

REWRITING *ECCLÉSIA PRIMITIVA*: PETER OF JOHN OLIVI'S IMAGE OF  
EARLY CHRISTIANITY AND THE FORMATION OF DISSENT IN THE  
WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN AROUND 1300

CHRISTIAN HOFFARTH

THE EARLY CHURCH AS AN IDEA

In antiquity the linchpin of all criticism of private property—besides the popular but rather vague Pythagorean proverb *amicorum communia omnia*—was the community of goods Plato intended for the ruling class of guardians in his Republic.<sup>1</sup> However, in places and ages informed by Christianity, deviation from common systems of ownership has always been based on the alleged communism of the early Christians.<sup>2</sup> The notion of a renunciation

<sup>1</sup> On the highly controversial Pythagorean communism, cf. Edwin L. MINAR, “Pythagorean Communism,” *TAPA* 75 (1944): 34–46. For its tradition over the centuries, until the proverb mentioned above finally arrived at first place in the *Adagia* of Erasmus of Rotterdam, see also Kathy EDEN, *Friends Hold All Things in Common: Tradition, Intellectual Property, and the Adages of Erasmus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). For a first orientation on Plato's *Republic*, see Julia ANNAS, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981). An overview of criticism of property and ideas of a community of goods in antiquity and among early Christians is provided by Manfred WACHT, “Gütergemeinschaft,” *RAC* 13 (1986): 1–59. An epoch-spanning approach to ideas of property and their antagonisms is offered by Peter GARNSEY, *Thinking about Property. From Antiquity to the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Besides other ancient socio-political ideals, the Pythagorean topos could have been an immediate influence on the Lucan narrative of the early Christian community of goods. Being familiar with Greek tradition, Luke may have intended his readers to believe in satisfaction of their desires in Christianity. Gerhard SCHNEIDER, *Die Apostelgeschichte. I. Teil: Einleitung, Kommentar zu Kap. 1,1–8,40* (Freiburg: Herder, 1980), 290–1, tries to prove the dependency by pointing to linguistic agreements between Greek witnesses of the Pythagorean ideal, Diogenes Laertius and Iamblichus, as well as Plato and Aristotle on one and Acts 2:44 on the other hand. An early example for the early Christians serving as a role model concerning property can be found in the second chapter of the *Life of Anthony* by Athanasius of Alexandria (ca. 298–373) that was available to the West in a Latin translation of Evagrius of Antioch. Here Acts 4 plays an important part in St. Anthony's conversion. See Pascal H. E. BERTRAND, “Die Evagriusübersetzung der Vita Antonii: Rezeption–Überlieferung–Edition. Unter

of property by the first believers in Jerusalem was derived from chapters two and four of the Acts of the Apostles, where the Evangelist Luke describes the Pentecostal community as a spiritual enclave, providing its members with all daily necessities:

184 · *Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.* [Acts 2: 44–45]

*Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.* [Acts 4: 32–35]

What may have constituted the historical nucleus of this narration (if any) has always been a highly controversial subject in modern biblical scholarship.<sup>3</sup> Late ancient and medieval scholars, however, took these passages as clear instructions for those wishing to closely follow the ideal of Christ and the apostles.<sup>4</sup> Characteristics of this role model included fraternity, charity, and

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besonderer Berücksichtigung der Vitas Patrum-Tradition" (PhD diss., Utrecht University, 2005), 160–1: *recordabatur quomodo et apostoli, omnibus spretis, secuti fuissent Saluatorem. Et multi, in Actibus Apostolorum, facultatibus suis uenditis, pretia ad pedeorum detulissent egentibus partienda. ... Talia secum uoluens, intrauit ecclesiam et accidit ut tunc Euangelium legeretur, in quo Dominus dicit ad diuitem: 'Si vis perfectus esse, uade, uende omnia tua quaecumque habes, et da pauperibus, et ueni, sequere me, et habebis thesaurum in caelis.' ... Statimque egressus, possessionem quam habebat ... uicinis largitus est.*

<sup>3</sup> The vast literature on this question cannot possibly be summarized. Some guidance is given by Martin LEUTZSCH, "Erinnerung an die Gütergemeinschaft," in *Sozialismus in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Richard FABER (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1994), 77–93, and Hans-Joachim KRAUS, "Aktualität des 'urchristlichen Kommunismus'?", in *Freispruch und Freiheit. Theologische Aufsätze für Walter Kreck zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Hans-Georg GEYER (Munich: Kaiser-Verlag, 1973), 306–27.

<sup>4</sup> Most likely it was John Cassian (ca. 360–after 430) who first applied the term *ecclesia primitiva* to what he assumed Luke's words to mean. Cf. Glenn W. OLSEN, "The *ecclesia primitiva* in John Cassian, the Ps. Jerome commentary on Mark and Bede," in *Biblical Studies in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Claudio LEONARDI and Giovanni ORLANDI (Florence: SISMEL, Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2005), 5–27, esp. 13–4. Others, like Augustine and the Venerable Bede, followed his example in using these verses to

the community of goods. Thus, from the early days of Christian society, the 'primitive church' became a wide-spread topos on which the monastic *vita communis* was shaped.<sup>5</sup> In accordance, the first Christians were seen as the first monks and, based on that, the precept of propertylessness was understood to be valid for monks alone. While the idea of a community of goods outside the 'island cloister,' even extended to all mankind, was not completely unknown, it was not counted as a possibility but as a lost primordial state.<sup>6</sup> Only in the later Middle Ages and increasingly during the Renaissance some groups and individuals elevated this idea to a social option, whereby the example of the Acts of the Apostles always remained noticeable, if not highly emphasized.<sup>7</sup> From there, eventually avenues of thought were opened up which much later led to the ideology of Christian socialism. After all, socialist and Marxist thinkers, like Wilhelm WEITLING or Karl KAUTSKY, even tried to substantiate a direct tradition between early Christians, medieval religious dissenters and modern socialists.<sup>8</sup>

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describe their image of the pure and pristine form of the Church as established by Jesus Christ. On Bede's interpretation of the early Church, cf. OLSEN, "Bede as historian: the evidence from his observations on the life of the first Christian community at Jerusalem," *JEH* 33 (1982): 519–30; on Augustine, cf. Luc VERHEIJEN, *Saint Augustine's Monasticism in the Light of Acts 4, 32–35* (Villanova, PA: Villanova University Press, 1979). On the *ecclesia primitiva* in general, see also numerous other articles by OLSEN, especially "The idea of *ecclesia primitiva* in the writings of twelfth-century canonists," *Traditio* 25 (1969): 61–8, and "The image of the first community of Christians at Jerusalem in the time of Lanfranc and Anselm," in *Les mutations socio-culturelles au tournant des XIe–XIIe siècles*, ed. Raymonde FOREVILLE (Paris: CNRS, 1984), 341–51. Furthermore, an account on *ecclesia primitiva* in Patristics with special emphasis on Augustine is given by Pier C. BORI, *Chiesa primitiva: L'immagine della comunità delle origini* (*Atti 2, 42–47, 4, 32–37*) *nella storia della chiesa antica* (Brescia: Paideia, 1974).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Hans-Jürgen DERDA, *Vita communis: Studien zur Geschichte einer Lebensform in Mittelalter und Neuzeit* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. the introduction to Bernhard TÖPFER, *Urzustand und Sündenfall in der mittelalterlichen Gesellschafts- und Staatstheorie* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1999), 2–4, and several other assertions throughout this monumental work.

<sup>7</sup> One might think, first of all, of dissident groups like the Apostolics, Dulcinians, Lollards, Taborites or the radical Anabaptists of Münster, but the respective ideas are also prominently featured in the writings of the 'Upper Rhine Revolutionary,' Sebastian Franck, Thomas More or Tommaso Campanella. See Ferdinand SEIBT, *Utopica. Modelle totaler Sozialplanung* (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1972).

<sup>8</sup> WEITLING is widely considered one of the first German theorists of communism. In his *Die Menschheit, wie sie ist und wie sie sein sollte*, written in the eighteen-thirties, he

To make all this possible, at some point a new understanding of the Lucan verses must have emerged, an exegetical re-writing that allowed the early Christian community of goods to be read as a timeless divine commandment for all Christianity. Certainly, monocausal explanations of how this came to be would fall short. Instead, a combination of innovative and progressive ideas must be surmised that made such new ways of thinking possible. Or, to speak with Arthur O. LOVEJOY, a gradual rearrangement of unit-ideas must have taken place.<sup>9</sup> In what follows, I will attempt to identify at least one significant step within this process. The aim, however, will not be so much to concretely determine the way of tradition and transformation, but rather to highlight, by reference to respective texts, crucial landmarks of the rearrangement of the topos *ecclesia primitiva* in terms of the history of ideas.

To begin with, it might be reasonable to focus on a historic episode during which the attitude of early Christianity towards property as well as the question of whether property was held by Christ and the apostles was most sharply discussed and literally dealt with in all seriousness: the so-called Franciscan poverty controversy. The following investigations will show how a small, seem-

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interprets Jesus as a religious communist and the early Christian community of goods as a program of revolution. KAUTSKY, a social democrat and Marxist thinker of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, authored several works on the very same topic, the most prominent being *Die Vorläufer des neueren Sozialismus* (1895) and *Der Ursprung des Christentums* (1908). Much more learned than WEITLING, KAUTSKY tried by an academic (though positivistic) approach to make early Christianity appear as proletariat and generally read medieval religious dissidents as precursors of modern communism.

