

**The “Poor of Christ” and their significant impact
on setting the scene for the 16th Century Reformation**

by

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Declaration

I declare that the thesis, “The “Poor of Christ” and their significant impact on setting the scene for the 16th Century Reformation” which I hereby submit for the degree at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.



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The author, whose name appears on the title page of this thesis, has obtained, for the research described in this work, the applicable research ethics approval. The author declares that he has observed the ethical standards required in terms of the University of Pretoria’s Code of ethics for researchers and the Policy guidelines for responsible research.

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Abstract

During the 500th Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017 a huge emphasis was placed on the main Reformation characters of 1517, especially Martin Luther. Those that preceded him were side-lined. Valdes of Lyon did not feature at all. This study shows that this lay person, Valdes had a significant impact on the 16th Century Reformation. This impact is not immediately obvious. The researcher reveals it by looking at the movement that resulted from his conversion in 1174, normally called the Waldenses, but in this study referred to as Poor of Christ, a name that they identified themselves with. The research does not focus on the Romanesque part that later formed the Waldensian Church, but on those living and ministering in the German region of the Holy Roman Empire.

Original sources such as papal letters, inquisition reports and reports of eyewitnesses of that time are researched. Historical contextual analysis and synthesis bring the information together showing the impact that the Poor of Christ ultimately had.

The researcher shows how the Roman Church, instead of engaging with these lay preachers, tried to silence and eradicate them over a period of 350 years. This action harmed the church itself more than it did the people it was fighting against. Doctrines and decrees formulated in reaction to the Poor of Christ increased the necessity for reformation.

The study shows an important but ignored link between the Poor of Christ and the Augustinian Order which throws a different light on why the Augustinian Order played such an important role in producing Reformation Theologians.

The research shows how the underground lay movement influenced the thinking in cities and regions in Germany that became the first strongholds of the 16th Century Reformation. Through their ministry the basics of *Solus Christus* and *sola scriptura* were already taught and practised in homes and families for generations prior to 1517.

The researcher argues that Martin Luther and other prominent Reformers were not the originators of the 16th century Reformation. Unlike Hus a hundred years before, they succeeded because the climate in Europe, and especially Germany, had changed due to the presence and ministry of the Poor of Christ. The real force behind the Reformation were the lay men and women who for generations shaped Christ-centred values, who, for 350 years prior to 1517 had already been studying and teaching scripture in the local vernacular. This study argues that the Poor of Christ must become part of main stream Reformation teaching, a place the movement deserves.

The study heightens the historical value of this research by showing how core aspects of the Poor of Christ can help the church today to be resilient and relevant. Their authentic way of living their faith is an example worth following. Church leadership is reminded of the importance of servant leadership, and all theologians are reminded that the real strength of the church lies in the lay people who are not dependent on clergy, but empowered to live and share what they believe.

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Chapter 1 Rediscovering the Poor of Christ in the Roman Church

1. Introduction

It all started in 1176. A businessman, Valdes¹, had gathered significant wealth in Lyon, France. He was part of a new group in society - ordinary citizens, not connected to nobility, nor officials in the Church, starting to play an influential role in society. (Asbridge 2011:557f)) Valdes used some of his wealth to commission the translation of the Latin Bible into his mother tongue, Romance.

He was fascinated by what he read. The gospel of Jesus Christ touched him. He read about the sending of the disciples by Jesus and heard it as his personal call (Mt 10, 5ff). After giving away all his possessions he became a wandering preacher, in Lyon and neighbouring cities. He focused on preaching repentance, calling people to live a life of following Christ and teaching the New Testament. (Selge 1969: 95f) Soon he had a significant number of people heeding the call - either by becoming wandering preachers themselves, or by at least following the repentance call and starting to live a changed life based mainly on the sermon of the mount. (Selge 1969, Map, back cover)

The movement had many names.² “In the beginning, brethren, preachers, Poor of Lyons, Poor of Christ, devotees and believers were all the same: synonymous terms all denoting the members of the dissenting community.” (Audisio 1999:114) This thesis will use the one that they sometimes used to describe themselves: “The Poor of Christ” (Pauperes Christi) (Selge 1967 I: 64, 96), although this name was not used frequently (de Lange 2004: 67).

