them and they are my lords.

¹ Mary and Martha are sisters in Luke 10:38-42. Martha welcomes Jesus and his disciples and busies herself with preparations for her guests, but Mary sits at Jesus' feet, listening to him. Martha complains that Mary should help her, but Jesus responds that Mary has chosen the better way. In Christian commentaries on this passage, Mary stands for the contemplative life while Martha signifies the active life. Both are needed. Thus the "mothers" and "sons" at the hermitage take on these two roles. Francis's use of maternal imagery for the relationship among the hermits stems from Isa. 49:15 and 66:13, where God's love for mankind is likened to the love a mother has for her child.

² Matt. 6:33. These Hours constitute the (Divine) Office, to which Francis frequently refers in the *Testament* below.

³ The hermits, too, are to practice mendicancy, begging alms. But in the hermitage, they beg from their "mothers" who provide them with food and other essentials. The sons have no contact with the outside world, but the mothers, though they should "stay far from everyone" (as the Rule says in the next paragraph), must have been able to obtain the wherewithal of life from beyond the hermitage enclosure.

⁴ The "minister" and his "custodian" were titles for the provincial administrators of the Franciscan Order.

⁵ The periodic exchange of roles demonstrated the essential fraternity and equality among the hermits.

⁶ "The Lord gave me" here and elsewhere underlines Francis's interpretation of his conversion as obedience and submission to God's will.

⁷ The phrase "I showed mercy" has a rich biblical tradition, especially in the Old Testament. For Francis, it was particularly aligned with penance: people show mercy to others (lepers, for example) as God shows mercy to the penitent.

⁸ Traditionally a person "left the world" by entering a monastery. But in Francis's case it meant the beginning of his path of conversion, the first step of which was the restoration (by his own hands) of the church of San Damiano just outside of Assisi.

⁹ The prayer is based on a traditional one, but Francis added "all your churches throughout the world" as well as the adjective "holy" to describe the Cross.

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And I act in this way because, in this world, I see nothing corporally of the Most High Son of God except His most holy Body and Blood which they receive and they alone administer to others.¹ I want to have these most holy mysteries honored and venerated above all things and I want to reserve them in precious places. Wherever I find our Lord's most holy names and written words in unbecoming places, I want to gather them up and I beg that they be gathered up and placed in a becoming place. And we must honor all theologians and those who minister the most holy divine words and respect them as those who minister to us spirit and life.

And after the Lord gave me some brothers, no one showed me what I had to do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel. And I had this written down simply and in a few words and the Lord Pope confirmed it for me. And those who came to receive life gave whatever they had to the poor and were content with one tunic, patched inside and out, with a cord and short trousers. We desired nothing more. We clerical [brothers] said the Office as other clerics did; the lay brothers said the *Our Father*; and we quite willingly remained in churches. And we were simple and subject to all.²

And I worked with my hands, and I still desire to work; and I earnestly desire all brothers to give themselves to honest work.³ Let those who do not know how to work learn, not from desire to receive wages, but for example and to avoid idleness. And when we are not paid

for our work, let us have recourse to the table of the Lord, begging alms from door to door. The Lord revealed a greeting to me that we should say: "May the Lord give you peace."⁴

Let the brothers be careful not to receive in any way churches or poor dwellings or anything else built for them unless they are according to the holy poverty we have promised in the Rule,⁵ "As pilgrims and strangers," let them always be guests there.⁶

I strictly command all the brothers through obedience, wherever they may be, not to dare to ask any letter from the Roman Curia, either personally or through an intermediary, whether for a church or another place or under the pretext of preaching or the persecution of their bodies. But, wherever they have not been received "let them flee into another"⁷ country to do penance with the blessing of God.

And I firmly wish to obey the general minister of this fraternity and the other guardian whom it pleases him to give me. And I so wish to be a captive in his hands that I cannot go anywhere or do anything beyond obedience and his will, for he is my master.

And although I may be simple and infirm, I nevertheless want to have a cleric always with me who will celebrate the Office for me as it is prescribed in the Rule.