<sup>9</sup> In his famous *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936), 3–4, LOVEJOY stated that the history of ideas “dealing with the history of philosophical doctrines ... cuts into the hard-and-fast individual systems and, for its own purpose, breaks them up into their component elements, into what may be called their unit-ideas.” He justifies this method by arguing that “the total body of doctrine of any philosopher or school is almost always a complex and heterogeneous aggregate—and often in ways which the philosopher himself does not suspect. ... One of the results of the quest of the unit-ideas in such a compound is ... bound to be a livelier sense of the fact that most philosophic systems are original or distinctive rather in their patterns than in their components. ... The seeming novelty of many a system is due solely to the novelty of the application or arrangement of the old elements which enter into it.” LOVEJOY’S theory of the history of ideas is not undisputed and has been especially challenged by the so-called Cambridge School around Quentin SKINNER. Nonetheless, LOVEJOY’S terminology still has its value as far as it can be of great help to trace the development of a specific idea in the long run.

ingly unimportant exegetical assertion could become a starting point not only for theological, but also for socio-theoretical transformations of extraordinary momentousness and, in so doing, contribute to a reevaluation of medieval biblical exegesis for modern historiography, aiming to provoke closer attention to this unjustly neglected source-genre.<sup>10</sup>

#### ECCLESIA PRIMITIVA AND FRANCISCAN POVERTY

In a scene from Umberto ECO’S brilliant novel *The Name of the Rose*, the most important actors and conflicting positions of the poverty controversy are summarized in a nutshell.<sup>11</sup>

*The session was opened by Abo, who deemed it opportune to sum up recent events. He recalled how in the year of our Lord 1322 the general chapter*

<sup>10</sup> Major approaches to medieval biblical exegesis are, from a historical point of view, Beryl SMALLEY, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1952); from a theological point of view, Henri DE LUBAC, *Exégèse médiévale: les quatre sens de l’Écriture*, 4 vols. (Paris: Aubier, 1959–64), and Henning G. REVENTLOW, *Epochen der Bibelauslegung*, vol. 2: *Von der Spätantike bis zum Ausgang des Mittelalters* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1994). To these should be added Gilbert DAHAN, *L’Exégèse chrétienne de la Bible en Occident médiéval, XIIe–XIVe siècles* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1999). Since Robert E. LERNER, “Zur Einführung,” in *Neue Richtungen in der hoch- und spätmittelalterlichen Bibelexegese*, ed. Robert E. LERNER (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1996), ix–x, at ix, noted in 1993 that “der Bereich der mittelalterlichen Exegese nach wie vor sträflich vernachlässigt [wird],” scholarship certainly produced quite a few new studies referring to and drawing on medieval exegesis. The overall situation, however, is pretty much the same, as the majority of medievalists still seems to be unaware of the significance of medieval bible studies to our deeper understanding of the patterns of medieval thinking and its transformations.

<sup>11</sup> The subject matter and the course of the controversy are explored in detail by Malcolm D. LAMBERT, “The Franciscan crisis under John XXII,” *Franciscan Studies* 32 (1972): 123–43; Andrea TABARRONI, *Paupertas Christi et apostolorum: l’ideale franciscano in discussione (1322–1324)* (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medioevo, 1990); Ulrich HORST, *Evangelische Armut und päpstliches Lebramt. Minoritentheologen im Konflikt mit Papst Johannes XXII. (1316–34)* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1996). From Bonagratia of Bergamo’s perspective, see Eva L. WITTNEBEN, *Bonagratia von Bergamo. Franziskanerjurist und Wortführer seines Ordens im Streit mit Papst Johannes XXII* (Leiden: Brill, 2003). See also, most recently, Jürgen MIETHKE, “Der ‘theoretische Armutsstreit’ im 14. Jahrhundert. Papst und Franziskanerorden im Konflikt um die Armut,” in *Gelobte Armut—Armutskonzepte der franziskanischen Ordensfamilie vom Mittelalter bis in die Gegenwart*, ed. Heinz-Dieter HEIMANN (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2012), 243–83.

of the Friars Minor, gathered at Perugia under the leadership of Michael of Cesena, had established with mature and diligent deliberation that, to set an example of the perfect life, Christ and, following his teaching, the apostles had never owned anything in common, whether as property or feud, and this truth was a matter of Catholic faith and doctrine, deduced from various passages in the canonical books. Wherefore renunciation of ownership of all things was meritorious and holy, and the early fathers of the church militant had followed this holy rule. [...] However, Abo added, the following year the Pope issued the decretal *Ad conditorem canonum*, against which Brother Bonagratia of Bergamo appealed, considering it contrary to the interests of his order.<sup>12</sup>

As reflected here, the Franciscan party with its spokesmen Michael of Cesena (ca. 1270–1342), Bonagratia of Bergamo (ca. 1265–1340) and William of Ockham (ca. 1285–1347) insisted on the absolute propertylessness of Christ and the apostles, while their adversary, Pope John XXII (ca. 1249–1334, Pope from 1316), held the exactly opposite view. Behind this controversy lay nothing less than the question of the *raison d'être* of the Franciscan lifestyle. The latter rested on the desire for exact imitation of Christ's life, as well as on the aspiration to own nothing, neither individually nor in common.<sup>13</sup> Put the other way round, proving by the words of Scripture that Jesus and his closest circle had had any possessions would have meant to completely cutting the ground from under the Franciscans' feet, or at least its more rigorist branch, the so-called Spirituals.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Umberto ECO, *The Name of the Rose*, trans. William WEAVER (London: Vintage, 2004), 338–9.

<sup>13</sup> These key aspects of Franciscanism are vividly combined, for example, in the first chapter of the oldest extant rule, the so-called *Regula non bullata* of 1221, where it reads: *Regula et vita istorum fratrum haec est, scilicet vivere in obedientia in castitate et sine proprio et Domini nostri Iesu Christi doctrinam et vestigia sequi*. See *Die Regula non bullata der Minderbrüder*, ed. David E. FLOOD (Werl: Dietrich-Coelde-Verlag, 1967), 55. The precept to possess nothing, either individually or in common, most distinctly is singled out by the bull *Quo elongati*. Issued in 1230 by Franciscan-friendly Pope Gregory IX in support of the Franciscan version of *vita religiosa* and for firm establishment of some problematic matters, it declares that the friars *nec in communi nec in speciale debent proprietatem habere*. See Herbert GRUNDMANN, "Die Bulle 'Quo elongati' Papst Gregors IX.," *AFrH* 54 (1961): 1–25, at 22.

<sup>14</sup> For information on the Spirituals one can exclusively point to David BURR, *The Spiritual Franciscans. From Protest to Persecution in the Century after Saint Francis* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001).

There is, of course, nothing novel about this. Not only did historical scholarship produce various in-depth studies on the topic,<sup>15</sup> but these are also the issues on which ECO shaped his great story about William of Baskerville and his novice Adso of Melk. Even the fact that the exposition of some Gospel passages and particularly the dispute over Christ's purse<sup>16</sup> figured prominently in this debate should not come as a surprise, at least since ECO's work. However, what is only suggested by ECO is that in the course of the said conflicts, the understanding of *ecclesia primitiva* was controversially discussed as well, whereby on the part of the Franciscans a remarkable reappraisal of the alleged community of goods was expressed that represents an important step in the process of transferring the idea of an all-embracing Christian community of goods from the next world to this one.

In order to understand the significance of these conceptions, it seems helpful first to recall the basic tension between Franciscanism and Early Christianity. This issue, so far mainly discussed in the framework of disagreement about the conceptual proximity of original Franciscan ideals to classic coenobitism, still is, and probably will remain, highly controversial. Actually, it seems to be more a question of belief than of history.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, it will not be further

<sup>15</sup> See n. 11 above.

<sup>16</sup> The debate about Christ's *loculi* alluded especially to Jn 12:6 and 13:29. Cf. WITTNEBEN, *Bonagratia*, 114–6; Robert J. KARRIS, "The place of the money bag in the secular-mendicant controversy at Paris," *Franciscan Studies* 68 (2010): 21–38.

<sup>17</sup> Francis himself seems to have been ambivalent about that question. On one hand, when cardinal John of St. Paul asked him in 1209 to decide for the monastic or the ascetic lifestyle he refused, because *non persuasa despiciendo, sed alia pie affectando, altiore desiderio ferebatur*. This story is told in the *Vita prima* of Thomas of Celano, the first biography of St. Francis. See Tommaso da Celano, *Vita prima sancti Francisci*, in *Analec̃ta Franciscana* 10 (Quaracchi: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1926–40), 1–117, at 26 (1 Cel 33). Another time, in an early general chapter, when his brothers asked him to adopt one of the existing rules, the *Legenda Perusina* reports his answer as: *Fratres mei, fratres mei, Deus vocavit me per viam humilitatis et ostendit michi viam simplicitatis: nolo quod nominetis michi Regulam aliquam, neque sancti Augustini, nec sancti Bernardi, nec sancti Benedicti*. See *Legenda Perusina*, ed. Marino BIGARONI, *Compilatio Assisiensis dagli scritti di fr. Leone e compagni su S. Francesco d'Assisi. dal Ms. 1046 di Perugia*, 2nd edn (S. Maria degli Angeli: Porziuncola, 1992), 56. On the other hand, the Poverello set great value upon his movement being accepted by the Church as equal to the other orders, and even when he, despite his personal opposition, had to watch it rapidly develop into classical schemes of monasticism, he never broke with it. Two very different views on the original Franciscan ideals are given by Kajetan ESSER, *Anfänge und ursprüngliche Zielsetzungen des Ordens der Minderbrüder* (Leiden: Brill, 1966) and Herbert GRUNDMANN, *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter*:

discussed here. Nevertheless, it has to be noted that the papally approved Franciscan rule of 1223, in contrast to all other major monastic rules, makes no mention of the *ecclesia primitiva* narratives from the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>18</sup> The same applies to the earlier version of the order's statutes, the *Regula non bullata* of 1221, although this is densely interspersed with biblical quotations. This suggests that St. Francis and his intimates deliberately chose not to make the life of the early Christians an example for their movement. The system of communal ownership chronicled in Acts could not be an ideal for them who did not want to appropriate anything even in common. But since the *topos ecclesia primitiva*, as said above, had immense weight with regulated life and formed the core of the monks' self perception as well as their perception by others, the Franciscan movement—rapidly grown and 'monastified' during the thirteenth century—had to accept being measured against it.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, starting with the second generation, Franciscans themselves also transferred this traditional interpretive pattern to their group.<sup>20</sup> Finally, during the Franciscan poverty controversy the conflict between the general understanding of the passages from Acts and the *Regula bullata* vigorously surfaced.

