

# (Un)Orthodoxy among Priests and Neighbors: Local Circles of Religious Negotiation in Western Peripheral Late Medieval Communities

Michael Anfang

## Introduction

Late medieval religious life has been under historians' scrutiny for the better part of 400 years. Historians have described and problematized notions of Southern French heretics, Papal reforms of the clerics, the supposed maintenance of pagan practices, and the rise of saint cults. However, we still know far too little about how Christians thought about their church and common ritual between the conquest of Christianity through the ninth century and the installation of clerical reforms beginning in the thirteenth.<sup>1</sup> Analysis has been lacking regarding the interaction between laity, clergy, and ritual outside the theologians' circles in Paris and Rome. I will argue that the local laity and clergy negotiated their practical religion among themselves, *without* ideologically incorporating the elite theologians at Paris and Rome.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper, I use the vague term "practical religion." By practical religion I mean religious actions that could be implemented with the expectation of some tangible outcome (contra indulgences which would

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<sup>1</sup>In many places, reforms were not fully instituted until the Reformation and Counter-Reformation (ca. 1517-late 17th Century) which explains the temporal breadth in sources. Our concern will be in what we might call Roman Europe—that of France, England, western Germany, and Italy. In this paper, I use Church to refer to the institutionalized Roman Catholic Church and church to refer to a local parish church.

<sup>2</sup>There were of course other centers of theology, e.g. Bologna, Oxford, Avignon, etc., and other places from whence serious theologians came, e.g. Clairvaux, Utrecht, Cologne, etc., and while these do play roles as "elite centers" for our purposes, Paris and Rome were premier at the time and will rhetorically suffice.

yield an intangible yet 'real' outcome), and which would be religious in the sense of incorporating ecclesiastically-linked supernatural powers. The terms "quotidian" and "practical" are used interchangeably in this paper. There is some nuance between them: quotidian implies that the rituals were usually done, whereas practical implies that they had a purpose that was tied to real-world results. During this time, most practical rituals were quotidian rather than extraordinary, and most quotidian rituals were practical, in the sense that Christians thought the world was saturated by the active supernatural.

### *Contemporary Societal Background*

The psychology of the medieval world was far removed from our contemporary world-view. Two elements among the most foreign to us are the thorough localization—by which I mean the negotiation of concepts among the nearby community as inclusively local/communal rather than as multiple negotiations by various interest groups—and Christianization.<sup>3</sup> As Christianity pushed through Europe with its proselytizing missionaries until the end of the eighth century, the Church emphasized converting pagans by adapting local practices to Christianity.<sup>4</sup> From the eighth century through at least the thirteenth, communities had priests from their local area who were largely poorly educated.<sup>5</sup> This reflected a general paucity of education in many of these communities, even for middling nobility.<sup>6</sup> Not only were many of these peripheral Europeans without general education, but many lacked what we would consider the very basics of religious dogma. A late thirteenth century synod ruled that priests needed to be confirmed to hold office—implying that before, this

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<sup>3</sup> A third important conceptual difference was their understanding of the world as replete with supernatural powers which ordinary people could harness. See: Richard Kieckhefer, "The Specific Rationality of Medieval Magic," *American Historical Review* 99, no. 3 (June, 1994): 54.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 821ff.; Michael D. Bailey, *Fearful Spirits, Reasoned Follies: The Boundaries of Superstition in Late Medieval Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013): 54.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 58; *id.*, *European Witch Trials: Their Foundations in Popular and Learned Culture, 1300-1500* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976): 48; Virginia Davis, "Rivals for Ministry? Ordinations of Secular and Regular Clergy in Southern England c. 1300-1500," *Studies of Church History* 26 (1989): 101.

<sup>6</sup> Paul J. Archambault, *A Monk's Confession: Memoirs of Guibert of Nogent* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996): 14.

was not the case. Similarly, illiterate clerics regularly held office.<sup>7</sup> Given the poor state of education, many priests did not desire to learn in earnest, but rather viewed the cloth as a way to earn a stable living.<sup>8</sup> This seemed to be the status quo in most places until the mid-fourteenth century, when Lateran IV-style reforms penetrated the more peripheral communities.<sup>9</sup> This lack of education and lack of mobility led to an extraordinarily conservative society. Thus, between the ninth and (at earliest) thirteenth centuries, we can consider these peripheral communities as ideologically isolated, which aided in maintaining local customs and religion.<sup>10</sup>

Society was not only fairly static, but also Christianized. By the end of the eighth century, there were no more major pagan groups in Europe's major ecclesiastic administrative areas that the Catholic Church had to convert,<sup>11</sup> and the old pagan traditions had been Christianized. While Europe as a continent contained Jews, Muslims, and central Europeans who worshiped in their own traditions, these groups are not relevant to our discussion because they were not incorporated within the sacral community in which these religious decisions were made. This Christianization rendered a social system replete with ostensibly Christian holidays, customs, and rites.<sup>12</sup>

It is worth noting that even if it seems apparent that Christianity was quickly and loosely grafted onto pagan practices, the invoking of a Christian God made the practices (magical, ritual, and superstitious) Christian *precisely because* the Christian God performed them and not any of the

<sup>7</sup> Norman Tanner and Sethina Watson, "Least of the Laity: the Minimum Requirements for a Medieval Christian," *Journal of Medieval History* 32, no. 4 (2006): 405; ed., Rosalind M.T. Hill, *The Rolls and Register of Bishop Oliver Sutton 1280-1299* vol. 1 (Hereford: Lincoln Historical Society, 1948): 212; Claire Taylor, "Evidence for Dualism in the Inquisitorial Records of the 1240s: A Contribution to a Debate," *History* 98, no. 331 (July, 2013): 325.

<sup>8</sup> Davis, "Rivals for Ministry," 105; trans., Louise Nash, *Translation of De Pignoribus Sanctorum of Guibert of Nogent with Notes and Comments* (M.A. thesis, University of Washington, 1941): 32. This refers to the fact that priests would be entitled to benefices attached to their offices. The cloth was an appealing career choice that would guarantee the cleric would be fed, clothed, and housed—which were rather uncertain in the pre-modern world.

<sup>9</sup> Helen Birkett, "The Pastoral Application of the Lateran IV Reforms in the Northern Province, 1215-1348," *Northern History* 43, no. 2 (Sept., 2006): 213.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 201; Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials*, 48; Jean-Claude Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound: Guinefort, Healer of Children Since the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Martin Thom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983): 133. This cultural maintenance will help us understand the historical situation as typical of the late Middle Ages even with a temporally broad source-base.

<sup>11</sup> Especially of concern to the Church were groups who counted among their members' elites. The lack of early ecclesiastical emphasis on non-elite beliefs has been a partial explanation for common ex-pagan practices among historians.

<sup>12</sup> Ronald Hutton, "How Pagan Were Medieval English Peasants?" *Folklore* 122 (Dec., 2011): 243.

pagan gods. These three terms—magical, ritual, and superstitious—will often overlap in their instantiations; using set definitions for them is difficult, so we will use rather broad definitions. The “superstitious” may be defined as certain actions taken to ward off a non-natural (or supernatural) potential threat or to garner supernatural aid. “Magic” can correspond to actions that invoke supernatural powers (e.g. invoking gods), supernatural principles (e.g. sympathetic magic), and/or supernatural characteristics of the actor (e.g. magical healing). Finally, “ritual” can be defined as a formula attempting to harness the supernatural in a licit manner.

Magic at this point in time was not so quickly demonized as it would become in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Magic was considered on the bases of intent and powers invoked, much of it good in many senses. In a strong sense of the term, magic could even mean any intervention of the supernatural—a definition that would include the transformation of the Eucharist and many other ecclesiastical rituals as well as unorthodox healing; a weaker definition either holds only the latter *or* only cases of ill-willed magic or magic that invoked non-Christian powers. It will be important to keep both these senses in mind, and remember that some magic was not only licit but encouraged.<sup>13</sup>

In addition, churches and other ecclesiastical institutions were well distributed by the eleventh century. Likewise, both priests and laity were aware of the appropriate ecclesiastical hierarchies and utilized them.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps in areas even more remote than most of those involved in this discussion, i.e. the peripheral communities of western Europe and England, understanding of the Church as an institution may have been hindered by difficulty in communication between communities.<sup>15</sup> However, it is doubtful that *honest* pagan customs survived given the above discussion.<sup>16</sup> Lastly, even though the ecclesiastic infrastructure was significant, significant Christian practice or knowledge was not necessarily expected of the laity or even the clergy. Rather, there was an expectation that was broadly met, at least of and by the laity, that they hold a baseline set of beliefs

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 240; Kieckhefer, “Rationality of Medieval Magic,” 829.

<sup>14</sup> On spread of churches see trans., Jean Duvernoy, *Le Registre D'Inquisition de Jacques Fournier: (Évêque de Pamiers) 1318-1325* vol. 1 (Paris: Mouton, 1978): 19 and Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound*, 105; on recognition of Church hierarchy and institutions see Tanner and Watson, “Least of the Laity,” 413 and Archambault, *A Monk's Confession*, 90; cf. Jean-Claude Schmitt, “Jeunes et danse des chevaux de bois: le folklore méridional dans la littérature des ‘exempla’ (XIIIe-XIVe siècles),” in *La Religion populaire en Languedoc de XIIIe siècle à la moitié du XIVe siècle* (Fanjeaux, France: Le Centre d'Études Historiques de Fanjeaux, 1976): 132.

<sup>15</sup> This issue is brought up concerning seventeenth century Friulian villages in n. 63 on Carlo Ginzburg, *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 182-3.