And let all the brothers be bound to obey their guardians and to recite the Office according to the Rule.⁸ And if some might have been found who are not reciting the Office according to the Rule and want to change it in

¹ This affirmation of the authority of the priests of the Roman Church, their exclusive right to celebrate the Eucharist, their right to deny him permission to preach, even their right to persecute him, all explicitly affirm Francis's orthodoxy in the context of heretics like Waldo (for whom see above, p. 371).

² The *Our Father* is the prayer in Matt. 6:9-13. Compare the habit of the friars to that of the monks in *The Benedictine Rule* (above, p. 20). The "clerical" friars chanted the traditional liturgical hours while the lay brothers said the *Our Father* over and over. When "on the move," the friars stayed and prayed at any nearby church.

³ "I worked with my hands" is a reference to the model of the apostles in Acts 20:34. Francis and other early Franciscans worked in leprosaria or did agricultural labor in exchange for bread. By the time Francis wrote the *Testament*, however, many of the friars had substituted intellectual work for manual labor, and they depended on the other brothers to maintain them. In the next sentence, Francis seems to want even those "contemplative" friars, as well as those with greater responsibilities, to learn how to work with their hands, probably to prevent the development of two separate classes of brothers.

⁴ 2 Thess. 3:16.

⁵ By the time Francis wrote this *Testament*, he had drawn up several Rules. The one written in 1221 and sealed by the pope in 1223 was no doubt the one referred to here. At this point the *Testament* ceases to be autobiographical and becomes, instead, a series of admonitions to the friars. Here Francis reveals his fear that the very success of his order will jeopardize its ideals. Thus, he is worried about gifts and (in the next sentence) prohibits the brothers from actively seeking churches or residences.

⁶ 1 Pet. 2:11.

⁷ Matt. 10:23.

⁸ The "guardian" was the superior of the community, much like the abbot of a monastery.

some way, or who are not Catholics; let all the brothers, wherever they may have found one of them, be bound through obedience to bring him before the custodian of that place nearest to where they found him. And let the custodian be strictly bound through obedience to keep him securely day and night as a man in chains, so that he cannot be taken from his hands until he can personally deliver him into the hands of his minister.¹ And let the minister be bound through obedience to send him with such brothers who would guard him as a prisoner until they deliver him to the Lord of Ostia, who is the Lord, the Protector, and the Corrector of this fraternity.

And the brothers may not say: "This is another rule." Because this is a remembrance, admonition, exhortation, and my testament, which I, little brother Francis, make for you, my blessed brothers, that we might observe the Rule we have promised in a more Catholic way.

And let the general minister and all the other ministers and custodians be bound through obedience not

to add to or take away from these words. And let them always have this writing with them together with the Rule. And in all the chapters which they hold, when they read the Rule, let them also read these words. And I strictly command all my cleric and lay brothers, through obedience, not to place any gloss upon the Rule or upon these words saying: "They should be understood in this way." But as the Lord has given me to speak and write the Rule and these words simply and purely, may you understand them simply and without gloss and observe them with a holy activity until the end.

And whoever observes these things, let him be blessed in heaven with the blessing of the Most High Father, and on earth with the blessing of His Beloved Son with the Most Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, and all the powers of heaven and with all the saints. And, as far as I can, I, little brother Francis, your servant, confirm for you, both within and without, this most holy blessing.

6.26 Religious feeling turned violent: *Chronicle of Trier* (1231). Original in Latin.

Beginning in the twelfth century, the monks of the monastery of St. Matthias, just outside Trier, began keeping a *Gesta* or *Chronicle* of their city and its saints and religious institutions. For the year 1231 they recorded the burning of heretics "throughout the whole of Germany."

1. What was the role of the Dominicans in the persecution of heretics?
2. What was the attitude of the monks of St. Matthias (the authors of this account) toward these persecutions?

[Source: *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, ed. and trans. Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), pp. 267–69 (notes modified).]