In the middle ages the term “poor” was used for all who were powerless in the face of the

¹I will use “Valdes” as name form, since it is regarded as the most likely form that the name had in his dialect. (Schwinge 2003: 175). Other forms are Vaudes, Waldes, Valdesius. The first name “Peter” or “Petrus” first appears 1368 and was only given long after his death

² Other names such as Poor of Lyon, Lombards, Sandalwearers, and Waldensians (Frank 1999: 23) feature regularly

political and church powers, regardless of their financial status (Tarman 2010: 44)

A manuscript ascribed to Ermengaud of Béziers, a close associate of the movement, states (Wakefield 1991:234):

There are, moreover, other heretics, who are called “the Lyonists,” from Lyons; “the Waldenses,” from Waldes; “the Poor,” because they say they take no thought for the morrow; “the Sandal-shod”, because they wear perforated footgear.

De Lange (2004: 58ff) states that “Poor in Christ” captures the essence of their teachings and life style. “Poor” does not refer to their abandoning all possessions, but to the “poor in spirit”, mentioned in the beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount, Mt 5,3. Powerless towards the authorities, they regarded themselves as totally dependent on Christ.

The name “Waldensians”, by which they eventually became known, is misleading. Audisio (1999: 3) writes

The term ‘Waldensian’, in fact, was coined by those who persecuted them, designating the heretics by the name of their founder, as is so often the case. The ‘heretics’, however, never used this name. On the contrary, they claimed they had but one master, Jesus Christ. In no document issued from within the community is the term ‘Waldensian’ used. They distinguished themselves from other Christians by saying they were ‘Brothers’, ‘Poor of Christ’ or ‘Poor of Lyons’.

The name “Waldensian” was given to them by the Church that rejected them. The name implies that Valdes was the central figure of the movement. Although he played a crucial role as founder and was a recognised authority during his life time, he is not usually regarded as central a figure such as Hus, Wycliffe, Luther or Calvin were in their respective traditions. He resisted any hierarchical structures and claimed no special position for himself (Exempla Historica 1984: 83f). Selge (1967 I: 206) states: *“Er war eben nich Oberhaupt, sondern, wenn man so will, Erstberufener unter vielen, die den gleichen Auftrag empfangen hatten.”* – Valdes was not head of the movement, but the one called first.

As a result, very little is known about Valdes - not even key biographical information such as his date and place of birth, nor, more significantly, the place, date or even the year of his death (Fischer 1984: 73). Had he been a more central authority and figure, at least the details about his death would have been known. The power of the Poor of Christ did not lie in his strong leadership, but in the emphasis on thorough teaching and instruction received by many and passed on by many. (Frank 1999: 15) Valdes was the initiator, but many became the multipliers. This becomes evident when one considers the rapid spread during the first 30 years in all directions. The Map by Selge on page 34 of this chapter shows various schools that were established in this period, indicating the involvement of many well-trained teachers.

When speaking about the church in which the Poor of Christ existed, I refer to it as the Roman Church, rather than the Roman Catholic Church. At that stage, European Christianity had split into two: The Western Church with Rome, and the Eastern Church with Constantinople as its centre. The Poor of Christ existed within the Roman Church only. For them there was only one Church - the one they knew, which was headed by the Pope in Rome. This is evident in the profession of faith, which Valdes signed at the council of Lyon in 1180 (See Chapter two, page 83 in this study). It clearly states that he believes in the one holy Church outside which there is no salvation (Tourn 1983: 24). Molnar points out that, although this confession does not contain essential aspects of what Valdes believed, but rather focuses on confirming his allegiance to the Church, he would not have signed it if he did not agree with the statements it contains. (Molnár 1993:38f)

The name "Roman Catholic", at least from a Protestant perspective, refers to one denomination amongst many, whereas in this research I deal with the history of the *Roman Church*, the common source of most of western Christian denominations. I cannot speak of it as if it were a separate denomination, but rather as part of our common history - Protestant and Roman Catholic alike. This Roman Church is part of my church's history!

The Roman Church was in a process of establishing its authority over the entire world, including over the Eastern Orthodox Church. The papal bulls and decrees of the Church

testify to this. One fine example is Constitution 5 of Lateran IV in 1215, which states: ³

5. The dignity of the patriarchal sees

Renewing the ancient privileges of the patriarchal sees, we decree, with the approval of this sacred universal synod, that after the Roman church, which through the Lord's disposition has a primacy of ordinary power over all other churches inasmuch as it is the mother and mistress of all Christ's faithful, the church of Constantinople shall have the first place, the church of Alexandria the second place, the church of Antioch the third place, and the church of Jerusalem the fourth place, each maintaining its own rank. Thus after their pontiffs have received from the Roman pontiff the pallium, which is the sign of the fullness of the pontifical office, and have taken an oath of fidelity and obedience to him they may lawfully confer the pallium on their own suffragans, receiving from them for themselves canonical profession and for the Roman church the promise of obedience. They may have a standard of the Lord's cross carried before them anywhere except in the city of Rome or wherever there is present the supreme pontiff or his legate wearing the insignia of the apostolic dignity. In all the provinces subject to their jurisdiction let appeal be made to them, when it is necessary, except for appeals made to the apostolic see, to which all must humbly defer.