<sup>16</sup> Meaning still worshiping Odin or Germanic powers *rather* than Christian ones.

about God and Christ, but not much beyond that.<sup>17</sup>

### *Historiography*

The problem of late medieval religion and unorthodoxy has been well researched within the historiography, beginning with the Reformation historians. The Protestant Reformation historiographical tradition, criticized for its anti-Catholic bias, was dominant through the early twentieth century. This tradition argued real continuations of paganism and inept Catholic priests were reality.<sup>18</sup> Works focused more on cults, arguing for their existence and pagan nature, were also popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most famously those of University College London's Margaret Murray.<sup>19</sup> Since the 1960s, these historiographical arguments have gone by the wayside. The field has refuted the biases of post-Reformation histories, as well as the over-simplifications and factual errors in Murray's arguments regarding the real survival of pagan rites. Carlo Ginzburg argues that witches' sabbats—the nighttime gatherings of witches centered on the reversal of mass and diabolic worship—existed only in the mind.<sup>20</sup> The current historiography tends to see the medieval world in a manner much more similar to the way medieval people saw it—as thoroughly Christian.

Despite the elimination of paganism and the fairly complete Christianization of society, many unorthodox beliefs, of both contemporary and pagan origins, persisted even through the nineteenth century. Currently, the discussion revolves around why and to what extent these beliefs continued. Many historians have posited that the clergy were unable to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate magic, and therefore some

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<sup>17</sup> See Tanner and Watson, "Least of the Laity," *passim*.; lay Christians still definitely had some understanding of ritual, especially mass, see Virginia Reinburg, "Liturgy and the Laity in Late Medieval and Reformation France," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 23, no. 3 (Autumn, 1992): 529. Essentially, the laity were expected to know that there was only one God in at least two instantiations (God and Christ; the Spirit of the Trinity was less important), that Christ was fully divine, how to perform baptism, that marriage was a requirement for children, and some basic miracles of mass. There was no expectation at all of lay understanding of the Bible. In fact, Innocent III (r. 1160/1-1216) claimed heretics translated the Bible into the vernacular (as opposed to Latin), and even through the twentieth century, Bible possession could be considered canonically illicit.

<sup>18</sup> The most famous (modern) work of this sort is Henry Charles Lea, *A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages* (1906).

<sup>19</sup> Margaret Murray's *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (1921) and *God of the Witches* (1933).

<sup>20</sup> See Ginzburg's *Night Battles and Ecstasies*, as well as Cohn's *Europe's Inner Demons*.

practices remained despite their unorthodoxy.<sup>21</sup> There has, however, also been a significant push toward a rationalization of the incorporation of ex-pagan ritual into Christianity.<sup>22</sup> That is, the distinguishing between charms or rituals that were formally the same, but were licit or illicit if they cited God/Christ or something non-Christian respectively. Further, there has been some analysis of religious life for common Christians (i.e. non-zealous, as opposed to groups like the Cathars<sup>23</sup>), showing the lax form of Christianity practiced by most medieval Europeans.<sup>24</sup> A flexible medieval Christianity created a world that emphasized faith and order rather than universal dogma.

There has also been a large debate on the extent of medieval unorthodoxy, especially since most of our records are from inquisitors. Some historians argue that heresy did not exist at all, but was only grafted on by inquisitors.<sup>25</sup> Most scholarship, however, tends to assert that there was at least a kernel of truth to the inquisitors' reports.<sup>26</sup> This hypothesis is bolstered by the argument that most inquisitors acted and were seen as

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<sup>21</sup>See Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Penguin, 1991) and Valerie Flint's *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*. This is not to say that all the unorthodoxies discussed deal with magic, but rather that the latter is a major category of the former. Furthermore, many unorthodox beliefs, e.g. multiple baptisms, were used in healing the same way we might say the 'magic' of a saint or healer healing was.

<sup>22</sup>Kieckhefer explains, countering Valerie Flint, "from the perspective of Hincmar of Reims or Rabanus Maurus, to rewrite a charm and substitute Christ for Odin was not to make a slight adjustment. Even if a story originally told about Odin was retained as part of the charm, its transference to Christ made a substantial difference. The adjustment did not result in a Christian type of magic; rather, it involved editing out the magical element." Kieckhefer, "Rationality of Medieval Magic," 829. Flint views the assimilation as early priests knowingly incorporating pagan magical elements, a view sympathized with by many historians. Nonetheless, both acknowledge that the Church did one way or another coopt ex-pagan ritual, story, location, etc.

<sup>23</sup>A heretical sect mainly in southern France that focused on religious zeal and conceived of the world as a dualist fight between a good God and an evil Satan, also known as the Albigensians; see Malcolm Barber's *The Cathars: Dualist Heretics in Languedoc in the High Middle Ages*. They were similar to other millennial and reforming heretics, e.g. Waldensians in the Alps and Lollards (Wycliffites) in England.

<sup>24</sup>Tanner and Watson, "Least of the Laity," passim.

<sup>25</sup>See Robert E. Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972); Peter Biller, "Through a Glass Darkly: Seeing Medieval Heresy," in *The Medieval World*, ed. Peter Linehan and Janet L. Nelson (London: Routledge, 2001), 308–26.

<sup>26</sup>Taylor, "Evidence of Dualism"; Kieckhefer, "Rationality of Medieval Magic"; Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988).

individuals rather than parts of an inquisitorial institution.<sup>27</sup> Finally, the standard historiography has argued for interpretive circles as split between clerics and the laity for religion, literate and the illiterate for philosophy, or elite and popular for art.<sup>28</sup>

### *Argument*

I hypothesize that this relative laxity and uncertainty in orthodoxy outside Paris and Rome, poor standards of clerical dogmatic training, and changing definitions of orthodoxy vis-à-vis heresy after the rise of Gnostic heresy—the belief in “good” and “evil” gods (or god-like beings) or aspects of God—in the twelfth century all led to the creation and legitimization of unorthodox beliefs in the peripheral communities at hand, both within and without the clergy. From here, I will argue that in order to properly understand peripheral Christians’ relationship to religion in this time period, one must alter the interpretive circles to function on a local-foreign split,<sup>29</sup> rather than the customary literate-illiterate or clerical-lay models relied upon in previous scholarship. Peripheral clergy and laity after the triumph of Christianity but before the implementation of Lateran reforms negotiated their relationships with quotidian ritual in *local* terms—in other words, laity and clergy together. This is not to impose uniformity on peripheral beliefs, even within one location, but rather to suggest that peripheral Christians considered their practical religiosity in an interpretive circle of their specific local community. Their circle was separate from potentially overlapping circles of other areas and from those of Paris and Rome. The opposing view, one favored in much of the current historiography, is that of more separated circles of interpretation within specific localities whereby clerics negotiated their religiosity

<sup>27</sup> Richard Kieckhefer, “The Office of the Inquisition and Medieval Heresy: The Transition from Personal to Inquisitorial Jurisdiction,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 46, no. 1 (Jan., 1995): 36–43 passim.

<sup>28</sup> Nancy Caciola, “Wraiths, Revenants and Ritual in Medieval Culture,” in *Past and Present* 152 (Aug., 1996): 5 and Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound*, 177. N.B. these categorizations are not firm, i.e. a clerical-lay split may not be *solely* tied to religion, but might also be workable for art, philosophy, etc. By interpretive circles I mean the groups who participated in the negotiation of an independent construct, in the structural anthropologists’ constantly renegotiated sense of structure. For a general discussion, see William A. Christian, Jr, “Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain,” *Annales* 37, no. 3 (1982): 510–13; Mary R. O’Neil, “From ‘Popular’ to ‘Local’ Religion: Issues in Early Modern European Religious History (Book Review),” *Religious Studies Review; Waterloo, Ont.* 12, no. 3 (July 1, 1986): 222.

<sup>29</sup> That is foreign to the community. This “foreign” most importantly takes hold as the central Church (i.e. major theologians at Paris, Rome, etc.), but can apply to any other similarly foreign locale, even if we consider that locale to function also with its own local circle of interpretation.

on Parisian or Roman (or even just diocesan) ecclesiastical lines while the laity negotiated theirs locally.<sup>30</sup>

When we view peripheral medieval religion with this interpretive lens—through which I hypothesize that the subjects themselves, *both lay and clerical*, viewed the world—it becomes clear that many unorthodoxies went unchallenged because they were not perceived as unorthodox. Central orthodox beliefs on practical matters of religiosity—if such orthodoxies existed explicitly rather than implicitly—were not transmitted to peripheral churchmen, providing no foil against local Christian customs. Peripheral clergy were trained to work against remaining paganism, not to weed out unorthodox practices. The local sourcing of peripheral clergy combined with the ambiguity of orthodox practices led to a clergy that unknowingly propagated and legitimized practices that would later be called unorthodox.

### *Potential Research Difficulties*

The geographical and temporal bounds of this project are rather broad. The geographic focus will be on Britain and Europe west of the Rhine valley—broadly ex-Roman Europe. This is both for unfortunate linguistic boundaries (I only have reading knowledge of English and French) and the ecclesiastic focus on these locations in particular, creating a larger source base.<sup>31</sup> I need not be so strict about geographic boundaries since I am most concerned with the interactions and critical structures concerning beliefs than the beliefs themselves. In other words, I am more concerned with *how* they thought than *what* they thought. This allows the comparison of Toulouse and Metz even though they are on opposite sides of France, because they are both peripheral to the center

<sup>30</sup> This standard method may be more appropriate for abstract views (what we may call theology instead of religiosity/ritual). However, for pragmatic/practical views it seems that my method is more fitting. To clarify the difference, see the discussion of clerical grafting of theoretical Latin vocabulary onto incongruent local beliefs, despite understanding of their concreteness in Caciola, "Wraiths, Revenants and Ritual," 10-11. Late in this project, I discovered some of this idea in a short article by Cambridge's Carl Watkins, "'Folklore' and 'Popular Religion' in Britain during the Middle Ages," *Folklore*, 115, no. 2 (Aug., 2004): 140-150, and more broadly in recent theological works about vernacular religion, like those of Salvador Ryan, W. Graham Monteith, and R.W. Scribner. Nonetheless, my argument expands more broadly upon Watkins's foundation to include the Continent and goes into more reasoning about practical religion contra theology.