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*Untersuchungen über die geschichtlichen Zusammenhänge zwischen Ketzerei, den Bettelorden und der religiösen Frauenbewegungen im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert und über die geschichtlichen Grundlagen der deutschen Mystik* (Berlin: Matthiesen 1935). Cf. also Achim WESJOHANN, *Mendikantische Gründungserzählungen im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert. Mythen als Element institutioneller Eigengeschichtsschreibung der mittelalterlichen Franziskaner, Dominikaner und Augustiner-Eremiten* (Berlin: LIT, 2012), 164–170.

<sup>18</sup> *Regula bullata*, in use up to this day, was approved by Pope Honorius III on 29 November 1223 with his bull *Solet annuere*. The bull carries the full text of the rule. *Solet annuere*, ed. Joannis H. SBARALEA, *Bullarium Franciscanum* 1 (Rome: Typis Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, 1754), 15–9. A concordance of biblical citations in medieval monastic rules is provided by Christoph JOEST, *Bibelstellenkonkordanz zu den wichtigsten älteren Mönchsregeln* (Steenbrugge: Abbatia S. Petri, 1994). On the relevant passages of Acts, see JOEST, *Bibelstellenkonkordanz*, 105.

<sup>19</sup> In 1226, Jacques de Vitry, the first outside commentator on the Franciscans, already intimately associates the movement with the primitive church. See *Lettres de Jacques de Vitry, 1160/1170–1240, évêque de Saint-Jean d'Acre*, ed. Robert B. C. HUYGENS (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 75: *Ipsi autem secundum formam primitive ecclesie vivunt, de quibus scriptum est: multitudinis credentium erat cor unum et anima una*. Cf. ESSER, *Anfänge*, 47–52.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas of Celano, for instance, several times uses terms like *forma ecclesiae primitivae, vita apostolica*, and the like to describe his order. See Duane V. LAPANSKI, *Perfectio evangelica. Eine begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung im frühfranziskanischen Schrifttum* (Munich: Schöningh, 1974), 252–3.

In his bull *Quia vir reprobus*, issued in 1329 and therefore pertaining to the last chapter of the debate, John XXII opposing Michael of Cesena stated:

*If he means that no believer had individual ownership, what he says is true, in respect of the time of which the Scripture speaks; because Acts 4[:32–] says explicitly 'None of them said that anything he possessed was his.' But if he means (as he does mean, as is quite clear from what he puts forward later) that the believers had no ownership of anything even in common, he expressly contradicts these Scriptures, since they say that 'to them', that is to the believers, 'all things which they possessed were common' among themselves.*<sup>21</sup>

Remarkably, here the apple of discord is not, as it was in the gospel-related debate, Christ's and the apostles' possessions, but the possessions of the *believers*. And indeed Michael of Cesena had previously advanced exactly this—to say the least—unconventional view, claiming and trying to verify that the whole group of believers, including, of course, the apostles, would not have had any possessions in common, but merely collective *use* of necessities. The relevant statement is to be found in his *Appellatio minor* from 1328 where he asserts:

*They had ownership of no temporal thing, neither a thing consumable by use, nor a thing not consumable by use. For they sold things not consumable by use, namely possessions, fields, homes, and resources [...] and retained them neither individually, nor in their community. But they held in common the things which the law swears (in Institutes, De usu fructu, Constituitur)<sup>22</sup> are things consumable by use—namely, the monies taken for the price of sold things and bread, about which special mention is made there: And it was divided to everyone as each had need, nor did anyone of them say that something which he possessed was his, that is, one's*

<sup>21</sup> Ioannes XXII, *Quia vir reprobus*, ed. Conrad EUBEL, *Bullarium Franciscanum* 5 (Rome: Typis Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, 1898), 408–49, at 411: *Si intelligat, quod in speciali proprietatem nullus credentium habebat, verum est, quod dicit, pro tempore illo, quo dicta scriptura loquitur; quia hoc dixit expresse scriptura praedicta Act. 4 cap., cum dicit: Nec quisquam eorum, quae possidebat, aliquid suum esse dicebat. Si autem intelligat (sicut intelligit, ut per ea, quae proponit inferius, clare patet), quod credentes nullius rei proprietatem habebant etiam in communi, scripturis praedictis etiam contradicit expresse, cum dicat, quod illis scilicet credentibus omnia, quae possidebant, erant communia*. Trans. John KILCULLEN and John SCOTT, *A Translation of William of Ockham's Work of Ninety Days*, vol. 1 (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), 98–9.

<sup>22</sup> *Institutiones Iustiniani* 2, 4, 2, ed. Philip E. HUSCHKE (Leipzig: Teubner, 1868), 47–8.

own, but all things were common for them. And thus each one of them had the use of things consumable by use without ownership or lordship—or separate from ownership and lordship.<sup>23</sup>

As a reply to *Quia vir reprobus*, William of Ockham prepared a copious tract called *Opus nonaginta dierum*.<sup>24</sup> Drawing sharp distinctions, while counterchecking the biblical passages at issue against canon and civil law, the philosopher fully supported Cesena's reading. He stated "that any one of them—that is of the converts, Apostles, and disciples—had use of fact of things consumable by use separate from all individual or common 'full and free' lordship, which is [also] called 'civil and worldly'."<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Michael of Cesena, *Appellatio in forma minore*, ed. Gedeon GÁL and FLOOD, *Nicolaus Minorita: Chronica. Documentation on Pope John XXII, Michael of Cesena and the Poverty of Christ with Summaries in English. A Source Book* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1996), 429–56, at 432–3: *quod nullius rei temporalis nec usus consumptibilis nec rei non consumptibilis usu, proprietatem habebant, quia res non consumptibiles usu, scilicet possessiones, agros, domos et substantias . . . vendebant et ipsas nec in speciali nec in eorum communitate retinebant. Illas autem res quas lex in I. [2.4] De usu fructu, [2] Constituitur, usu consumptibiles esse testatur, scilicet pecunias pro pretio rerum venditarum acceptas et panes, de quibus ibi habetur mentio specialis, in communi habebant, [Act. 4, 32] et dividebantur singulis prout cuique opus erat, et nullus ex eis aliquid suum, id est proprium, esse dicebat, sed omnia erant illis communia. Et sic quilibet eorum habebat usum rerum usu consumptibilium absque proprietate et dominio, sive a proprietate seu dominio seperatum.* Trans. Jonathan ROBINSON, *The Shorter Appeal of Michael of Cesena, Extracted from the Longer Appeal*, 4–5, accessed March 25, 2016, [http://individual.utoronto.ca/jwrobinson/translations/michael\\_appellatio-minor.pdf](http://individual.utoronto.ca/jwrobinson/translations/michael_appellatio-minor.pdf). On Cesena's somewhat inconsistent views on the economics of the apostles, the disciples, and the multitude of believers as related to the religious orders, see ROBINSON, *William of Ockham's Early Theory of Property Rights in Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 137–47.

<sup>24</sup> Guillelmi de Ockham, *Opus nonaginta dierum*, ed. Hilary S. OFFLER, *Guillelmi de Ockham opera politica*, 2 vols. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1940–63), vol. 1, 287–374, and vol. 2. On the notion of *dominion* and *use* in the *Opus nonaginta dierum*, see in detail ROBINSON, *Ockham's Early Theory*, passim. Further aspects of the work, as well as its historical importance, are discussed in Takashi SHOGIMEN, *Ockham and Political Discourse in the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), and MIETHKE, *Ockhams Weg zur Sozialphilosophie* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1969), 428–535.

<sup>25</sup> Ockham, *Opus nonaginta dierum*, vol. 1, 341: *quod quilibet istorum, scilicet conversorum et Apostolorum ac discipulorum ipsorum Apostolorum, habuit usum facti rerum consumptibilium usu ab omni dominio speciali et communi pleno et libero, quod vocatur dominium civile et mundanum, seperatum.* Trans. KILCULLEN and SCOTT, *A Translation*, vol. 1, 140.

Thus, in the poverty controversy the Franciscans most explicitly contradicted the traditional image of the early Church on two crucial points: first, in stating that there would have been a law-free or, respectively, jusnaturalistic community of use, and second, by levelling the previously undisputed social hierarchy between the apostles and the multitude of believers as well as between the two groups' economic practices. The confidence with which both Cesena and Ockham advanced these positions and the stress they lay on those arguments in their polemics indicate they had not developed them especially for discounting the papal attacks, but could draw on established exegetical interpretations. Looking for their source almost inevitably leads us to the most productive Franciscan bible interpreter of the thirteenth century and first ever Franciscan exegete of Acts:<sup>26</sup> the controversial brother Peter of John Olivi.

#### OLIVI'S COMMENTARY ON ACTS IN CONTEXT

Born in Sérignan in 1247/48, Peter of John Olivi became a Franciscan friar at the age of twelve, studied in Paris and came to be a prominent lecturer of his Order in Florence, probably in Montpellier, and in Narbonne, where he died in 1298.<sup>27</sup> One of his most famous students was none other than Ubertino of

<sup>26</sup> To be exact, there have indeed been earlier Franciscan approaches to Acts. Alexander of Villedieu composed a *Summarium Biblicum cum commentario* that included Acts. However, this was not an exegesis in the proper sense, but a metrical summary of the Bible for purpose of memorisation. Similar goes for a *Biblia cum scholiis* attributed to Anthony of Padua. A more or less complete list of medieval writings on Acts can be found in Paul F. STUEHRENBURG, "The study of Acts before the Reformation: a bibliographic introduction," *NT* 29 (1987): 100–36. Also to be consulted is Friedrich STEGMÜLLER, *Repertorium biblicum medii aevi*, II vols. (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1950–80), accessed March 25, 2016, <http://repbib.uni-trier.de>. Looking through the lists of thirteenth century scholarship on Acts, one notices a striking dominance of Dominicans. For now, however, this remains a finding without explanation.