It not only reserved the right to declare itself and the Bishop of Rome as the supreme of all, it also reserved the right to arrange the other patriarchal sees as it saw fit.

It made use of crusades to conquer other religions and gain control over Eastern Christianity. Between 1097 and 1244 five crusades caused immense suffering, not only to local communities, but also to those participating. Jerusalem was besieged and captured from Muslims during the first crusade in 1099, recaptured by Muslims in 1187, and then won back during the fifth crusade in 1229. Christian sites were not spared either,

³ Unless stated otherwise, all English quotations of papal bulls, decrees or council constitutions are taken from <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/>

especially during crusade four, where Constantinople was ransacked by the crusaders in 1204, ending all hopes for re-unification between Eastern and Western Christianity (Asbridge 2011:733f)

I will deal with this power play of the Roman Church extensively in chapter two of the dissertation, (Page 46f) because it plays a vital role in the interaction between the Poor of Christ and the Roman Church.

The teachings and life style of the Poor of Christ clashed with the direction and ideals of the Roman Church. This is apparent in the following statements. The first one is by Walter Map, who was tasked with interrogating the Waldensian delegation at the Lateran Council in 1179 (Map 1966: 77): *“These have nowhere fixed abode, but wander about by two and two' barefooted, clad in sheepskins, possessing nothing, 'having all things in common' like the apostles, naked following the naked Christ.”*

“Naked they follow the naked Christ” - this not a statement of admiration, but of dismay. A “poor and naked Christ” did not fit into the theology of power and supremacy. Walter Map’s description of the Poor of Christ was an expression of the utter disdain that the powerful in the Church had for these people. They portrayed everything that the Church hierarchy did not want to be. Therefore, Map continues: *“Now their beginnings are lowly because they can find no entrance anywhere, for, should we let them in, we should be driven out”* (ibid).

The second statement is by the inquisitor Stephen of Bourbon from 1235, who gives a summary of the movement as he perceives it (Molnár1993, 44):

Valdes gathered a large number of men and women and sent them into the surrounding villages to preach the gospel there. These were people of the lowest professions. Illiterate men and women wandered around in the towns, forced themselves into the homes, preached almost everywhere, eventually even in churches and misled the people.

The teachings of the Poor of Christ were indeed sabotaging the drive for power of the Church. Stephen of Bourbon regarded them as illiterate, since they did not work with the Latin Bible and doctrines, but studied and taught in their vernacular. They had little

knowledge of the latest doctrines and theological debates, since these were conducted by scholars in Latin. It was precisely this aspect that made them the laughing stock at the Lateran Council in 1179, since they were not aware of the distinction between Mary being the mother of Christ or the mother of God. Walter Map, an English clergy participating in the council, reports on this event in *“Of the sect of the Waldenses”* (Map 1966:76ff, also see Chapter Three: 116 in this study) He comments on their inability to understand the fine theological distinctions. For Church Theologians, these fine theological distinctions and word plays were of equal importance, if not more important, than the Bible itself. (Molnár1993: 23ff).

Yet, their focus on the New Testament in their mother tongue also partly explains their vast growth: The largely illiterate population could understand them and could even learn Bible passages off by heart, unlike with the official Latin doctrines and teachings of the Roman Church which were a mystery and incomprehensible to most. Furthermore, the Bible in mother tongue resulted in illiterate people not only learning passages off by heart, but even to read and write, contributing to their education. (See also the map on pg. 34).

The laughter at the Lateran council in 1179 was soon replaced by concern about this rapidly spreading movement, about laity that challenged clergy. Even calls for new crusades suffered because of the spread of the message of non-violence. Asbridge (2000: 558f) states: *“Doch hatte der Verkündigungseifer der Mendikanten auch das Potential, die Ziele eines heiligen Krieges zu beeinflussen und in das bekannte Schema von Eroberung und Verteidigung den neuen Aspekt der Umkehr einzubringen.”* (The eagerness of the mendicant preachers had the potential to influence the aims of a holy war, by adding to the known system of conquering and defending the new aspect of repentance.) This non-aggressive, serving and caring attitude pushed the Roman Church to take more drastic steps to halt the movement because of it being counter-productive to and undermining the calls to crusades.