<sup>31</sup> Ecclesiastic effort was focused on western Europe rather than central or eastern because the latter two were not fully converted until the tenth or eleventh centuries, from at the latest 1054 a significant portion of Eastern Europe was Orthodox (and thus operated separately in Greek rather than Latin), and most of the clerics came from west of the Rhineland, since that was the area of the monasteries and cathedral schools.

(Paris) in the same sense. Though I am primarily concerned with Europe circa 1000-1400, the temporal boundaries can be flexible. Trials against unorthodox practices even through the seventeenth century in many regions are still useful, as they will represent the continuation of the practices from the Middle Ages. If a sixteenth century Italian says that their practices are legitimated by the priests, either his twelfth century ancestor would say the same thing, or even that the priest introduced legitimacy to the unorthodoxy.<sup>32</sup> Both alternatives would support our conclusion—either these beliefs were so deeply ingrained in peripheral Christian attitudes that even after the Lateran reforms priests did not reconsider their propriety, or priests so misunderstood orthodoxy after the Lateran reforms that they imposed or encouraged unorthodoxies.<sup>33</sup>

The source base is also suspect due to the nature of its creation. The main sources, inquisitorial records, are potentially problematic because they were recorded by an outsider from the central Church rather than by the local people in their own voices. However, with significant analysis, the inquisitorial trials can be relied upon to give hints at how locals perceived their religiosity.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, since most of these local people were illiterate or barely literate,<sup>35</sup> they left few records of their own experiences. This is an unfortunate limitation, and can be combatted only with breadth of sources and ‘negative evidence’.<sup>36</sup> Finally, there is a worry that

<sup>32</sup> See e.g., Ginzburg *The Night Battles*, 79-85. There is little need to worry about the practices changing so much over four centuries due to the highly conservative nature of the society as mentioned above. This practice of retrospective history is broadly accepted in the historiography, see, e.g. Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 84 and Bloch’s *The Royal Touch*.

<sup>33</sup> The idea of this is that priests may have been encouraged by Lateran reforms to revamp their practices and therefore incorporated more quotidian ritual. This ritual would have either come from the Church or from local custom. If it came from the Church, it would not have been unorthodox, so therefore it *must* have come from local custom, thus endorsing the hypothesis that quotidian ritual was negotiated locally.

<sup>34</sup> As the inquisition as an institution progressed, inquisitors had more and more access to resources created by previous inquisitors, thus expediting the process, but also leading inquisitors to overlook local nuance. Nonetheless, it seems that inquisitors were at least to some extent at the onset of any inquisitorial visitation interested in actually understanding the local situation, see Kieckhefer, “The Office of the Inquisition,” *passim*.

<sup>35</sup> This category notably includes local clergy, see D. W. Robertson, “Frequency of Preaching in Thirteenth-Century England,” in *Speculum* 24, no. 3 (July 1949): 383; and Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 58.

<sup>36</sup> Negative evidence consists of conspicuous absences within records. For example, if we know from a parish’s register that it celebrated a local saint’s day, and we know that the bishop visited this parish around the time of the saint’s celebration, yet the bishop does not record this as heretical whereas he records other heresies in the parish, then this would suggest via negative evidence that the bishop did not see this saint celebration as problematic.

forgeries were common in medieval and early modern Europe. However, we can hope that our translators have done their due diligence in giving us real sources, and that even if some forgeries slip through, they can tell us about the conceivability of what they portray, helping the argument of this paper.

### Local Differentiations from the Center

As the structure of the Church grew in medieval Europe, its theology became increasingly complex. As a result, the central Church expanded the definition of heresy over the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries. Local churches were accustomed to view heresy as the open rejection of the Church or prayer to old pagan deities, the model the central Church had endorsed during the initial missionary stage of Christianization. The Church, however, progressively brought more actions and beliefs under the schema of heresy, excluding from orthodoxy many previously legitimated beliefs.

From the early days of the Church through the twelfth century, the key ecclesiastic concern was heretics who were either pagan or “desired to conquer [the church] openly.”<sup>37</sup> There were few diocesan visitations and very few prosecuted heresy cases.<sup>38</sup> Local priests were left to deal with heresy on their own. Starting in the twelfth century, “any deviation, however slight, became all the more hazardous,” as it was taken more seriously then.<sup>39</sup> Facets of old beliefs, such as interactions with demons, which had not been strictly heretical, now became such.<sup>40</sup> The Church

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<sup>37</sup> Trans. Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans, “Henry at Le Mans,” in *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, ed. Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969): 113; see Michael Goodich, *Other Middle Ages: Witnesses at the Margins of Medieval Society*, ed. Michael Goodich (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998): 75; and Ginzburg, *The Night Battles*, 94.

<sup>38</sup> A visitation was when a bishop toured his diocese to support and gather information on his priests and flock. Tanner and Watson, “Least of the Laity,” 419 and Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 312.

<sup>39</sup> Scott L. Waugh and Peter D. Diehl, “Introduction” to *Christendom and its Discontents: Exclusion, Persecution, and Rebellion, 1000-1500*, ed., Scott L. Waugh and Peter D. Diehl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 4; in other communities this same phenomenon is seen later, see Tanner and Watson, “Least of the Laity,” 399 and Ginzburg, *The Night Battles*, 177.

<sup>40</sup> “Demon” has very broad connotations, but is more or less a supernatural being on a metaphysical plane closer to that of man than of God. N.B., a demon is not necessarily evil, as its connotations contain continuations from the Greek “ $\mu$ ” (cf. Latin “genius” and “lar/lares”), which one might know from Aristotelian “eudaimonia” and the Roman concept of genius, daemon, and lares. Ed., Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969): 250.

began to encourage Christians to name possible heretics based on the accused's lack of participation in ritual fasts, e.g. the fast from meat during Lent.<sup>41</sup> A witch, for instance, was identified as "a woman who supposedly at meat on Fridays" in the trial of Paolo Gasparutto in the Friuli, 66 miles northeast of Venice, in 1575.<sup>42</sup> The Church had attempted to make local Christians more aware of heresy as a general reality in their day-to-day lives in the thirteenth century. They contrasted the reality of heresy to the perception that it was something either wiped out during the Merovingian period (ca. 5-8 centuries CE) or that reared its head from time to time in the sermons of wayward preachers.<sup>43</sup>

### *Local Traditions*

The split between the center and the periphery was not just a matter of elites leaving behind a passive periphery; rather, the periphery insisted upon its local circles of interpretation. It is important to remember how conservative these areas were. One cleric commented, "country folk, uneducated and sluggish of mind, once they are poisoned by a draught of this virus [Gnostic heresy], stubbornly resist all discipline."<sup>44</sup> If we understand medieval society as hyper-conservative, the amount of local variation seems to support the idea that matters of practical religion were indeed locally negotiated. As Thomas Head writes, during this period "martyrologies varied greatly according to the local needs of individual dioceses."<sup>45</sup> Peripheral Christians would adapt aspects of martyrologies and hagiographies, sometimes major ones, in order to reflect their cultural atmosphere. Similarly, saints might be local to and recognized in only one country, region, diocese, or even parish. For example, Saints Nonna

<sup>41</sup> Tanner and Watson, "Least of the Laity," 417 and Duvernoy, *Le Registre D'Inquisition*, I, 240.

<sup>42</sup> Ginzburg, *The Night Battles*, 147. We will return to Paolo's case of trial as a *benandante*—a Friulian who was thought to fight for the crops in night ecstasies—as exemplary.

<sup>43</sup> Before this time, there were likely very few diocesan visits and few cases of heresy were prosecuted, see Tanner and Watson, "Least of the Laity," 419 and Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 312.

<sup>44</sup> Trans. Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans, "The Fate of Heretics in England: 1161-1166," in *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, ed. Wakefield and Evans, 245. This speaks not only to the conservativeness of rural Christians, but also their suspicion of outsiders in general (including elite clerics).

<sup>45</sup> Martyrologies are accounts of the lives of martyrs and were widely spread in the late medieval period. Thomas Head, *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology* sec. Introduction, ed. Thomas Head (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000): xviii; cf. Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound*, 43; Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 51.

and Corentin were local to Brittany,<sup>46</sup> the cult of Saint John of Gualdo was native to an abbey in Benevento,<sup>47</sup> and the particular cult of Saint Guinefort had been located on an estate (Villars) *near* a town (Neuville).<sup>48</sup> These practices were also tacitly encouraged by the central Church in its attempts to enforce its official procedures on translation of saints' bodies.<sup>49</sup> Alternatively, local clergy insisted upon the local importance of their saints, even going so far as avoiding papal legates in order to preserve the propriety of venerating their saints.<sup>50</sup> These Christians were anxious to preserve the local values and memory conserved in their cultural institutions, which at this time were often ecclesiastical.

Likewise, many instantiations of blessings and rituals were specific to certain localities, which would be important to local life but negligible from the central Church's vantage point.<sup>51</sup> Tithing varied by location, with many places eschewing the system as a whole for various reasons.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, female monastic closure was negotiated almost entirely on a local, political basis, rarely having to do with the greater ecclesiastical structure.<sup>53</sup> Further, agricultural rituals, such as rogations (a community's tracing of its boundaries), prayers or rites for good harvests, and prayers or rites for good weather, variegated across the Continent and in Britain. This variation indicated that agricultural rituals *must* have been locally negotiated, since the agricultural importance of crops in Burgundy could

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<sup>46</sup> Thomas Head, ed., *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology* (New York: Garland Pub., 2000), sec. Introduction.

<sup>47</sup> André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 28-9; see also *ibid.*, chapter 10, "Local Saints" for a general overview; a similar example is discussed in Schmitt, "Jeune et Danse des Chevaux de Bois."