<sup>27</sup> Until now, the only attempts for a full biography of Olivi have been presented by Franz EHRLE, "Petrus Johannis Olivi, sein Leben und seine Schriften," *ALKgMA* 3 (1887): 409–552 (to be supplemented by idem, "Die Spiritualen, ihr Verhältnis zum Franciscanerorden und zu den Fraticellen," *ALKgMA* 1 (1885): 509–69, *ALKgMA* 2 (1886): 106–64, 249–336, *ALKgMA* 3 (1887): 553–623, *ALKgMA* 4 (1888): 1–190, and idem, "Zur Vorgeschichte des Concils von Vienne," *ALKgMA* 2 (1886): 353–416, *ALKgMA* 3 (1887): 1–195), and BURR, *The Persecution of Peter Olivi* (Philadelphia, PA: American Philosophical Society, 1976). Additionally, BURR wrote further excellent

Casale (1259–ca. 1330), whom Eco made the headstrong guard of the Spirituals' ideas.<sup>28</sup> As a theologian and philosopher, Olivi created an extensive and fascinating oeuvre<sup>29</sup> that once prompted Warren LEWIS to call him “das bestgehütete Geheimnis des 13. Jahrhunderts.”<sup>30</sup> Olivi's intellectual profile takes shape in critical dialogue with his great teacher Bonaventure and in conflict with Thomas Aquinas, whom he met as an equal in various disputes.<sup>31</sup> But the

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monographs and numerous articles on Olivi's life, work, and teachings. See Michael F. CUSATO, “A retrospective on the work of David Burr,” *Oliviana* 1 (2003), accessed March 25, 2016, <http://oliviana.revues.org/7>, with a bibliography up to 1999, <http://oliviana.revues.org/12>. Before BURR, a re-evaluation had already been undertaken by FLOOD, “Petrus Iohannis Olivi. Ein neues Bild des angeblichen Spirituellenführers,” *Wissenschaft und Weisheit* 34 (1971): 130–41. Newer biographical outlines are given, for instance, in Albert SCHMUCKI, *Selbstbesitz und Hingabe. Die Freiheitstheologie des Petrus Iohannis Olivi im Dialog mit dem modernen Freiheitsverständnis* (Mönchengladbach: B. Kühlen, 2009), 27–37, who inventively and convincingly associates Olivi's character with his Southern France homeland. For brief biographical sketches, see also Alain BOUREAU and Sylvain PIRON, introduction to *Pierre de Jean Olivi* (1248–1298). *Pensée scolastique, dissidence spirituelle et société*, ed. Alain BOUREAU and Sylvain PIRON (Paris: J. Vrin, 1999), 9–13; Theo KOBUSCH, *Die Philosophie des Hoch- und Spätmittelalters* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2011), 279–93, esp. 279–80. For bibliographical orientation, see Servus GIEBEN, “Bibliographia Oliviana (1885–1967),” *Colleġanea Franciscana* 38 (1968): 167–95; Vian PAOLO, *Pietro di Giovanni Olivi, Scritti scelti* (Rome: Città Nuova, 1989); BOUREAU and PIRON, ed., *Pierre de Jean Olivi*, 389–99; Catherine KÖNIG-PRALONG et al., “Bibliographie des travaux récents sur Olivi, 2004–2012,” *Oliviana* 4 (2012), accessed March 25, 2016, <http://oliviana.revues.org/696>.

<sup>28</sup> See Raoul MANSELLI, “Pietro di Giovanni Olivi e Ubertino da Casale (A proposito della *Leġtura super Apocalipsim e dell'Arbor vitae crucifixae Iesu*),” *StMed* 6 (1965): 95–122.

<sup>29</sup> Olivi's oeuvre has been so far examined most thoroughly in the unpublished dissertation by PIRON, “Parcours d'un intellectuel franciscain. D'une théologie vers une pensée sociale: l'œuvre de Pierre de Jean Olivi (ca. 1248–1298) et son traité ‘De Contractibus,’” 3 vols. (PhD diss., University of Paris, 1999). See also Antonio CICERI, *Petri Iohannis Olivi opera. Censimento die manoscritti* (Grottaferrata: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1999).

<sup>30</sup> Warren LEWIS, “Freude, Freude! Die Wiederentdeckung der Freude im 13. Jahrhundert: Olivis ‘Lectura super Apocalipsim’ als Blick auf die Endzeit,” in *Ende und Vollendung. Eschatologische Perspektiven im Mittelalter*, ed. Jan A. AERTSEN and Martin PICKAVÉ (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2001), 657–83, at 658.

<sup>31</sup> The conflicts between Olivi and Aquinas, not surprisingly, revolved around the topic of poverty. See Marie-Thérèse D'ALVERNY, “Un adversaire de Saint-Thomas: Petrus Ioannis Olivi,” in *St. Thomas Aquinas, 1274–1974. Commemorative Studies*, vol. 2, ed. Armand A. MAURER et al. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974), 179–218; Jan G. J. VAN DEN EIJNDEN, *Poverty on the Way to God. Thomas Aquinas on*

Friar Minor also was a contentious figure. In the so-called *usus pauper*-controversy he insisted that poor use, i.e., a use of goods limited to necessities and free from any legal claim, was an essential part of the Franciscan vow.<sup>32</sup>

In his concept of *Heilsgeschichte*, Francis and his followers played leading roles on the way to the approaching apocalypse; roles dependent on strict observance of poverty.<sup>33</sup> He laid down this concept especially in his infamous Apocalypse commentary, which was to be condemned on several occasions during and after Olivi's lifetime and ultimately declared heretical by John XXII in 1326.<sup>34</sup>

Among Olivi's lesser known exegetical works one finds what is probably the most extensive and elaborate medieval commentary on the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>35</sup> In this work, hardly taken into account by modern research, he expounds in detail his image of *ecclesia primitiva* that runs contrary to the classic exegesis as well as to the previous Franciscan tradition; and, as will be seen

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*Evangelical Poverty* (Leuven: Peeters, 1994), 198–216; Kevin MADIGAN, “Aquinas and Olivi on evangelical poverty. A medieval debate and its modern significance,” *The Thomist* 61 (1997): 567–86.

<sup>32</sup> On the entire complex of *usus pauper*, see BURR, *Olivi and Franciscan Poverty. The Origins of the Usus Pauper Controversy* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), and more recently Roberto LAMBERTINI, “Die Kontroverse um den usus pauper—Eine Gewissensfrage,” in *Ringeln um die Wahrheit. Gewissenskonflikte in der Christentumsgeschichte*, ed. Mariano DELGADO et al. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2011), 111–20.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Susanne CONRAD, “Franziskanische Armut als Heilsgarantie. Das Zusammenspiel von vita evangelica und Apokalyptik im Armutsverständnis des Petrus Iohannis Olivi,” in *In proposito paupertatis. Studien zum Armutsverständnis bei den mittelalterlichen Bettelorden*, ed. Gert MELVILLE and Annette KEHNEL (Münster: LIT, 2001), 89–99.

<sup>34</sup> The most reliable and sharp account on the *Leġtura super Apocalipsim* comes from BURR, *Olivi's Peaceable Kingdom. A Reading of the Apocalypse Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993). See also MANSELLI, *La ‘Leġtura super Apocalipsim’ di Pietro di Giovanni Olivi. Ricerche sull'escatologismo medioevale* (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medioevo, 1955); LEWIS, “Freude, Freude!”; idem, “Peter John Olivi, author of the *Leġtura super Apocalipsim*: was he heretical?,” in *Pierre de Jean Olivi*, ed. BOUREAU and PIRON, 135–57. After having been announced for decades, an official edition was just recently published: *Petrus Iohannis Olivi, Leġtura super Apocalipsim*, ed. LEWIS (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2015).

<sup>35</sup> Petrus Iohannis Olivi, *Leġtura super Actus Apostolorum*, ed. FLOOD, *Peter of John Olivi on the Acts of the Apostles* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2001) (hereafter LSAA).

below, it seems almost certain that this is where the heterodoxy of Cesena, Ockham, and their fellows originated.