The first reaction was to excommunicate them. Tourn (1983: 23) describes how the French bishops in 1184, less than a decade into their existence, demand that the synod of Verona adds them to the list of heretical movements. This again is an indication of how rapidly the movement spread right from the beginning. Excommunication, despite its

harshness, (see Chapter two: 55) did not yield the desired subjugation, since the Poor of Christ believed that Christ had the final say in their salvation. The Church did not have the power to take away their Christ-given salvation!

Harsher methods were called for. These included a series of decrees, especially during the 4th Lateran Council of 1215 (Wohlmuth 2000: 230ff, also see Chapter two: 55ff), a twenty-year crusade against perceived heretics starting in 1208 (Tourn 1983: 30), as well as the establishment of the Inquisition as an organ of the Church to combat heresy. (See Chapter two: 71f). This well organised and funded structure acted like a secret service, sniffing out any potential heretic and eradicating opposition. Ironically this Inquisition also became one of the main sources of information on the spread of the poor of Christ, since detailed recordings of proceedings were made (Wohlmuth 2000: 252), of which many were preserved.

The Church, by its reaction to the Poor of Christ, moved into a direction, even manoeuvred itself into a corner, which eventually made the Reformation inevitable.

The Poor of Christ in relation to other movements and stream of their time

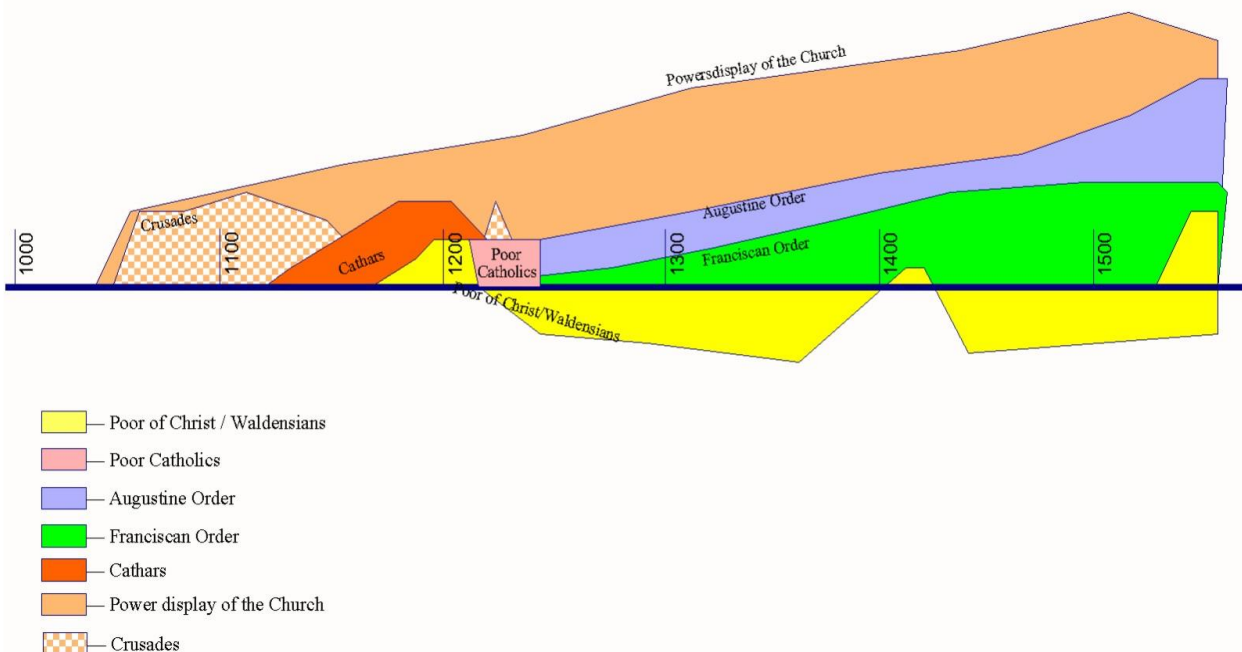


Figure 1 shows the timeline from the start of the Gregorian reformation of the Roman Church till the period when the Poor of Christ (yellow) finally joined the reformed wing of the Reformation.