<sup>48</sup> Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound*, 4. Notice, 'near' and not 'in', implying that only a few dozen or hundred people may have recognized this saint.

<sup>49</sup> Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, 30-1; the idea is that a cleric might ask a bishop or even the Pope to translate a local saint from one place to the other. The central cleric, due to poor records, might explain to the local cleric how to translate (and perhaps verify the sainthood of) the saint, thus tacitly endorsing the local saint even though the saint may never have been endorsed formally at all.

<sup>50</sup> Einhard, "Translation of the Relics of Sts. Marcellinus and Peter," trans. Thomas Head in Head, *Medieval Hagiography*, 210-11.

<sup>51</sup> For instance, certain practices were local to Swabia; trans. Montague Summers "The *Malleus Maleficarum* on Superstitious Practices (c. 1486)" in *Medieval Popular Religion, 1000-1500: A Reader*, ed. John Shinnors 2nd ed. (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2007): 292.

<sup>52</sup> Tanner and Watson, "Least of the Laity," 414.

<sup>53</sup> Closure being nuns remaining in their cloister (nunnery) rather than travelling about in cities preaching, as mendicant friars would. See Katherine Gill, "Scandala: Controversies Concerning *Clausura* and Women's Religious Communities in Late Medieval Italy," *Christendom and its Discontents*, ed. Waugh and Diehl, 182.

not have been the same as that in Languedoc or Cornwall.<sup>54</sup> Both priests and the laity negotiated together as a community these very practical elements of local religious life—elements that mattered to the local community but were less important to the central Church.

A significant system of localized morality also bolstered localized religion. Witchcraft accusations both on the Continent and in Britain were linked with social faux pas.<sup>55</sup> It is important to note that these were also included within the religious milieu, as interaction with God or other supernatural powers all existed within an ostensibly Christian supernatural system. Accusations of witchcraft in Lausanne (near Geneva) and Perugia (in Umbria) in the early fifteenth century differ from each other on the basis of moral judgments about witches.<sup>56</sup> The vocabularies these communities used to describe, and the means they used to punish, witchcraft diverged, indicating varied moral evaluations of witchcraft. In other words, witchcraft was a strong indicator of practical religious sentiment in general, at least before central intervention, and was correlated with local moral value systems. Communities verified the moral value of heroes and saints by reference to morally positive community members.<sup>57</sup> They also prized local solidarity, often at the expense of misfits within the community.<sup>58</sup> Even in heresies, religion was perceived communally: a password to a meeting of Cathars was “nous, à ce que nous croyons.”<sup>59</sup> The Cathars and similar groups did not think of themselves as heretics but as Christians who were purifying themselves and the Church. Thus, with this statement, they aligned certain religious beliefs with their local community.

### *Local Clerical-Lay Commonality*

What we might call popular culture—the cultural tendencies of the

<sup>54</sup> See Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 44, 54, 141; Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 59.

<sup>55</sup> Robin Briggs, *Communities of Belief: Cultural and Social Tension in Early Modern France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989): 31-3, 99; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 527, 629.

<sup>56</sup> Richard Kieckhefer, “Mythologies of Witchcraft in the Fifteenth Century,” in *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 1, no. 1 (Summer 2006): 80-94 passim. Here Kieckhefer argues for a local understanding of witches, emphasizing that Lausanne did not have a native form of diabolical witchcraft.

<sup>57</sup> Nash, *De Pignoribus Sanctorum*, 29; cf. confirmation of local history in Schmitt, “Jeunes et danse des chevaux de bois,” 132.

<sup>58</sup> Emmanuel Le Roy Laduire, “Préface” to Duvernoy, *Le Registre D’Inquisition*, I, xxviii.

<sup>59</sup> “us, to that which we believe” in Duvernoy, *Le Registre D’Inquisition*, II, 495; cf. *ibid.*, III, 766-7, 1076.

people in common—was essentially local culture.<sup>60</sup> Even if an official orthodox practice began in one place and then instituted throughout Christendom, it was likely practiced with especial zeal and perhaps extra innovation in its original area.<sup>61</sup> The elite/common split does not lack merit; certainly toward the early modern period there is a significant separation between these two cultural circles. At least as late as the eleventh century, however, both the elites and the commoners shared local popular religious culture.<sup>62</sup> In other words, local popular culture, particularly religion, was more homogenous than one might think when using an elite/common split in the interpretive circles. This was true regarding religious conceptions shared between the commoners and the elite.<sup>63</sup> At this time, it was difficult, if not impossible, to discern between religion and local tradition; both laity and clergy partook in it, and the cases in question would often occur within or near either ecclesiastical spaces or times, making the status of common practices ambiguous.<sup>64</sup> Even medieval Christians were aware of this. One text from Rue in Somme in 1383 reads: “the religious acts of our ancestors are so mixed with folk actions that it is difficult, if not impossible to detect which are purely religious from which are purely traditional.”<sup>65</sup> It was not uncommon for medieval Europeans to describe religious ideas in terms of proverbs, mixing the local (i.e. vernacular) and the ecclesiastic.<sup>66</sup> Since the clergy came from the area they served and

<sup>60</sup> Burke, *Popular Culture*, 28, 50. Note, this is in opposition to the idea of an elite/common split, asserting instead a local/foreign split perceived in each locality. That is, a Toulousain will see the culture of the people of Toulouse as popular and essentially due to the region (including the local lord and peasant), and he will see that of a Burgundian as foreign, even though they both may well be artisans. Medieval people, for example, commonly noticed dress as a regional variation. See Roger Vaultier, *Le Folklore pendant la guerre de Cent Ans d'après Les Lettres de Rémission du Trésor des Chartes* (Paris: Librairie Guénégaud, 1965): 226.

<sup>61</sup> An example of this is the Rogations in Vienne in trans., William G. Ryan, “Jacob of Voragine on the Greater and Lesser Rogations (c. 1260),” in *Medieval Popular Religion*, ed. Shinnars, 300.

<sup>62</sup> Robert I. Moore, “Heresy, Repression, and Social Change in the Age of Gregorian Reform,” in *Christendom and its Discontents*, ed. Waugh and Diehl, 35-6.

<sup>63</sup> Duvernoy, *Le Registre D'Inquisition*, I, 140. N.B., this also includes actions that border on the “religious,” see Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials*, 48.

<sup>64</sup> Ginzburg, *The Night Battles*, 81.

<sup>65</sup> “Les actes religieux de nos ancêtres sont tellement mélangés de faits folkloriques qu'il est difficile, sinon impossible de déceler ce qui est purement religieux de ce qui est purement traditionnel,” Vaultier, *Le Folklore pendant la guerre de Cent Ans*, 169.

<sup>66</sup> We know that these proverbs were almost always local as they were usually in the local dialect, see Duvernoy, *Le Registre D'Inquisition*, II, 657 (quote regarding disbelief around crucifixion: “à ceux qui crucifièrent et tuèrent le Christ et l'ensevelirent, il est arrivé selon le commun proverbe: «Aquel que bat sa molher am le coyshi la cuia far mal, e no lui fa ges»” translated by Duvernoy as, “Qui bat sa femme avec un coussin/Croit lui faire mal et ne lui fait rien” *ibid.*, 666 n. 2).

generally lacked education, these clerics would share a large deal of their religious sentiments with their neighbors and their families—who, of course, taught the priests these tenets.<sup>67</sup>

This closeness in cultural background among the laity and clergy, combined with their closeness in educational background, led to, at times, little differentiation between clergy and laity. In some places in Europe, as many as 46% of acolytes failed to reach priesthood (and presumably this was true in higher percentage in the lower minor orders).<sup>68</sup> Coupled with this were significant discussions between clergy and laity regarding practical religious issues, in which the laity at times participated nearly as equals.<sup>69</sup> Clerics were known to have sometimes debated heretics on theological matters rather than demanding their obedience to the Church.<sup>70</sup> Finally, heresy in some areas appeared worse than that of others, mainly because local clerics believed there to be little to no heresy in their parish.<sup>71</sup> Although some scholars have taken this to indicate that some clerics were much less zealous (or less interested in their position) than others, it seems just as likely that these clerics simply did not consider local heresies

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<sup>67</sup> Joan of Arc told investigators that all the religion she learned was from her mother. While obviously Joan of Arc was not a priest, she seems to be—at least as a child—a fairly normal Christian, and thus it is likely that her religious education was similar to that of her lay neighbors and even to those of them who became priests (even if these priests did get more education later). One might argue that cathedral schools would provide only men education; these would be in cities, however, and therefore not accessible to the majority of the population. Either way, if our reasoning does not hold strongly for 1431, it certainly must for 1231 before the spread of schools. See trans., John Shinnars, “The Faith of Joan of Arc (1431),” in *Medieval Popular Religion*, ed. Shinnars, 62; this was taught as conventional practice, Richard Kieckhefer, “Convention and Conversion: Patterns in Late Medieval Piety,” *Church History* 67, no. 1 (Mar., 1998): 38; see also our example of Paolo the *benandante*, whose semi-religious sentiments about the caul (placenta) were instilled by his mother, Ginzburg, *The Night Battles*, 162-3.

<sup>68</sup> Davis, “Rivals for Ministry,” 102. This was about thirteenth century Winchester, but Davis suggests that this diocese was representative of England, and so cannot have been too far off from the Continent either.

<sup>69</sup> Duvernoy, *Le Registre D’Inquisition*, I, 191-2 for a lay discussion on the relative merits of priests and their theologies and *ibid*, II, 713-14 for a theological discussion between a “cleric” and a layman.

<sup>70</sup> Bernard Gui, *The Inquisitor’s Guide: A Medieval Manual on Heretics*, trans. Janet Shirley (Welwyn Garden City, England: Ravenhall Books, 2006): 59. Note this is a shift on reasoning regarding heresy from a dogmatic aspect to a pure loyalty aspect.