As a matter of fact, scholars have associated Olivi's version of Acts, chapters two and four, with Franciscan positions in the poverty controversy. But they usually only refer to the eighth of Olivi's *Quaestiones de perfectione evangelica*.<sup>36</sup> In this earlier text, all things considered, the author draws much the same conclusions about *ecclesia primitiva* as in his exegetical work. Yet, due to genre and intention, here the issue is discussed only in quite short and widely dispersed passages, paying far less attention to the Lucan wording.<sup>37</sup> It is not until the *Lectura super Actus Apostolorum* (*LSAA*) that one can truly understand the origin of the Minorite's uncommon ideas and his effort to prove them by the words of Scripture. This work alone established a stable foundation which makes Cesena's and Ockham's emphatic insistence on the said arguments seem reasonable. The fact that scholars have linked so far the Franciscan positions, e.g. in the so-called *Manifest of Perugia*,<sup>38</sup> exclusively to Olivi's *QPE 8*, may be either simply due to it having been available in edition considerably earlier than the *LSAA*, or because a much wider circulation of the *Quaestio* among Franciscans in the early fourteenth century was assumed. To what extent this assumption is true is questionable—even with regards to the manuscript tradition, as there

are six full copies and fragments of the *LSAA* and eleven of the *QPE 8*.<sup>39</sup> But then again, the priority of influence of the latter is beyond dispute: one only has to think about its relevance for the famous *Sachsenhausen Appellation*.<sup>40</sup>

Nevertheless, it seems perfectly possible that Olivi's exegetical oeuvre was not only known to French and Italian friars, such as Michael of Cesena, Bonagratia of Bergamo and Ubertino of Casale, but to Ockham as well, for the man of Languedoc was still—and particularly—on everyone's lips a quarter of a century after his death. Up to 1324, the Dominican inquisitor Bernard Gui led the persecution of the apocalyptic sect of Beguins in the Western Mediterranean.<sup>41</sup> This group of lay men and women, sharing little but the name with the much more famous communities of pious women in northern Europe,<sup>42</sup> lived a religious life somewhat similar to that of the spiritual Franciscans. The group's *Weltanschauung* was derived first and foremost from Olivi's doctrine, and its members worshipped him as a holy prophet. Just when John XXII ultimately condemned the Apocalypse commentary in 1326, and during the previous trial, Ockham was under arrest at the Avignon curia where he had to defend his doctrine against suspicion of heresy.<sup>43</sup> Forty years later, a catalogue of the apostolic library informs that, in addition to other works of Olivi, the papal collection also held two copies of the *LSAA*.<sup>44</sup> When they may have got there cannot be said for sure. But, most likely, it was in the years after the second condemnation of Olivi's teachings in 1299 when Boniface VIII had launched an official papal campaign against the recently deceased friar, or possibly in

<sup>36</sup> See WITTNEBEN, *Bonagratia*, 121–2, and LAMBERTINI, *Apologia e crescita dell'identità francescana (1255–1279)* (Rome: Istituto Palazzo Borromini, 1990), 156. Only few other works, indeed, have lately examined some of the aspects of Olivi's image of the early Church, but did not associate it with the poverty controversy. See LAMBERTINI, "La difesa dell'Ordine francescano di fronte alle critiche dei Secolari in Olivi," in *Pierre de Jean Olivi*, ed. BOUREAU and PIRON, 193–205; GARNSEY, "Peter Olivi on the community of the first Christians at Jerusalem," in *Radical Christian Voices and Practice. Essays in Honour of Christopher Rowland*, ed. Zoe BENNETT and David GOWLER (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 35–49; Giacomo TODESCHINI, "Le 'bien commun' de la civitas christiana dans la tradition textuelle franciscaine (XIIIe–XVe siècle)," in *Politique et religion en Méditerranée. Moyen Âge et époque contemporaine*, ed. Henri BRESCH et al. (Saint-Denis: Bouchène, 2008), 255–303, esp. 284–6. See also the introduction to an English translation of Olivi's exegesis of Acts 2:42–7 and 4:32–5 by KARRIS and FLOOD, "Peter Olivi on the early Christian community (Acts 2:42–47 and 4:32–35): The Christian way with temporalities," *Franciscan Studies* 65 (2007): 251–80. The *Quaestio 8* is edited by Johannes SCHLAGETER, *Das Heil der Armen und das Verderben der Reichen. Petrus Johannis Olivi OFM. Die Frage nach der höchsten Armut* (Werl: Dietrich-Coelde-Verlag, 1989), 73–201 (hereafter *QPE 8*).

<sup>37</sup> *QPE 8*, 79, 99, 178, 198, etc.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. WITTNEBEN, *Bonagratia*, III–23.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. FLOOD, *Peter of John Olivi on the Acts*, xiii–xv. SCHLAGETER, *Heil*, 53–60.

<sup>40</sup> Louis the Bavarian, in his attack on John XXII, heavily drew on *QPE 8*. See EHRLE, "Petrus Johannis Olivi," 540–52.

<sup>41</sup> On the sect in general, see Louisa A. BURNHAM, *So Great a Light, so Great a Smoke. The Beguin Heretics of Languedoc* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008). On the persecution, see further Jennifer KOLPACOFF DEANE, *A History of Medieval Heresy and Inquisition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 147–51.

<sup>42</sup> On the diverse use of the word "beguin" in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, see Louisa A. BURNHAM, "Just Talking About God: Orthodox Prayer Among the Heretical Beguins," in: *Franciscans at Prayer*, ed. Timothy J. JOHNSON (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 249–70, at 250–1.

<sup>43</sup> There is an extensive literature on Ockham's life. The circumstances of his stay in Avignon are covered, for instance, by MIETHKE, *Ockhams Weg*, 46–74, and, more recently, William J. COURTENAY, *Ockham and Ockhamism: Studies in the Dissemination and Impact of his Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 101–2.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. EHRLE, "Petrus Johannis Olivi," 460.

the course of the inquisitorial persecution of the Beguins. Be that as it may, there is good reason to believe that the manuscripts were available at the curia when Ockham arrived in 1324 and it is by no means impossible he had access to the library. Or maybe, even simpler, he might have found the works of his Provençal brother in the Franciscan convent of Avignon where he took residence.<sup>45</sup> But no matter how the dissemination of Olivian ideas may have proceeded, Cesena's and Ockham's positions towards *ecclesia primitiva* undoubtedly stem from Olivi's exegesis. Thus, these positions are best approached through his exegetical writings.

#### A NON-HIERARCHICAL COMMUNITY OF USE

The main tool of Bible studies in the high and late Middle Ages was the *Glossa ordinaria*. In this work from the school of Anselm of Laon scholars could find canonical expositions of every Bible verse, compiled from the most important individual commentaries of each book and supplemented by anonymous inter-linear glosses.<sup>46</sup> Regarding the Acts of the Apostles the compilers chiefly drew on the popular commentaries of Rabanus Maurus<sup>47</sup> and the Venerable Bede,<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Cf. COURTENAY, *Ockham*, 100.

<sup>46</sup> On the *Glossa ordinaria*, see SMALLEY, *Study*, 56–66, and most recently Lesley SMITH, *The Glossa Ordinaria. The Making of a Medieval Bible Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), and Ulli ROTH, “Die *glossa ordinaria*. Ein mittelalterlicher Standardkommentar zur Heiligen Schrift,” in *Kommentarkulturen. Die Auslegung zentraler Texte der Weltreligionen. Ein vergleichender Überblick*, ed. Michael QUINSKY and Peter WALTER (Cologne: Böhlau, 2007), 31–48. The widely used edition in *PL* 113/114 follows an old misunderstanding in attributing the *Glossa* to Walafrid Strabo. Moreover, the edition is uncritical and erroneous. It thus makes more sense to turn to the facsimile of an early print in *Biblia latina cum glossa ordinaria: facsimile reprint of the editio princeps Adolph Rusch of Strassburg 1480/81*, 4 vols., ed. Karlfried FROELICH (Turnhout: Brepols, 1992).

<sup>47</sup> There is no edition of Rabanus' *Traclatus super Actus*. To get hold of it one must turn to the manuscripts. Alternatively, the library of Yale University holds a microfilm of the respective Cambridge manuscript (Ee III 51, fols. 195–241).

<sup>48</sup> Bede authored three works on Acts: an *Expositio*, a *Retractio*, and a toponomastic dictionary. All three are edited in *Bedae Venerabilis Opera. Pars II: Opera Exegetica, 4: Expositio Actuum Apostolorum, Retractio in Actus Apostolorum, Nomina Regionum atque Locorum de Actibus Apostolorum, In Epistolas VII Catholicas*, ed. Max L. W. LAISTNER (Turnhout: Brepols, 1983).

and for the *ecclesia primitiva* narratives they almost exclusively relied on the latter. Thus, the exegete of the later Middle Ages, wishing to say something about the life of the first Christians, above all found himself confronted with Bede's interpretations. Virtually bearing canonical authority, those apparently remained unquestioned by the majority of theologians. Olivi as well, while preparing his *Lectura*, continuously read along Bede's commentary and quite cleverly used it to support his own positions.<sup>49</sup>

Highlighting Olivi's own interpretations therefore calls for comparison with that of his venerable predecessor. Moreover, as a link between the two of them, additionally, there shall be invoked a representative of the first generation of academically learned Franciscans, namely Olivi's venerated teacher, Bonaventure of Bagnoregio. While he did not leave behind any exegetical work on the Acts of the Apostles, in the aftermath of the secular-mendicant controversy,<sup>50</sup> the seraphic doctor composed an *Apologia pauperum* in which the social structures of the early Church as they are presented in Luke's story, figure as an image of perfection, pointedly revealing his own understanding of the questionable verses.<sup>51</sup> In what follows, I will examine how exactly the three authors comment on the social system of the early Christian community and its economic practices.

With regard to Acts 4:32–33 Bede says:

*The ranks of teachers and hearers are carefully distinguished: for the multitude of believers, having scorned their possessions, were joined with one*

<sup>49</sup> It seems he was not only drawing on the *Glossa* but also kept at hand a full copy of Bede's widespread works. Cf. FLOOD, *Peter of John Olivi on the Acts*, viii–ix.

<sup>50</sup> On the secular-mendicant controversy at the University of Paris in the 1250s and 1260s, see Max BIERBAUM, *Bettelorden und Weltgeistlichkeit an der Universität Paris. Texte und Untersuchungen zum literarischen Armuts- und Exemptionsstreit des 13. Jahrhunderts (1255–1272)* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1920); Sophronius CLASEN, *Der hl. Bonaventura und das Mendikantentum: ein Beitrag zur Ideengeschichte des Pariser Mendikantenstreits* (Werl: Verlag Franziskus-Druckerei, 1940); Rolf KÖHN, “Monastisches Bildungsideal und weltgeistliches Wissenschaftsdenken. Zur Vorgeschichte des Mendikantenstreites an der Universität Paris,” in *Die Auseinandersetzungen an der Pariser Universität im XIII. Jahrhundert*, ed. Albert ZIMMERMANN (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1976), 1–37.