It shows their position in relation to the Cathars, the Augustinian and Franciscan orders, and how, for 300 years, they were “underground”. The brief surfacing after 1400 is the time of Jan Hus and his followers, with whom they closely associated (De Lange 2006: 29ff). It also shows the continuation from the Poor of Christ via the *Poor Catholics* (pink) into the Augustine Order (blue). The orange shows the power display of the Church, which increases during the time of the emergence of the Poor of Christ.

In this research, I want to show how this “little yellow field” impacted on the Church, and that the time of being underground was not a time of insignificance, but rather had significant impact due to its perseverance and wide spread and an eventual impact on the 16th century Reformation.

2. The Research Problem

The role which the Poor of Christ played in preparing the Reformation has not been highlighted sufficiently and deserves recognition. The lack of recognition became even more apparent during the 500 years Reformation celebration in 2017, where this movement did not feature and was totally ignored. Many of those who celebrated the jubilee have never heard of Valdes or the Poor of Christ. In fact, I even received a threatening letter from a fellow Lutheran, stating that I did not deserve to be bishop, since, instead of focussing on Martin Luther, I kept on referring to this irrelevant sect. With this research, I wish to show that they are by no means irrelevant, but had a significant impact on the Reformation.

Thus, the research will ask the following question:

What impact did the Poor of Christ have on the *Roman Church*, creating the climate for the 16th Century Reformation?

To understand this, I will seek to establish which doctrines and decrees were issued by the Roman Church in reaction to the Poor of Christ, steering it into a direction which made the Reformation inevitable.

Which of the unique teachings of the Waldensians were carried through to, and influenced the 16th century Reformers?

In order to answer this, I will look at the development of the Roman Church between 1000 and 1400. I have to start almost two hundred years before Valdes, so that the shift in direction of the Church, caused by the Poor of Christ, can be seen.

In this period the Church split into the Western, Roman Church, and the Eastern Orthodox Church (1054), as a result of the battle for ultimate authority. The Roman Church fought to be recognized as the highest authority on earth with the right to send to hell or elevate to heaven on behalf of Christ.

It asserted its authority through crusades, the instalment and dethroning of rulers by the pope. (A list of papal bulls of that period gives a good impression of how much authority the pope claimed over the rulers of the Western World. –

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_papal_bulls)

This time saw the start of the building of many cathedrals as the visible, architectural expression of authority and power of the Church. (e.g.: Albi, 1282; Avignon, 1150; Lyon, 1174; Strasbourg 1176; Cologne, 1284; Magdeburg 1206)

(from: https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste_der_Kathedralen_in_Frankreich;_Deutschland)

The bishop of Lyon had been given primacy over the Churches of Gaul in 1079 (*Antiqua sanctorum patrum* by Gregory VII) and in 1174 the archbishop of Lyon started with the building of a new, significantly larger cathedral to give expression to his status (Visit on site, Lyon, 19.06.2016, see also Chapter two: 68)

The Poor of Christ frustrated the Roman Church in these endeavours through their teaching of humility and non-violence, their exemplary and simple lifestyle and their providing spiritual and physical caring free of charge, resulting in less income for the Church, which expected payment for almost every service given.

The extremely aggressive reaction of the Roman Church towards the Poor of Christ moved the Church into a direction that made the 16th century Reformation inevitable.

In this time, there is a strong shift from theology to power, decrees are not tested against scripture or even contradicting New Testament Teaching, and the distance between clergy and laity continues to grow.

Although the Poor of Christ have been recognised by many as forerunners of the Reformation almost right from the beginning of the Reformation, the reasons given were different from what I am researching. Most authors focus on the similarities between them and the reformers, specifically the teaching of grace by faith in Christ. For instance, Keller (Keller 1897) comes to the conclusion that, because of their teachings, there is a direct link from Luther via Valdes to the New Testament Church. Indeed, there is such a direct link, but it is not an organisational one. It is the New Testament itself. The teaching on grace by faith is not a Waldensian one, which was re-discovered by Luther, but rather a Pauline one that was discovered by both Valdes and Luther as they studied the New Testament. Two students of scripture can, totally independent of each other, come to the same conclusions, because the thoughts are already in the text. Thus, it is incorrect to assume a direct influence of Valdes on Luther when conclusions can be derived directly from scripture.