<sup>71</sup> In a way, heresy was what happened *somewhere else* or is done by *someone else*, much as people today, especially in bourgeois communities, might say that various “seedy” crimes happen in *other* communities. (this later part might be unnecessary without some sort of example/citation )

to be anything but orthodox.<sup>72</sup>

The local circle of interpretation was reinforced by central clerical misunderstandings of local structures. Language barriers constantly impeded inquisitors or even bishops from understanding a local society to which they were foreign.<sup>73</sup> This does not necessarily mean that foreign churchmen were at a loss and blindly categorized local practices; rather, in many situations, churchmen simply lost the local nuances and connotations in translation. Especially in cases of potential witchcraft, inquisitors simply could not understand local theological misconceptions.<sup>74</sup> Further, local systems differed greatly from each other, so that even if an inquisitor understood one town, he might not understand its neighbor right across the river, even though he may have assumed a greater continuity.<sup>75</sup> Vexed by the local divergences from orthodoxy, inquisitors developed sources to aid each other, but in the process, increased stereotyping.<sup>76</sup> This led inquisitors to ignore the details of local religion and instead demonize and misinterpret local practices that had been categorized as dogmatically benign or even positive beforehand.<sup>77</sup> Since local beliefs were pushed into unorthodoxy, their practitioners had a choice: either maintain the beliefs and therefore insist on a local circle of interpretation, or reject the beliefs and apply central ecclesiastic rule to their practical religion. This downward pressure from the ecclesiastic elite combined with the upward pressure from the cultural homogeneity and conservativeness of these societies to push for a local circle of interpretation.

### Local Magic and the Church

The medieval world was saturated by the magical and the miraculous, with the conception that there were many different supernatural

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<sup>72</sup> See, e.g. Duvernoy, *Le Registre D'Inquisition*, I, 4, 51, 319-20 and Rob Lutton, "Heresy and Heterodoxy in Late Medieval Kent," in *Late Medieval Kent, 1220-1540*, ed., Sheila Sweetinburgh (Woodbridge, England: The Boydell Press, 2010): 168. Of course, some clerics simply avoided looking for heretics because of their lack of interest, but to suppose this group to be an overwhelming majority would be far too pessimistic a view.

<sup>73</sup> There are many examples of this in the literature, e.g., Kieckhefer, "Rationality of Medieval Magic," 834; id., "Mythologies of Witchcraft," 98-100; Caciola, "Wraiths, Revenants and Ritual, 10-11; Ginzburg, *The Night Battles*, 117; and Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 194.

<sup>74</sup> Ginzburg, *The Night Battles*, 147-171 passim.

<sup>75</sup> Kieckhefer, "Mythologies of Witchcraft," 89, 94-5 and Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound*, 15, 133.

<sup>76</sup> Taylor, "Evidence of Dualism," 330 and Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials*, 91.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 36, 76; Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound*, 175; Ginzburg, *The Night Battles*, 71, 76.

powers and tendencies that ordinary Europeans could harness.<sup>78</sup> When the Church became the major cultural institution, Christian supernatural powers (God, Christ, the saints, holy objects, etc.) filled the void of pagan supernatural powers. This led to close ties between the Church and magical practices that had originated in local at times ex-pagan religious customs. Due to the adoption of old pagan rituals into Christianity and the gap in clerical education, local magic existed on a spectrum from considered as unopposed to the Church—even tacitly accepted by the Church—to being expressly legitimated by the Church and even practiced by the clergy and laity together.

### *Ecclesiastic Tacit Approval*

During Christianity's conquest of Europe, old pagan customs and rituals were quickly and without much dogmatic consideration adapted to Christian practice. One historian notes, "to be partly pagan is simply to be anybody living in the European and Mediterranean worlds at any time since the end of antiquity."<sup>79</sup> The conversion process was both physical and spiritual. Churches were often built on ex-pagan sites, and old holy trees or other landmarks often drew in nominally Christian cults or practices.<sup>80</sup> Many medieval Christians simply substituted Christian supernatural powers for pagan ones in charms and rites in general,<sup>81</sup> especially with the creation of Christian holidays on top of—or to justify—pagan ones.<sup>82</sup> A simple example of this is the ritual mass over a field, a quick incorporation of Christian ritual into something that had been the domain of pagan gods.<sup>83</sup> Priests often aided in the confusion by not distinguishing between "heretical" magical agricultural battles—times when Europeans would believe themselves to go out into the fields on certain nights to fight evil supernatural powers in order to protect their crops—and ecclesi-

<sup>78</sup> Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 21. Consider, particularly, Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian (meta)physics.

<sup>79</sup> Hutton, "How Pagan," 235-6.

<sup>80</sup> Archambault, *A Monk's Confession*, 93. N.B. Guibert de Nogent seems to be the only one who notices that his abbey is built on an ex-pagan site, although this may be part of his general pompousness. C.f., Guinefort is buried under what is likely an ex-pagan tree in Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound*, 64, 73.

<sup>81</sup> For many examples, see ed. John Shinnars, "Christian Charms (Eleventh to Fifteenth Centuries)" in *Medieval Popular Religion*, ed. Shinnars, 313-322.

<sup>82</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 82-3; Ginzburg, *The Night Battles*, 81. Perhaps they did not *consciously* do so, but the substitution was apparent both to contemporary skeptics and modern historians.

<sup>83</sup> Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 59.

astic rogations.<sup>84</sup> Joan of Arc knew of yet another example, “‘The Fairies’ Tree,’” which had a ritual attached to it associated with “Blessed Mary of Domrémy.”<sup>85</sup> More systematically, Catholicism was flexible in creating structures akin to those of pagan gods: saint cults replaced local pagan cults, diversifying the supernatural world.<sup>86</sup> However, it does not seem that Europeans themselves thought of their practices as pagan or anything other than Christian. As Kieckhefer argues, the very substitution of and reliance on Christian supernatural powers tracked the practitioners’ rationalization of the magic. Calling on Christ to keep a field fertile acknowledged specifically his supernatural powers, rather than other possible ones.<sup>87</sup> Importantly, these rituals would be tied to local settings and be in the same mental area as expressly ecclesiastic rituals such as rogations.

At a minimum, the Church did not oppose much of medieval magic and superstition. Oftentimes churchmen left alone actions that would count as heterodox, either at that time or at a later period when the Church expanded its categorization of heterodox. Locals thus concluded that the actions posed no threat to—or had nothing to do with—ecclesiastic orthodoxy. Earlier medieval theologians, focused on expanding Christendom, told their local priests that “nonheretical magic should be left to the purview of local authorities,” rather than dealt with by better-educated bishops or inquisitors.<sup>88</sup> Confessions, if performed at all, were usually superfluous, allowing heretical practices to go unnoticed.<sup>89</sup> This rather laissez-faire view of heresy was the status quo at least until 1484, when Innocent VIII instructed local priests to take a more active role in the persecution of superstition and other unorthodoxies.<sup>90</sup>

As a result, it was common for people to be unaware of the sinfulness

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<sup>84</sup> Ginzburg, *The Night Battles*, 156, 170. During the Inquisition’s conviction of Paolo the *benandante*, they banned him from carrying “viburnum” during communal rogations, which he had used during a nocturnal ecstasy to protect the crops, implying that they were not confident in the conceptual separation between the orthodox and the heretical.

<sup>85</sup> Trans. John Shinnners, “The Faith of Joan of Arc (1431)” in *Medieval Popular Religion*, ed. Shinnners, 64.

<sup>86</sup> Hutton, “How Pagan,” 242.

<sup>87</sup> Kieckhefer, “Rationality of Medieval Magic,” 829. These other powers would have started as pagan deities such as Oden or Diana, which might have survived through the Middle Ages, but were also supplemented by the Devil and other fallen angels.

<sup>88</sup> Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 191.

<sup>89</sup> Tanner and Watson, “Least of the Laity,” 407-8.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 421; ed. Wakefield and Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, 251. N.B., this does not mean that between 1215 and 1484 local priests’ concerns with heresy did not expand; rather, when they expanded, they did so slowly and specifically, targeting heretical unorthodoxies that their bishop pointed out rather than dealing with unorthodoxies in general.

of their actions—especially in regard to witchcraft<sup>91</sup>—or to believe that priests allowed the actions since they were in essence non-ecclesiastic.<sup>92</sup> For example, Paolo the *benandante* spoke openly to priests about his nocturnal ecstasies to save the crops, begging them to come, indicating that he thought the priest would approve of his actions.<sup>93</sup> Thus, heterodox beliefs, especially beneficent magic, grew rampant, almost to ubiquity.<sup>94</sup> In fact, many historians have argued that magic was more beneficial than other “cures” for ailments (often bloodletting or ingesting poison) due to the placebo effect or the ingestion of moderately beneficial foods.<sup>95</sup> Sometimes people would go to sorcerers with morally bad reputations if they thought the cures would work better.<sup>96</sup> The church’s tacit acceptance of these practices sustained them: in one French city, the university’s medical faculty recommended the traditional cures (questionably unorthodox healing magic) over the clerical ones.<sup>97</sup> Similarly, the tacit acceptance of night ecstasies—beliefs of Europeans going out on certain nights to fight for the crops—led to them being thought of as actually positively affecting crops.<sup>98</sup> An end result of this was the tacit democratization of supernatural power, allowing laypeople to invoke God or Christ to affect the real world. Thus, a doctor in France might be someone “qui sauvera ton âme et ton corps,” expanding his role beyond the physical (“corps”) to the spiritual (“âme”).<sup>99</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials*, 22.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 6, especially on invocation’s not being inherently ecclesiastic. One might alternatively say that these were non-religious rather than non-ecclesiastic. However, it seems much more likely that local Christians saw it as *their community’s* Christianity instead of the central Church’s Christianity.

<sup>93</sup> Ginzburg, *The Night Battles*, 148-9.