In the year of our Lord 1231 began a persecution of heretics throughout the whole of Germany, and over a period of three years many were burned. The guiding genius of this persecution was Master Conrad of Marburg;² his agents were a certain Conrad, surnamed Tors, and John,

who had lost an eye and a hand. Both of these were said to have been converted heretics.³ It is this Master Conrad who, renowned for active preaching, especially in behalf of the crusades, had built up a great following among the people; who interfered in the visitation of clergy and nuns

¹ These harsh prescriptions against disobedient friars testifies to Francis's fears about splinter groups within and heretical influences on the order.

² Conrad of Marburg (d.1233) was a papal inquisitor in Germany.

³ Conrad Tors was a Dominican; John a layman.

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and sought to constrain them to strict observance and continence;¹ and who, supported by apostolic authority and endowed with firmness of purpose, became so bold that he feared no one—not even a king or a bishop, who rated no higher with him than a poor layman. Throughout various cities the Preaching Friars [Dominicans] cooperated with him and with his afore-mentioned lieutenants; so great was the zeal of all that from no one, even though merely under suspicion, would any excuse or counterplea be accepted, no exception or testimony be admitted, no opportunity for defense be afforded, nor even a recess for deliberation be allowed. Forthwith, he must confess himself guilty and have his head shaved as a sign of penance, or deny his crime and be burned.

Furthermore, one who has thus been shaved must make known his associates, otherwise he again risks the penalty of death by burning. Whence it is thought that some innocents have been burned, for many, because of love of earthly existence or out of affection for their heirs, confessed themselves to have been what they were not and, constrained to make accusation, brought charges of which they were ignorant against those to whom they wished ill. Indeed, it was finally discovered that heretics instigated some of their number to permit themselves to be shaved in penance and thus to accuse Catholics and the innocent. Of such three were taken at Mainz; thereafter there was no one so pure of conscience as not to fear meeting a calamity of this sort. For no one dared, I will not say to intercede for the accused, but even to make the mildest observation in their behalf, for he would immediately be considered a defender of heretics. And, indeed, in accordance with the decision pronounced by the lord pope,² he [Conrad] proceeded against defenders and receivers of heretics exactly as against heretics themselves. Furthermore, if anyone had once abjured this impiety and was reported to have relapsed, he was apprehended and without any reconsideration was burned.

Nor was the diocese of Trier free from this infection. For in the city of Trier itself three groups of heretics were uncovered. There was burned a certain Leuchard, who

was reputed to have been of a most saintly life, but who bewailed with dreadful laments the unjust banishment from heaven of Lucifer, whom she wished again restored to heaven. Nor was it surprising that such occurrences happened in other cities, since in Rome itself, according to a letter from the pope, not a few had been thus infected. There were a large number in this sect. Many of them were versed in the Holy Scriptures, which they had in German translation. Some, indeed, performed a second baptism; some did not believe in the sacrament of the Lord's body; some held that the body of the Lord could not be consecrated by evil priests; some said that the body of the Lord could be consecrated with salver and chalice in any place whatsoever, equally well by a man or a woman, whether ordained or not; some judged confirmation and extreme unction to be superfluous; some scorned the supreme pontiff, the clergy, and the monastic life; some denied the value of prayers of the Church for the souls of the dead; some took their own mothers in marriage, making amends for the consanguinity that existed by the payment of eighteen pence; some kissed a pallid man or even a cat, and performed still worse acts; some, believing all days to be the same, refused to keep holidays or fasts, and thus worked on feast days and ate meat on Good Friday. Let this suffice as a catalogue of their errors, not that we have listed them all but only noted the most outstanding.

At that time the archbishop of Trier convened a synod in which he publicly announced that the heretics in his diocese had a bishop, to whom they had given his own name, Theodoric, and that others did the same elsewhere after the bishops of other places; and he also announced that they shared in common a pope, whom they called Gregory after the bishop of the Church Universal, so that, should they be questioned about the faith, they could say that they had the same faith as did Pope Gregory and bishop so-and-so (giving the name of the bishop), naming our bishop and meaning theirs.

Three heretics were cited before this synod, of whom two were released and one burned.

¹ I.e., self-control, discipline.

² Gregory IX (1227-1241).