<sup>51</sup> The *Apologia pauperum* is edited in Bonaventura, *Opera Omnia* 8 (Quaracchi: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1898), 233–330.

another in a bond of charity, while the apostles, shining with the powers of Christ, were revealing mysteries to all.<sup>52</sup>

As can be seen, Bede separates the group of believers from the apostles and awards the community of goods to the former alone, while he says nothing about the state of property of the apostles. About six centuries later, in the *Apologia pauperum*, Bonaventure, utilizing Bede's interpretation, states:

Although we read in the Acts of the Apostles that 'the multitude of believers [...] had all things in common,' and that they would lay at the feet of the apostles the price of what they had sold, it should never be understood that the apostles ever owned anything, either privately or in common, for this community does not refer to them, but to the multitude.<sup>53</sup>

At this point the seraphic doctor, following the Franciscan notion of *vita apostolica*, assumes a common as well as individual propertylessness of the apostles. He argues as well that the community of goods, to which Luke is referring, had only included the multitude of believers which he considers to be a social group clearly distinguished from the apostles as their spiritual leaders.

Bonaventure's wayward student Olivi, however, comes up with the following assertion regarding Acts 2:44: "And all who believed, that is, not just the apostles or the first disciples, but also all who believed, *were together*, that is, they were living such a common life as if they were equal, even co-equal in all things."<sup>54</sup> Even in this short sentence, Olivi bluntly rejects the idea of a social gradient between the apostles and the group of believers—an assumption that had been common since Bede's time and was supported by Bonaventure. A

<sup>52</sup> Bede, *Expositio*, 27–8: *Doctorem uigilanter auditorumque discernit ordinem; nam multitudo credentium rebus suis spretis caritatis inuicem copula iuncta est, apostoli uero uirtutibus refulgentes Christi cunctis mysteria pandebant*. Incorporated into the *Glossa ordinaria*, ad Acts 4, 33. Trans. Lawrence T. MARTIN, *The Venerable Bede: Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1989), 52.

<sup>53</sup> *Apologia pauperum* 7, 32, 283: *Quamvis enim legatur in Actibus, quod multitudini credentium erant omnia communia, et quod rerum venditarum pretia ponebantur ad pedes Apostolorum; nequaquam est intelligendum, quod Apostoli proprium aliquid vel commune possederint, quia communitas illa non refertur ad Apostolos, sed ad turbam*. Trans. José DE VINCK and KARRIS, *Works of St. Bonaventure: Defense of the Mendicants* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2010), 211.

<sup>54</sup> LSAA, 89: *Omnes etiam qui credebant, id est non soli apostoli vel primi discipuli, sed etiam omnes qui credebant erant pariter, id est ita communiter conuiventes ac si in omnibus essent pares et coaequales*. Trans. KARRIS and FLOOD, "Peter Olivi on the early Christian community," 257.

class society in terms of Plato, he insists, could not have existed in the Jerusalem community. Olivi knew that with this claim he potentially stood in stark contradiction to Bede's authority. Elsewhere he therefore seeks to close the gap:

It is sufficiently improbable that the faithful of that time who wanted to imitate apostolic poverty and were of one heart and one soul with the apostles would have wanted to live a community life dissimilar to theirs. Now the distinction between the apostles and the multitude of believers given by Bede, indeed by Luke, is not against this, because the apostles are not distinguished as apostles from the number of believers who were of one heart and one mind. Rather the apostles are distinguished as unique among the others by these further qualities: they are teachers and witnesses of the resurrection and glory of Christ. In the same way we distinguish a larger number from a smaller one, for example, three from two, since three contains two, and exceeds two by the number that is left over.<sup>55</sup>

Thus, Olivi cleverly turns Bede's intended message into its opposite. Whereas the latter apparently aimed to support the Church's structures of his own time by reference to the *ecclesia primitiva*, ascribing the socio-ecclesiastical hierarchy between religious and laity, and between prelates and believers to the early days of institutionalised Christendom, Olivi makes Bede's words a proof for the exact opposite, that is, a structural disagreement between *ecclesia primitiva* and the later Church. Because the multitude of believers would not have wanted to differ from the apostles in any way, he argues, both must have exercised the same economic practice. The nature of this practice, however, the Minorite exegete could, as shown above, easily look up in Bonaventure ("*nequaquam [...] Apostoli proprium aliquid vel commune possederint*"). Accordingly, he asserts

<sup>55</sup> LSAA, 92: *Satis est improbabile quod ex quo fideles illius temporis volebant pauper-tam apostolicam imitari et cum eis quasi unum cor et una anima esse, quod in modo communitatis eis dissimulari uellent. Nec est contra hoc distinctio apostolorum a multitudine credentium data a Beda, immo potius a Luca, quia non sic ibi distinguuntur quasi apostoli non essent de numero credentium habentium cor unum et animam unam. Sed distinguuntur in hoc quod apostoli ultra hoc erant prae ceteris singulares doctores et testes resurrectionis et gloriae Christi. Iuxta quem modum distinguimus numerum maiorem a minori, puta trinarium a binario, quia trinarium continet binarium et ultra hoc excedit in unitate quam superaddit*. Trans. KARRIS and FLOOD, "Peter Olivi on the early Christian community," 260.

that this community excluded all property or proprietary right, not only from individuals, but also from their entire community. So if any Gentile or Jew from outside the community would take something away from them, they would never demand it back from them as if it were property of their community.<sup>56</sup>

This entails several quite astounding implications. First, Olivi denies the *communis opinio* of a direct tradition between early Christianity and monasticism, that was advocated, for instance, by Bede in his *Retractio*.<sup>57</sup> Undoubtedly, the community of property ranked among the most important constitutive elements of monasticism. While the individual, when entering a religious order, usually had to renounce his proprietary possessions, the monastery as a corporation had collective property, belonging to it by positive law. On such property each monastery could and would have asserted its legal claims. However, Olivi's interpretation of the early Christian community of goods denies exactly this for the Apostolic Age, thus depriving coenobitic monasticism of its essential foundation and handing it over to the Franciscans. Moreover, by negating a class-divided structure among the first Christians, without questioning the early Church's function as a role model, he—more or less parenthetically—establishes the ideal of an egalitarian, all-embracing Christian community free from property. The further course of his argument proves that this is not overstressing his point. This becomes especially clear when he appeals to Pseudo-Clement as a witness of his interpretation. Transmitted

<sup>56</sup> LSAA, 90: *quod haec communitas omnem proprietatem seu ius proprietatem excluderat non solum a singulis sed etiam a tota communitate eorum, ita quod si aliqui de exteris gentilibus vel Iudaeis aliqua eis auferrent nequaquam repetissent illa ab eis tamquam propria suae communitatis*. Trans. KARRIS and FLOOD, "Peter Olivi on the early Christian community," 259.

<sup>57</sup> Bede, *Retractio*, 126: *ergo ita uiuunt ut sint eis omnia communia in domino, recte composito ex duobus uno nomine κοινοβίται uocantur*. Bonaventura, *Apologia pauperum* 7, 4, 273, uncritically adopts this reading; *Hic etiam tradita fuit forma monasticae seu coenobiticae vitae, iuxta quod Glossa Bedae dicit ibidem*.

through the famous Pseudo-Isidorian forgeries,<sup>58</sup> the letter *Dilectissimis*,<sup>59</sup> falsely attributed to Pope Clement I (ca. 50–99), made its way into the *Decretum Gratiani*.<sup>60</sup> In the later Middle Ages, the letter was highly controversial among decretists, especially with regard to its strong emphasis on natural law.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, during the struggles over mendicant poverty, it gained prominence also outside legal circles. The focus of the letter—which associates the above mentioned Pythagorean saying with the Lucan reports of *ecclesia primitiva*—is *vita communis*.<sup>62</sup> As an alleged eyewitness and temporary member of the early Christian community, Ps.-Clement comments on the ideal form of Christian communality that he found realized in Jerusalem. In so doing, he identifies the state of innocence in Edenic times with post-Pentecostal conditions, thereby supporting both the idea of equality between the apostles and believers, as well as the notion of a law-free community of use. In the *LSAA*, Olivi cites a lengthy passage from *Dilectissimis*:

*The common life is necessary for all, brothers, and especially for those who wish to fight irreprehensibly for God and want to imitate the life of the apostles and their disciples. For the common use of all things that are in*

<sup>58</sup> The history of Pseudo-Isidore is most fully covered in HORST FUHRMANN, *Einfluß und Verbreitung der Pseudoisidorischen Fälschungen. Von ihrem Auftreten bis in die neuere Zeit*, 3 vols. (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1972–4). More recent research could substantiate identification of Ps.-Isidore with the abbot of Corbie Paschasius Radbertus (ca. 785–865); see Klaus ZECHIEL-ECKES, "Auf Pseudoisidors Spur. Oder: Versuch, einen dichten Schleier zu lüften," in *Fortschritt durch Fälschungen? Ursprung, Gestalt und Wirkungen der pseudoisidorischen Fälschungen. Beiträge zum gleichnamigen Symposium an der Universität Tübingen vom 27. und 28. Juli 2001*, ed. Wilfried HARTMANN and Gerhard SCHMITZ (Hannover: Hahn, 2002), 1–28.

<sup>59</sup> On the letter that begins with the words *Dilectissimis fratribus*, see TÖPFER, *Urzustand*, 120–1; idem, "Vorstellungen von einem ursprünglichen und einem endzeitlichen Idealzustand als Ausdruck utopischen Denkens im Mittelalter (unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Interpretationen des Kapitels *Dilectissimis* der *Causa XII* des *Decretum Gratiani*) bis zum 14. Jahrhundert," in *Mittelalterforschung nach der Wende 1989*, ed. Michael BÖRGOLTE (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1995), 387–406; Norman COHN, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (London: Paladin, 1957), 204–5.