<sup>94</sup> Briggs, *Communities of Belief*, 24.

<sup>95</sup> See Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials*, 67; an important line in Kieckhefer: “much of the unofficial ritual practiced by medieval laity and lower clergy was tolerated, however grudgingly, as nonmagical, provided their rituals appealed to the same spiritual forces that orthodoxy recognized as legitimate”, id., “Rationality of Medieval Magic,” 831. N.B., this does to some extent apply to ecclesiastic cures: when the king touched for scrofula or a relic cured a different disease as in Marc Bloch’s *The Royal Touch*.

<sup>96</sup> Roger Aubenas, *La Sorcière et l’Inquisiteur: Épisode de l’Inquisition en Provence 1439* (Aix-en-Provence: La Pensée Universitaire, 1956): 39.

<sup>97</sup> “Ces médicaments [remèdes de bonnes femmes] sont actuellement recommandés par la Faculté” (these medications [cures of good women, cf. clever women, *benandanti*] were then recommended by the Facluté [a medical faculty]) in Vaultier, *Le Folklore pendant la guerre de Cent Ans*, 226. (I’m not sure if this needs to be capitalized)

<sup>98</sup> Ginzburg, *The Night Battles*, 4, 56; although, the results of the battles would not be revealed until after the crops had already been taken.

<sup>99</sup> “who will save (heal) your soul and your body” Duvernoy, *Le Registre D’Inquisition*, II, 425. This is in distinction to the thought that the spiritual realm (âme) should be that of the Church.

### *Explicit Incorporations of Magic*

Beyond tacit approval, local Christians believed the Church explicitly approved of magic and other superstitious beliefs and incorporated them into orthodoxy. On a very basic level, this applies to supernatural properties given to different material objects connected to ecclesiastic supernatural powers. For example, herbs connected to St. John were believed to have supernatural healing powers.<sup>100</sup> Even though the herb was not officially *asserted* by the Church to have healing powers because of St. John, the name and the common thinking that this connection caused the herb's power led the people to think that this was supported by the Church rather than just tacitly accepted. Similarly, the nocturnal ecstasies were "for God" or "for Christ," thus explicitly incorporating the Church into these magical rituals.<sup>101</sup> Local saints were common instantiations of the central Church recognizing a purely local custom as orthodox. These were saints, as expressed above, who may have been venerated in a region, a few towns, or even a single village, and were oftentimes explicitly endorsed by the local priests.<sup>102</sup> Although these priests may have decided to ignore local heterodoxy or did not notice it, their parishioners, or they themselves, did believe the Church accepted and incorporated their practices. Thus, St. John's herb was considered orthodox by peripheral Christians because it cited the Church as the supernatural power; they had no reason to think otherwise because their priests never pointed this out.

At the furthest end of this spectrum of local magic's interaction with the Church is magic practiced by the clergy with their local laity. They explicitly incorporated these practices into local orthodoxy, or at least what the practitioners conceived as orthodoxy. Generally, clerics would not practice special magic or maleficent magic, but rather benign, "everyday," magic.<sup>103</sup> Clerics and laity would participate and exchange their forms of magic together, allowing them to "speak of a 'common

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<sup>100</sup> For this example and others see Vaultier, *Le Folklore pendant la guerre de Cent Ans*, 67-77, and more broadly his chapter "Les Fêtes Calendaires" (45-124).

<sup>101</sup> Ginzburg, *The Night Battles*, 85. If ecclesiastic symbols were misappropriated onto objects or practices, it would seem strange for medieval Christians to note that differentiation. Note the inquisition into our Paolo (and a partner Battista), 152-8.

<sup>102</sup> Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound*, 109; sometimes this was by mistake—however, at the time the laity or lower clergy could not have known that the upper clergy's endorsement of a tenet or more commonly a preacher was mistaken, see trans. Walter Wakefield and Austin Evans, "Heresy at Orléans," in *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, ed. Wakefield and Evans, 75.

<sup>103</sup> Kieckhefer, "Rationality of Medieval Magic," 826. There are exceptions, such as a record of a fifteenth century priest in Soissons who "set out to wreak vengeance on his enemies," in id., *European Witch Trials*, 50.

tradition' of medieval magic."<sup>104</sup> For example, ecclesiastic manuals warned priests against clerical and lay use of magic, implying that this had been a genuine issue.<sup>105</sup> Additionally, a Friulian community knew a priest to be a *benandante*, explicitly incorporating that belief into an orthodox schema.<sup>106</sup> Priests were also tried and sentenced for sorcery, such as Fr. Pierre Recort in 1329 Pamiers.<sup>107</sup>

Priests were likely to practice invocation of supernatural powers with or without the laity.<sup>108</sup> This is because the priests were literate and invocations were thought to require various Latin incantations.<sup>109</sup> The abbot of a monastery reportedly once resurrected an ox, for instance.<sup>110</sup> Masses were said regularly for various magical purposes, including, but not limited to, ensuring good crops and blessing the caul with which a *benandante* was born.<sup>111</sup> Additionally, clerics practiced—or employed a practitioner of—magic to recover lost property, particularly that of the Church.<sup>112</sup> These local practices were therefore expressly legitimized by the Church.

Furthermore, many clerics actively and explicitly justified ecclesiastic magic as rational and acceptable.<sup>113</sup> A parish priest near Toulouse, for example, allowed a local practice of taking the hair from a corpse for some

<sup>104</sup> Id., *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 56.

<sup>105</sup> Trans. John Shinnars, "A Handbook for Parish Priests (1385)," in *Medieval Popular Religion*, ed. Shinnars, 17.

<sup>106</sup> Ginzburg, *The Night Battles*, 79.

<sup>107</sup> Goodich, *Other Middle Ages*, ed. Goodich, 127, n. 2; Walker comments, "in the seventeenth century in France three undoubtedly innocent [of diabolic invocation] priests were burnt as sorcerers." This shows that at minimum it was rather conceivable that the priests should use magic, although in this case it was black magic. Nonetheless, it would be surprising if there was a conception of the possibility of black magic without the possibility of white magic, see Daniel Walker, *Unclean Spirits: Possession and Exorcism in France and England in the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981): 8.

<sup>108</sup> Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials*, 70-1.

<sup>109</sup> Of course, literate laity were known to do this as well, see trans., John Shinnars, "A Fifteenth-Century English Yeoman's Commonplace Book (1470s)," in *Medieval Popular Religion*, ed. Shinnars, 365.

<sup>110</sup> Caciola, "Wraiths, Revenants and Ritual," 32.

<sup>111</sup> Ginzburg, *The Night Battles*, 15. Cauls were highly spiritualized objects at this time; a prerequisite to be a *benandante* according to most was being born with a caul. This is insisted upon in Paolo's account, *ibid.*, 162-3, 170. Cf. a similar discussion about birthmarks in Marc Bloch, *The Royal Touch*, 168ff.

<sup>112</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 324-5.

<sup>113</sup> Kieckhefer, "Rationality of Medieval Magic," 823-4. While Kieckhefer takes explicit issue with the likening of ecclesiastic magic (ritual) with illicit magic, our terming is not too misleading. One advantage of calling legitimated rituals and practices ecclesiastic magic is that it hints at the fact that Christians in different localities held different practices as legitimate ritual versus illegitimate magic. Thus, by ecclesiastic magic here we mean *local* ecclesiastic magic.

unclear—though doubtlessly supernatural—purpose.<sup>114</sup> Clerics strongly disagreed about what supernatural actions were legitimate, indicating that a significant number of theologians argued for the legitimization of a greater number of actions than would ultimately be.<sup>115</sup> Even the arena of the debate was under question: for the theologians who affirmed that supernatural action per se is not unacceptable, often the question of whether the instantiation in question was acceptable became a question of the actor's motivation. This, as noted at the outset, often came down to community solidarity, an essentially localized process.<sup>116</sup>

### Unorthodox Versions of Orthodox Practices

As established in the introduction, clerical and lay education in rural communities was often rudimentary. Thus, it is not surprising that, given the isolation and a poor dogmatic background, rural Christians—both clerical and lay—developed unorthodox versions of orthodox practices, since they simply did not understand orthodoxy in its fullest sense. These Christians did not consider their practices to be unorthodox. Rather, they considered practices to either rise out of legitimate accommodation of local customs or to persist while unaware of changes in the central Roman/Parisian orthodoxy.<sup>117</sup>

#### *Misunderstandings and Poor Communication*

Liturgical misappropriations were common to both the laity and the clergy. It was quite typical to have additional prayers for nearly everything. Christians performed exorcisms to make fields fertile or to drive away caterpillars.<sup>118</sup> There was even a “general blessing for anything you

<sup>114</sup> “quand Pons Clergue mourut, Alazaïs Azéma, moi-même et Pierre Clergue, le recteur de Montaillou, nous nous enfermâmes dans la foganha [a kitchen (Occitan)] où le corps de Pons mort était étendu, et Alazaïs prit...des cheveux de la tête, en présence et à la vue du curé, qui ne s’y opposait pas,” in Duvernoy, *Le Registre D’Inquisition*, I, 350.

<sup>115</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 305. Clearly after the consensus was reached, these *theologians’* beliefs would have been beyond orthodoxy—which, as we have established above, translates to the beliefs of the area of the theologians’ families would be beyond orthodoxy. See also Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 58.

<sup>116</sup> Aubenas, *La Sorcière et l’Inquisiteur*, 39.

<sup>117</sup> By legitimate accommodation I am referencing the idea of Christianity initially adopting local practices to a Christian dogma from the first few centuries which was much vaguer than that of the late Middle Ages.

<sup>118</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 35.

wish” appearing on a bishop’s list of blessings.<sup>119</sup> Similarly, they very often misappropriated ecclesiastical terms for “magic.”<sup>120</sup> For example, orthodox prayers were used to heal,<sup>121</sup> and it was not uncommon for Christians to perform healing with Latin-esque gibberish, such as “rex, pax, nax in Cris-to filio suo.”<sup>122</sup> In addition to prayers, ritual items were also misappropriated for various purposes. Hosts were commonly used as medicine, fertilizers, and nearly any other imaginable use.<sup>123</sup> Similarly, relics were strongly believed to cure different diseases—both according to official dogma and according to local religion. Ecclesiastical spaces were additionally taboo: though consecrated, they were often sites of promiscuity and brawls.<sup>124</sup> The central Church anticipated some of these misappropriations, but chose to enforce the practice of many of these beliefs rather than the theological dogma. Thus, Christians generally might know the words to perform a baptism, but not the particular dogma of it.<sup>125</sup> Christians were actively using orthodox terms in a way that would be acceptable in their locality, but may not have been to the central churchmen.

The most serious piece of evidence for the extent of unorthodox misappropriations of orthodoxy was the high degree of local clerical misunderstanding of orthodox doctrine due to poor definitions. Clerics were simply confused and went with their best understanding, which was often, either at that time or a century later (once orthodoxy had moved on), unorthodox. This was so serious that one medieval Frenchman comment-

<sup>119</sup> Trans. John Shinnars, “Bishop Guillaume Durandus’s List of Blessings (c. 1295),” in *Medieval Popular Religion*, ed. Shinnars, 292. Also see, trans. John Shinnars, “Various Blessings (Early Eleventh to Thirteenth Centuries),” in *Medieval Popular Religion*, ed. Shinnars.

<sup>120</sup> There may be some hesitation on this term, given that it is likely that Christians did not see this as far different from rites such as rogations or field exorcisms, which they would not call magic. Recall the discussion in n. 115.

<sup>121</sup> Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials*, 56. Here the inquisitors assert that the prayers were supposed to honor the Devil. Whether this was the original intention or clerical diabolizing (we would be supported in asserting the latter), it does show that there was a local conception that these sorts of prayers had explicit and necessary healing powers. The idea of prayers healing is also expressed in an example given in Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 48.

<sup>122</sup> Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 4-5.

<sup>123</sup> Walker, *Unclean Spirits*, 24; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 37-8; also, the host to sketchily prove a miracle: Nash, *De Pignoribus Sanctorum*, 22.

<sup>124</sup> E.g., instructions to parish priests, implying that there had been illicit actions on church ground, in trans. John Shinnars, “A Handbook for Parish Priests (1385),” in *Medieval Popular Religion*, ed. Shinnars, 18; for many other examples, see lists in Duvernoy, *Le Registre D’Inquisition*, III, 1336, s.v. “Cimetière” and Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 810, s.v. “churches, behavior in” and “churchyard,” as well as 842 s.v. “sacrilege”; also useful is Schmitt, “Jeunes et danse des chevaux de bois,” passim.

<sup>125</sup> Tanner and Watson, “Least of the Laity,” 400-2.

ed, “les ecclésiastiques plongeant les gens dans l’erreur.”<sup>126</sup> From a basic level, the differences between *superstitio*, *magia*, and *miracula* were hazy and unstable.<sup>127</sup> For most of the period, the central Church simply did not have consistent, coherent definitions of orthodoxy.<sup>128</sup> Both magic<sup>129</sup> and quotidian rituals<sup>130</sup> were issues that the Church did not form stable guidelines for the majority of this period. Thus, local investigation into superstitions—rather than hard heresy<sup>131</sup>—was either random or nonexistent until at least 1250.<sup>132</sup>

The inadequacy of orthodox definitions seems mostly due to a lack of interest in those definitions among rural Christians.<sup>133</sup> For example, there was ambiguity regarding the doctrine of who was a saint, which most priests seldom considered.<sup>134</sup> Rites established later, such as extreme unction (ca. ninth century), also failed to gain significant traction, both among the laity and the rural clergy.<sup>135</sup> Even the ecclesiastic importance of marriage was seldom considered during this period; rather, it was a local ritual that happened to be recognized by the Church, assuming some basic vows and consummation, which would only have been brought into question regarding legal disputes about children, separation, and remarriage.<sup>136</sup>

Thus, priests under such “misery and deception” (i.e. ignorance due to poor communication) permitted the propagation of many unorthodox practices because they did not see them as problematic, or may even

<sup>126</sup> “the churchmen send the people into error,” Duvernoy, *Le Registre D’Inquisition*, I, 267.

<sup>127</sup> Kieckhefer, “Rationality of Medieval Magic,” 816; Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, 12, 30-6.

<sup>128</sup> Ed., Wakefield and Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, 3; Taylor, “Evidence of Dualism,” 320.

<sup>129</sup> Kieckhefer, “Rationality of Medieval Magic,” 818-21, 831.

<sup>130</sup> Tanner and Watson, “Least of the Laity,” 401. Many practices such as confirmation were only introduced by the central Church at Lateran IV in 1215 or later.

<sup>131</sup> Hard heresy being unorthodoxy clearly defined as antithetical to the Church, e.g. maleficent witchcraft, Catharism, polytheism, etc., contra soft heresy which would be more questionable, e.g. white magic, dualism and anticlericalism, etc.

<sup>132</sup> Trans. Michael Goodich, “Hermann of Scheda (ca. 1107-70), *Opusculum de conversione sua*,” in *Other Middle Ages*, ed. Goodich, 81; Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound*, 28. In many places, these would not be addressed until at least a century later; see Birkett, “Pastoral Application of Lateran IV,” passim.

<sup>133</sup> Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 9; cf. id., “Rationality of Medieval Magic,” 832 and John Shinnors, “Introduction to the First Edition,” in *Medieval Popular Religion*, ed. Shinnors, xix.

<sup>134</sup> Nash, *De Pignoribus Sanctorum*, 33.

<sup>135</sup> Tanner and Watson, “Least of the Laity,” 413.

<sup>136</sup> Vaultier, *Le Folklore pendant la guerre de Cent Ans*, 13-17.

have considered them acceptable.<sup>137</sup> A vicar of a local church encouraged parishioners to go to a certain miraculous field in Lincoln, despite his bishop's censure.<sup>138</sup> Alternatively, bishops had allowed various monastic institutions to maintain illegitimate elections and other procedures for convenience's sake.<sup>139</sup> A similar lack of interest took hold in clerical-lay interactions in the form of superfluous confession.<sup>140</sup> Either in clerical-clerical interactions or clerical-lay interactions, shallow confessions tacitly permitted unorthodox practices. This may well have been the case for our example of Paolo the *benandante*. He insisted on going to confession and spoke about being a *benandante* to his local priest.<sup>141</sup> Whether he did so because he knew that his priest would not force him to do penance or because he thought that the priest approved of it is unknown. However, given Paolo's openness about the ecstasies, as well as his insistence that he was fighting for God and Christ, we should give more credence to the latter idea. If this should be the case, it bolsters the argument that practical religion—such as fighting for the fields—was negotiated locally, since there would be no break between the local clerical and lay attitudes in this case.

### *Local Innovations in Central Gaps*

This lack of interest and general misunderstanding led priests themselves to establish practices that would at some point be called unorthodox. For example, foliate heads, which had been assumed both by inquisitors and historians to be pagan images, were actually created by Christians in eleventh century France for Christian purposes.<sup>142</sup> Priests would also participate in general bawdiness and disorderly behavior, at times leading the ruckus to enter the ecclesiastic sphere.<sup>143</sup> Once, a group of priests and lay people conquered a parish church in Thame, England for a year.<sup>144</sup> Priests' erring from the Church could be so serious that priests were de-

<sup>137</sup> Trans. Michael Goodich, "Thomassa (1318), Disciple of Clare of Montefalco," in *Other Middle Ages*, ed. Goodich, 219.

<sup>138</sup> Trans. John Shinnars, "An English Bishop Oversees Popular Piety (1296, 1299)," *Medieval Popular Religion*, ed. Shinnars, 479

<sup>139</sup> Ed., Hill, *The Rolls and Register of Sutton*, I, 124, 168. The bishop here did not bother educating the monastics on proper electoral procedure because they chose a good enough person and they proceeded with the election with true devotion, albeit misguided.

<sup>140</sup> Tanner and Watson, "Least of the Laity," 407 and Duvernoy, *Le Registre D'Inquisition*, I, 269; this applied too to initial searches for heretics, see Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound*, 32.

<sup>141</sup> Ginzburg, *The Night Battles*, passim.

<sup>142</sup> Hutton, "How Pagan," 238.

<sup>143</sup> See Tanner and Watson, "Least of the Laity," 410; Vaultier, *Le Folklore pendant la guerre de Cent Ans*, 45, 70, 161.

<sup>144</sup> Ed., Hill, *The Rolls and Register of Sutton*, IV, 67, 104, 107, 117, 152.

graded for misleading their flocks pedagogically.<sup>145</sup>

Even while priests led their congregations astray without anyone knowing, medieval Christians, particularly between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, worried about false preachers.<sup>146</sup> The fear was not without reason. On several occasions, a town's clerical leaders would permit an unknown outsider to preach, only to find out, sometimes much later, that he was preaching unorthodox dogma.<sup>147</sup> Thus, medieval Christians knew they were highly vulnerable to receiving inaccurate dogma because their local priests did not know the one accurate to the central Church.

More generally, the central Church's lack of interest in quotidian dogma allowed superstitious and unorthodox beliefs about the Church to attach themselves to objects and times regularly encountered. Many of these dealt with the Church calendar, such as ecstasies that were based on the Ember days.<sup>148</sup> The agricultural calendar in general was closely linked to the Church calendar, leading to many superstitions about which saint's days were good or bad for various activities.<sup>149</sup> Ritual objects also had many superstitions attached to them. Salt was often consecrated and considered miraculous, and holy bells were used to protect against lightning.<sup>150</sup> The Eucharist was broadly thought to have magical powers, and thus hosts were frequently stolen for various magical purposes.<sup>151</sup> There were also many superstitions regarding baptism, especially concerning baptizing cauls with which infants were born.<sup>152</sup> Finally, oftentimes stones or other natural landmarks near martyr's tombs were considered to have supernatural attributes.<sup>153</sup> In other words, a lack of clarity on the meaning of everyday objects in the Church, and the central Church's failure to

<sup>145</sup> Gui, *The Inquisitor's Guide*, 187.