<sup>60</sup> In Gratian, the letter is found as Canon C. XII, qu. 1, c. 2. See *Decretum Magistri Gratiani*, ed. Emil FRIEDBERG (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1879), coll. 676–7.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. TÖPFER, *Urzustand*, 168–85; idem, "Vorstellungen," 390–9.

<sup>62</sup> The text of the letter is found in the highly unreliable, but not yet replaced, edition of the Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals, *Decretales Pseudo-Isidorianae et Capitula Angilramni*, ed. Paul HINSCHIUS (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1863), 65–6.

*this world is binding on all men and women. But on account of iniquity one person says that this is his, and another that this is his, and thus division has arisen among mortals. Finally, a certain most wise person among the Greeks, knowing that these things are common, said that all things must be common among friends. [...] and just as the air and the splendor of the sun cannot be divided, so too the things that remain and that have been given communally to all people to possess must not be divided, but all things should be held in common. Thus God also says through the prophet: 'Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity.' Retaining the custom of this usage, the apostles and their disciples [...] led a common life together with us and with you. For so that you might know this well [...] none of them or us said that anything was our own [...] but all things were common to them and to us.*<sup>63</sup>

With regard to the question of expanding the ideal of a community of goods beyond convent walls, it should first of all be noted that the imperative of *vita communis* here is not explicitly restricted to monastic life. Indeed, the wording *his qui Deo irreprehensibiliter militare cupiunt et vitam apostolorum eorumque discipulorum imitari volunt* could be understood as primarily speaking of monks. But in all, the text remains vague as to the addressed audience, leaving open the option of addressing all Christianity. Besides, Ps.-Clement expressly points out that God gave common use of earthly goods to all mankind. The wicked man himself, however, had instituted distinction between *mine* and *yours*. This unnatural condition, though, had been overcome in the early Christian community since in those days, among apostles and believers equally, everything had been held in common use.

<sup>63</sup> LSAA, 91: *Communis vita est omnibus necessaria, fratres, et maxime his qui Deo irreprehensibiliter militare cupiunt et vitam apostolorum eorumque discipulorum imitari volunt. Communis enim usus omnium quae sunt in hoc mundo omnibus esse hominibus debuit. Sed per iniquitatem alius hoc dixit esse suum et alius istud, et sic inter mortales facta est divisio. Denique Graecorum quidam sapientissimus, sciens haec ita esse communia, ait amicorum debere omnia esse communia. Et sicut non potest dividi aer nec splendor solis, ita nec reliqua quae communiter omnibus data sunt ad habendum dividi debere, sed habenda esse omnia communia. Unde et Deus per prophetam dicit: Ecce quam bonum et quam iucundum habitare fratres in unum. Istius consuetudinis more retento, apostoli eorumque discipuli una nobiscum et vobiscum communem vitam duxerunt. Ut enim bene nostris, nullus eorum aut nostrum aliquid suum esse dicebat, sed omnia illis et nobis erant communia.* Trans. KARRIS and FLOOD, "Peter Olivi on the early Christian community," 259–60.

Not only later decretists, but also Gratian himself, noticed the potential for conflict these statements held, and thus tried to level the contradictions between positive and natural law concerning property.<sup>64</sup> Thereby, and due to the fact that Ps.-Clement fully attributed to the past the condition of natural law, *Dilectissimis* alone did not establish a future ideal of an all-embracing community of goods. Olivi, however, went this one step further. In summing up the Clementine decretal, he explains that Clement wanted to teach two things: first, that "there was a single and uniform community for the apostles and the other believers," and second, that

*that community did not appropriate anything to its fellowship in common. Rather it was of such a nature that the entire community of men and women were in the state of innocence, and it was of such a nature as should exist among all people, if there were not the corruption and weakness of original and actual sin, and it was of such a nature as that where air and sun were common to all.*<sup>65</sup>

It is the short subordinate clause *qualis inter omnes homines esse deberet* that takes the exegetical conclusions from Acts to a new level. Here, for the first time, an exegete, working according to the best rules of scholasticism, classifies the early Christian community of goods as a concrete ideal for all mankind. In *QPE* 8, Olivi develops this very thought even further. Again following a quotation from *Dilectissimis*, he attacks the traditional monastic community of goods and, moreover, the ecclesiastical practice of prebends. This leads him to the conclusion that the evils of the existing system—*causas et litigia, invidias et contentiones*—are due to *aliquid iuris sibi vendicant in suis communibus et quia non est ibi communitas illa generalis quae est ad omnes homines. Unde quod est unius collegii, non est alterius*. He leaves no doubt that it is desirable to overcome those present ills to recreate the harmony of the state of innocence just as the early Christians in Jerusalem had done.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Cf. TÖPFER, *Urzustand*, 165–7.

<sup>65</sup> LSAA, 91: *quod apostolis et ceteris credentibus erat tunc una et uniformis communitas. Secundum est quod illa communitas non appropriabat illi collegio aliquid in communi, immo erat talis qualis in statu innocentiae apud totam communitatem hominum fuisset, et qualis inter omnes homines esse deberet, si non esset corruptio et infirmitas originalis vel actualis peccati, et qualis est illa qua aer et sol omnibus sunt communes.* Trans. KARRIS and FLOOD, "Peter Olivi on the early Christian community," 260.

<sup>66</sup> *QPE* 8, 98–9: *Clemens etiam Epistola IV., et habetur XII. quaestione I. capitulo II.: 'Communis' – inquit – 'usus omnium quae sunt in hoc mundo, omnibus esse hominibus debuit, sed per iniquitatem alius hoc dixit esse suum et alius istud. Et sic inter mortales*

Obviously, it was the teachings of the famous Calabrian mystic Joachim of Fiore that served as a background to these utopian constructions.<sup>67</sup> As an adherent of the then very popular Joachimite doctrine of concordance between the Old and the New Testament and a coming third age of the Holy Spirit, the Franciscan believed in a recurring pattern in God's design.<sup>68</sup> Accordingly, he attributed prophetic significance to supposed historical congruities between the Old Testament age of the Father and the New Testament age of the Son. In other words, if in the early days of the Old Testament, in the state of innocence before the fall, as well as in the early days of the New Testament, among the first Christians in Jerusalem proprietary rights had not existed, the same was to be expected at the beginning of the new era.

## SPREADING DISSENT

In providing these novel explanations, the progressive Bible interpreter not only strongly supported the argument of his brothers in the poverty controversy, but also touched on a raw nerve of dissatisfied Christians. Especially in his native Languedoc his ideas were knocking at an open door.<sup>69</sup> The sect of the Beguins that formed there at the turn of the fourteenth century made their countryman's prophecies, as it were, their profession of faith. Which parts of his œuvre they were directly familiar with cannot be precisely determined. But turning back to Bernard Gui, it can be discovered

*that they took their pestiferous errors and opinions partly from the books and other writings of Brother Peter John Olivi, born in Sérignan near Béziers. That is, they took these errors from his commentary on the Apocalypse, which they have both in Latin and in a vernacular translation; from some treatises on poverty, begging and dispensations that the Beguins say and believe he wrote; and from certain other writings they attribute to him, all of which they have in vernacular translations [...] They also derive the aforesaid errors and opinions from oral tradition, teachings which they say he imparted to his close associates and to the Beguins during his lifetime.<sup>70</sup>*

In his *Practica Inquisitionis heretice pravitatis* that provides this information, the Dominican subsequently outlines in great detail the tenets and convictions of the Beguins, and it should not come as a surprise that *ecclesia primitiva* plays an important part in them. Indeed, Gui explains, the members of the sect—in

<sup>69</sup> On the Languedoc, which also was a centre of the Cathars, as a melting pot of religious ideas, see SCHMUCKI, *Selbstbesitz*, 31–7.

<sup>70</sup> Bernard Gui, *Manuel de l'Inquisiteur*, ed. Guillaume MOLLAT, 2 vols. (Paris: Champion, 1926–7), vol. 1, 110–2: *quod errores suos et opiniones huiusmodi pestiferas ipsi habuerunt et collegerunt partim quidem ex libris seu opusculis fratris Petri Johannis Olivi, qui fuit oriundus de Serinhano prope Bitterim, videlicet ex postilla ejusdem super Apocalipsim quam habent tam in latino quam etiam transpositam in vulgari; item ex aliquibus tractatibus quos ipsum fecisse Bequini dicunt et credunt, unum videlicet de paupertate et alium de mendicitate et quemdam alium de dispensationibus et ex quibusdam etiam aliis scriptitatis que sibi attribuunt et que omnia habent in vulgari transposita... Partim quoque predictos errores et opiniones habuerunt et collegerunt ex traditione ejusdem fratris Petri Johannis, quam traditionem se eruditionem dicunt eum fecisse suis familiaribus ac Bequinis tempore quo vivebat.* Trans. BURR, "Bernard Gui: Inquisitor's Manual," accessed March 25, 2016, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/bernardgui-inq.asp>.

*facta est divisio'. In quo est notandum quod non dixit quod communis usus debuerit esse isti vel illi collegio, sed omnibus hominibus generaliter. Sic enim fuisset in statu innocentiae. ... Et de hac communitate et secundum hunc modum est accipienda communitas, de qua et inferius loquitur, de qua et in Actibus dictum est quod 'erant illis omnia communia (Ac 4, 32)'. Si enim aliquid iuris vellent sibi in illis communibus vindicare, sicut faciunt hodie membra collegiorum ecclesiasticorum et monasticorum, non plenarie dici posset Actuum IV°. quod 'erat' illis cor unum et anima una (Ac 4, 32)'. ... Certum est autem quod collegium hodie pugnat contra collegium, quia aliquid iuris sibi vendicant in suis communibus et quia non est ibi communitas illa generalis quae est ad omnes homines. Unde quod es unius collegii, non est alterius. Praebendati etiam aut praebendandi quot causas et litigia, quot invidias et contentiones pro praebendis inter se habeant, celebris experientia docet; quod non esset, si nulla esset ibi iurisdictionis saltem ad dispensandum aut si nulla appropriatio saltem quantum ad necessarium sustentamentum. Competit enim de iure praebendato vel monacho pensio diuturna seu victus et vestitus. Et breviter: nisi totaliter tollatur amor iurisdictionis temporalis et temporalium a cordibus hominum, non potest esse aliqua communitas sine praedictis malis.*

<sup>67</sup> A very good recent account of Joachim's doctrine is Matthias RIEDL, *Joachim von Fiore. Denker der vollendeten Menschheit* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2004).