<sup>146</sup> Trans., Goodich, "Thomassa," 219. This was likely due to Church campaigns against the Gnostic and dualist heretics.

<sup>147</sup> Trans., Thomas Head, "The Cult of Relics in the Eleventh Century," in *Medieval Hagiography*, ed. Head, 286; trans., John Shinnars, "The Shepherds' Crusade (1251)," in *Medieval Popular Religion*, ed. Shinnars; and trans., R. I. Moore, "Popular Heresy in Twelfth-Century Le Mans (c. 1115)," in *Medieval Popular Religion*, ed. Shinnars.

<sup>148</sup> See Ginzburg, *The Night Battles*, 22. We know that this was supported by clerics, since a priest was a *benandante* *ibid.*, 79. The Ember days were a Christianized pagan period of seasonal calendar change four times a year. See also Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 71-2.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 735, 740; Vaultier, *Le Folklore pendant la guerre de Cent Ans*, 67-71; trans., Shinnars, "English Yeoman's Commonplace Book," 392-4.

<sup>150</sup> Trans. Walter Wakefield and Austin Evans, "From Heresy to Witchcraft," 255; Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound*, 71; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 34.

<sup>151</sup> Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials*, 64.

<sup>152</sup> Ginzburg, *The Night Battles*, 15, 61, and Paolo's example on 162-3; Caciola, "Wraiths, Revenants and Ritual," 29. Cf. Bloch, *The Royal Touch*, 176.

<sup>153</sup> Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound*, 64. These sites were almost always ex-pagan.

address daily Christian life, led to superstitious beliefs regarding various ecclesiastic objects and structures. Many of these ecclesiastical structures and objects were attached to the pagan places and practices that had formerly flourished. Christians interacted with these objects and spaces every day, so when unorthodox beliefs were attached to these places these beliefs would be constantly present in these Christians' lives.

### *Objections*

One possible objection is that I have not made a real distinction from previous interpretive models. However, these new interpretive circles seem significantly different from a modified elite-common split, in which the elite would essentially include those theologians who were equipped to and did participate in the creation of official orthodoxy as well as those intimately aware of these theologians' debates. This definition would miss out on the sense that the vast majority of, if not all, medieval Christians saw no fundamental difference between their local priest and great theologians like Abelard or Aquinas, and thus considered both to be just as meaningfully orthodox as each other.<sup>154</sup> Similarly, a modified literate-illiterate model—one that might equate literacy with the ability to and practice of meaningfully engaging with theological texts—would be insufficient as it would overlook the extent to which practical religiosity was relegated to local discretion. Moreover, it would ignore a real difference in terms of interpretive reading dynamics between the moderately literate local clerics and their illiterate lay counterparts. Thus it seems that my model of local circles of interpretation is the best for explaining regional variations in unorthodoxies.

Another potentially more concerning objection to my argument is that perhaps medieval Christians did not experience many instances of practical religion (especially white magic and healing) as religious at all, but rather as extra-ecclesiastic pragmatic practices. Making such an objection has several advantages. It maintains the historiography asserting a lay-clerical split regarding religion, since this area, which the laity and clerics are negotiating together, would be non-religious, and thus theology (on which the laity and clergy were likely separate) would be the only or main category of religion. It creates a division between rationalizing the supernatural and religion per se, one that appeals to modern sensibili-

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<sup>154</sup> They likely did account for the difference between a local priest and someone on a higher ecclesiastic rank, e.g. the difference between a local deacon and the Archbishop. However, these higher ranked officials, as we have mentioned above, rarely visited the peripheral communities. Furthermore, much of the theology originated from the universities, in which the theologians were regular priests. It is also possible that they might have thought that all priests were equal but if one had preached falsely to them he was not a *real* priest—in this case, the extent to which someone was reliable could only be established after the fact.

ties. And, finally, it works with a retrospective view of history working backwards from Lyndal Roper's influential argument that Reformation morality was essentially a continuation of secular guild laws.<sup>155</sup>

And yet, I think that this objection ultimately does not detract from my argument. It appears that this objection would trade on an assumption of a lay-clerical split, in that the clergy *making the ecclesiastic morals and rulings* would see themselves as separate from their locality in a meaningful way regarding practical religion. But, as I have argued, the laity and the clergy negotiated practical rituals together *locally*. Thus, the retrospective argument would be misapplied: it functions along the actual lay-clerical split,<sup>156</sup> arguing that lay morality and conceptions were different from these elite legal conceptions. This is likely the case in cities, however the evidence suggests that local rural clergy did not broadly stray from the laity's *mentalité*, but rather shared it. Thus, a contentious shift in Augsburg—a city with a robust ecclesiastic apparatus<sup>157</sup>—would have been neither contentious nor a shift in a rural locality. Rather, lay and clerical practice had been merged as communal practice. Perhaps for some issues the retrospective view is better: the morality of marriage would have been different between clergy, forbidden to marry, and the laity, for whom marriage was paramount.<sup>158</sup> Yet for issues with which clergy and laity were similarly involved such as agricultural ritual, saint worship, and beneficent magic, it seems that the local circle of interpretation applies. Asserting this has the benefit of explaining how so many variations from orthodoxy existed in a world that had been “so thoroughly Christianized that” Christians who practiced ex-pagan rites, and *a fortiori* heterodox Christian practices, “would have thought of them as essentially Christian and would not even have been conscious of their pagan [or heterodox] elements.”<sup>159</sup>

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to address a specific issue—local views of beliefs that could be classified at some point as unorthodox—

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<sup>155</sup> This would mean that medieval society was essentially less *religious* (contra less orthodox) than initially thought, since the medieval people would be more inclined to draw a sharper (and more secular) line between day to day life and the spiritual world. See Lyndal Roper, *The Holy Household: Women and Morals in Reformation Augsburg*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), esp. chapter 4.

<sup>156</sup> That between the *central clergy* and the laity, which perhaps for argumentative purposes might include local clergy.

<sup>157</sup> Roper, *The Holy Household*, 9-10.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, 133-42.

<sup>159</sup> Kieckhefer, “Rationality of Medieval Magic,” 830 n. 70.

over broad temporal, geographic, and evidential bases.<sup>160</sup> This paper does not argue that a localized lens is always—or even most of the time—the best method of negotiating the medieval world. It is true that much of medieval culture, especially surrounding hard heresy, literature, and solid dogma—i.e., the aspects which the Church did insist upon, e.g. the necessity of baptism for salvation—did work along interpretive circles divided between the clerics and the laity or the literate population and the illiterate population.

However, I have demonstrated that shifting the interpretive lens when viewing the nuances of medieval religion aids in clarifying the problems peculiar to the topic of medieval religiosity that are left unaddressed by the usual interpretive circles. These problems may not be limited to the unorthodoxies described above, but likely apply to practical medieval conceptions of ritual in general. That is to say, based on this investigation, it seems reasonable to anticipate that both clerics and the laity experienced practical religious beliefs locally, regardless of the ritual's orthodoxy.<sup>161</sup> Medieval society was localized, ritualized, and conservative. Its people resided in a world saturated by supernatural power, symbolism, and custom. Until the twelfth century, the Church, which had been the major institution of the previous millennium, had been concerned with theoretical dogma within its seminary cloisters and basic belief among the flock, neglecting doctrinal specificity on quotidian practice. These practices then—among

<sup>160</sup> As in the initial discussion, I consider these bases not to be remarkably problematic; much of the area in question inherited a common Germanic tradition with Roman influences, and due to the conservative nature of society, there would not be too much change. Further, an emphasis on data from before the Reformation or from areas not greatly affected by the Reformation helps focus the argument on Catholic Europe specifically. By focusing on this segment of predominantly Catholic Europe, we can hope to understand life in late medieval Europe before the Reformation (or its effects). Due to the nature of this argument, in the spirit of the (controversial) Semitic philologist Ernst Renan, any reader who thinks the word “perhaps” has been used too infrequently may supply it at her own discretion. (potentially unnecessary final sentence? I like it, but it might not fit the tone of the journal)

<sup>161</sup> This is a more speculative point, and will be on infirm ground unless deep archival research is pursued—even then, results would be uncertain. The idea is that perhaps just as medieval Christians considered their *unorthodox* saint saintly, they might *in the same way* experience their *orthodox* saint saintly. In other words, if official recognition did not particularly bother local Christians—because these aspects of religion were negotiated locally—then it should not have mattered to them whether or not their saint was officially recognized. If this was the case, then official saints were experienced in the same way as unofficial saints, thus *both* were experienced as specifically local iterations of religion. In terms of source basis, it would be quite difficult to establish this point as we would not even be aided by inquisitorial materials or other notations of local variation as there would not be variation at all, instead just a normal factor perceived in a certain way.

them healing, marriage, specific worship, and practical implementations of the supernatural (white magic)—were supplied by and determined within local communities. This was the case both for the laity and for the local clergy, who often served the community from which they came. The intellectual isolation on the issues of practical religiosity insulated local practices, guiding them along in separate, and often slower, ways than those of the central Church. Thus, variations from orthodoxy, while considered unorthodox by outside inquisitors and sometimes bishops, were viewed as precisely orthodox by their local practitioners, priests and their neighbors alike.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> It is likely that these practical variations were even held more strongly as orthodox than some sort of shared (between the local and central churches) theological dogma because the practical variations actually *affected* the lives of their practitioners.

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