<sup>68</sup> Expounded in Joachim's *Liber de Concordia Noui ac Veteris Testamenti*, ed. Emmett R. DANIEL, *Abbot Joachim of Fiore. Liber de Concordia Noui ac Veteris Testamenti* (Philadelphia, PA: The American Philosophical Society, 1983).

accordance with Olivi's apocalyptic conception—believed in the imminent downfall of the institutionalized Roman Church, or the *carnalis ecclesia* as they put it, and the ensuing rise of an *ecclesia spiritualis*.<sup>71</sup> These processes as well as the form of the Spirit's church they explicitly associated with *ecclesia primitiva*. Just as the infidels' temple had been demolished back then, in the near future the Roman Church would rightly be destroyed. And just as Christ rejected the synagogue, whereupon some pious men had been chosen to found the early Church, after the divinely organized downfall of the Catholic Church some *pauperes et spirituales* would remain to found the new one. Upon those chosen ones the Holy Spirit would be poured out in equal or even greater abundance than it was upon the apostles in the days of Pentecost.<sup>72</sup>

What little Gui has to tell about the Beguins' conception of this restored early Church's constitution has clear parallels to the specifics of Olivi's exegesis of Acts. In particular, he reports, they believed that, once the whole world would have become converted to Christian faith through the actions of the chosen ones, "all things will be common as far as use is concerned; and there will be no one who offends anyone else or encourages another to sin. For there will be the greatest love among them, and there will be one flock and one pastor."<sup>73</sup> According to that, an all-embracing community of use as well as a non-hierarchical, egalitarian social system were among the essentials of *ecclesia*

*spiritualis* as expected by the Beguins in the near future. Olivi's rewriting of early Christianity's history thus, just a few years after his death, demonstrably had already found entrance into heterodox ideologies and apocalyptic expectations of salvation. In this context it is immaterial that the Beguins, like other later groups and individuals that directly or indirectly drew on Olivi's doctrine, somewhat misunderstood their 'prophet.'<sup>74</sup> For once a progressive idea has taken root, it becomes disengaged from its creator and escapes his control.

#### SYNOPSIS

In this way, what began in the middle of the thirteenth century as debate over the appropriate understanding of some Bible verses, within half a century grew into one of the most influential religious dissents of the whole Middle Ages. While the poverty controversy in its narrower sense came to an end after the installation of Gerardus Odonis (d. 1349) as Minister General of the Franciscan Order in 1329, the disagreements about the pure form of *vita apostolica* continued. The broad corpus of writings the topic had generated up to this point permanently expanded the horizon of the speakable and thinkable. In order to be understood properly, Peter Olivi's exegetical interpretations of *ecclesia primitiva* must be grasped precisely in this context.

A rigorist Franciscan, he was completely on side with the advocates of *altissima paupertas* of Christ and the apostles. In his *Lectura super Actus Apostolorum*, shaped in an exemplary way according to the rules of scholasticism, he used the full arsenal of knowledge and experience of an outstanding scholar to create a pro-Franciscan image of the early Christian community as watertight as possible. Thus, in a historical perspective, the work gains preeminence compared to polemical writings that more or less promoted the same ideas. Polemics could be answered by counter-polemics whereas academic exegesis

<sup>74</sup> Several later dissidents have been considered or definitely were influenced by Olivi, among them the Dulcinians and the Anabaptist Melchior Hoffmann (ca. 1495–1543). See Johann Ch. HUCK, *Ubertin von Casale und dessen Ideenkreis: Ein Beitrag zum Zeitalter Dantes* (Freiburg: Herder, 1903), 12–5, and Werner O. PACKULL, "A reinterpretation of Melchior Hoffmann's exposition against the background of spiritualist Franciscan eschatology with special reference to Peter John Olivi," in *The Dutch Dissenters. A Critical Companion to their History and Ideas*, ed. Irvin B. HORST (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 32–65.

<sup>71</sup> Bernard Gui, *Manuel de l'Inquisiteur*, 144: *Item, duas ecclesias quasi distingunt, videlicet ecclesiam carnalem quam dicunt esse ecclesiam Romanam quantum ad multitudinem reproborum et ecclesiam spiritualem quantum ad viros quos vocant spirituales et evangelicos, qui vitam Christi et apostolorum servant; ... Item dogmatizant quod ecclesia carnalis, videlicet Romana ecclesia, ante predicationem Anti-Christi est destruenda. On the concept of ecclesia spiritualis, see ERNST BENZ, *Ecclesia spiritualis. Kirchenidee und Geschichtstheologie der franziskanischen Reformation* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1934), on Olivi, esp. 256–332.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 146: *Item, dogmatizant quod, sicut, rejeſta ſynagoga Judeorum, a Chriſto fuerunt pauci viri electi ex ea per quos fuit fundata Chriſti ecclesia primitiva ... ita, rejeſta et deſtruſta carnali ecclesia Romana ... remanebunt pauci viri electi ſpirituales pauperes evangelici ... per quos fundabitur ecclesia ſpiritualis... Item, aliqui ex eis dogmatizant quod Spiritus Sanctus effundetur in majori habundantia vel ſaltem in equali ſuper illos viros electos ſpirituales et evangelicos per quos fundabitur ecclesia ſpiritualis et benigna ... quam fuerit effuſus ſuper apoſtolos diſcipulos Jheſu Chriſti in die penthecoſtes in ecclesia primitiva.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 150–2: *omnia erunt communia quoad uſum et non erit aliquis offendat alium vel ſollicitet ad peccatum, quia maximus amor erit inter eos et erit tunc unum ovile et unus paſtor.* Trans. BURR, "Bernard Gui."

was to be seriously attacked only through scholastic discourse. With that said, the *LSAA* could have become to the Mendicants what Bede's *Expositio* was to coenobitic monasticism. However, the text was not to meet with such success as the author's posthumous condemnation for centuries put a stop to a broader reception of his works. Later deviants therefore usually lacked awareness of many branches of their doctrines being anticipated in the Minorite's writings.<sup>75</sup>

In the course of his programmatic idealization of the early Church, Olivi indeed stepped out of the pure exegetical milieu combining it with wide-ranging criticism of the existent social system. By this means he vaguely adumbrated Christian socialism as a future vision beyond mere eschatological fantasies. But since he expected its fulfilment solely through God's ministry and never called for its realization by revolutionary actions—a thought that necessarily had to remain alien to him—, he was worlds apart from the image that KAUTSKY, for instance, drew of some medieval dissidents as alleged predecessors of modern communism. On the other hand, KAUTSKY probably could have instrumentalized the Spiritual Peter of John Olivi as a warrantor of his matter much more easily and plausibly than he succeeded in doing so with Arnold of Brescia, for example, whose teachings were even further away from modern communist thought than Olivi's interpretation of the early Christian community.<sup>76</sup>

Nevertheless, by his exposition of early Christianity as a non-hierarchical, all-embracing community of use, the latter made available the topos of *ecclesia primitiva* as a basis of reasoning for alternative structuring of society outside monastery walls. Of course, his definition of the early Christian community of goods as a community of use rather than possession was primarily due to his desire for the highest biblical justification of the Franciscan lifestyle. Yet, as a result herein lies another clear contrast to newer socialist ideas. When one

<sup>75</sup> This finding is in accord with LOVEJOY, *The Great Chain*, 3, who states that “age after age, each new philosopher usually forgets about this melancholy truth,” namely the truth of his doctrine being a compound.

<sup>76</sup> On the canon regular Arnold of Brescia (ca. 1090–1155), see Romedio SCHMITZ-ESSER, “Arnold of Brescia in exile: April 1139 to December 1143 – his role as a reformer, reviewed,” in *Exile in the Middle Ages. Selected Proceedings from the International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds, 8–11 July 2002*, ed. Laura NAPRAN and Elisabeth VAN HOUTS (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 213–31, and idem, *Arnold von Brescia im Spiegel von acht Jahrhunderten Rezeption: Ein Beispiel für Europas Umgang mit der mittelalterlichen Geschichte vom Humanismus bis heute* (Vienna: LIT, 2007). KAUTSKY dedicated a full chapter of his *Vorläufer* to Brescia. On his ‘usurpation’ of the Italian for socialist ideas, see SCHMITZ-ESSER, *Spiegel*, 582–4.

imagines a further progression of Olivi's basics, however, the notion of full abolishment of property rights is nothing but inherently consequent. That is to say, if the community of goods is thought of as extended to *omnes homines*, logically there could not exist any property rights, for there would be no one left to claim them against. In this case, property as such would become meaningless and a pure community of use would develop. To some extent, Olivi's concept is thus even more consistent than religious Socialism. Whereas in the Franciscan's idea a future dissolution of property rights will follow naturally from God's divine plan, in religious Socialism the installation of a communist economy totally depends on human action.

Assuming an unbroken tradition between biblical exegesis of the later Middle Ages and the ideologies of modern Christian socialism would be positivistic nonsense. Nevertheless, Olivi's creative rewriting of early Church history—as I have argued here—constituted an important step in the re-arrangement of unit-ideas from which later on political ideologies of such kind were construed. Whatever meaning one might assign to this fact, at any rate it demonstrates the value of medieval biblical exegesis for the understanding not only of pre-modern thinking but also of the development of modern political ideas.