The fascinating question is: What are the teachings of the Poor of Christ that cannot be directly found in scripture, and have also become the teachings of the 16th century Reformers? Which conclusions did the Poor of Christ come to that the Apostle Paul did not and could not have reached a thousand years earlier, because his situation was very different? Which of the teachings of the Poor of Christ are not directly found in the New Testament, originated with them and then were taken up by the Reformers? These are some of the sub-questions this research focuses on.

Furthermore, many researchers focus on the Waldensians as if they were a movement outside or next to the Church. Indeed, there were areas where they existed as identifiable groups in total isolation. Tourn (1983: 55ff) states that the valleys to the south of Monginevro, on both sides of the Cottian Alps were ideal due to their isolation and later became the refuge of the Waldensian Church. But these areas also did not exert an influence on the outside world. In fact, they only came into contact with the Reformation a few years after it started spreading in Europe, so isolated were they (Molnár 1993: 335).

The influence on the Reformation should and can be found with those who stayed in the church, especially in the cities of Europe, and did not understand themselves as separate from the Church. This was the larger part of the movement.

Even after their excommunication, the Poor of Christ did not see themselves as an alternative or new Church, but as part of the One Roman Church of Christ, outside of which there was no salvation. Segl quotes from the *Liber Antiheresis* by Durand of Huesca (Frank 1999: 45) where the Poor of Christ are given advice how to answer Cathars who criticise them for their loyalty towards the Church.

Ihr haltet an dieser unzüchtigen Kirche fest! Wir aber antworten darauf und sagen: Nicht an der Unzucht und auch nicht an anderem Unerlaubten halten wir fest und wir entschuldigen auch nicht die bösen Werke der Priester oder anderer, sondern wir tadeln sie vielmehr ... Aber wir haben beschlossen, am Glauben an Gott und an den Sakramenten der Kirche ... bis zum Tod festzuhalten.. (Translation: We are not holding on to the immorality and other injustices of the church, nor do we excuse the evil deeds of priests and others, rather we admonish them ... but we have decided to hold on to the faith in God and the sacraments of the Church, even unto death)

Even during the most severe persecution, the movement existed within the Church and its members participated fully in the Church. The inquisitors interpreted this as a trick and hypocrisy to hide their true colours, but in fact it was their genuine understanding of being part of the Church. They did not accept their excommunication, since they believed that the pope had no right to exclude them from the One Church. Thus, their influence on the Church was from within, not from without! Molnár (1993: 331) refers to this as the sour dough that was working in Europe but it can be said that he underestimates the presence of that thinking even after the last martyr deaths before the Reformation.

Tourn (1983: 83), for instance, points out that the Reformation in Strasbourg was not in the hands of the noble, but that of the ordinary citizens. This is significant, since Strasbourg was also the German city where Waldensians were executed till 1458, the most well-known and documented having been the leader, Friedrich Reiser who is discussed in Chapter four:174ff of this study. This supports the assumption that, despite

the persecution, the teachings still existed amongst the people, resulting in the ordinary citizens becoming the driving force as the Church started losing its fearsome power.

The next aspect is that of the insistence of the Poor of Christ to work with the New Testament in their mother tongue, to teach and learn it off by heart and on teaching and training Christians in the Scriptures. This was the case also as the movement entered different language groups, resulting in various vernacular Bible translations during the next three centuries. The decree that banned the possession of such Bibles (7th and 14th decrees, Council of Toulouse, 1229 - Waldenser Chronick 1655: 66f) forced them to learn the scriptures off by heart, making it even more difficult to eradicate, and easier to pass on.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of the Poor of Christ is the distinction between the authority of scripture and that of doctrine and decrees. Valdes and the Poor of Christ reflected on the relationship between New Testament Scripture and Church doctrine and authority. This was something that none of the New Testament authors had to deal with, since they were busy writing the New Testament. When Valdes quoted Peter from Acts 5,29 "We must obey God rather than human beings" (Tourn 1983: 22) he was referring to the priests, bishops and the pope as representative of Christ, whereas Peter was addressing the Jewish Sanhedrin who did not recognize Christ as Authority. With this statement the lay man Valdes claimed the right to discern when priests, bishops or pope abuse their authority against that of Christ, and not to obey them when they err.

The Poor of Christ claimed that the official dogmas and decrees of the Church were less authoritative than Scripture, a claim that is found nowhere in the New Testament. This also was a key issue of the sixteenth century Reformation. Are the Poor of Christ the originators of this doctrine?

Another unique aspect of the Poor of Christ was their ministry of healing. (Biller 1982: 55-77) It resulted in the Poor of Christ reaching a broad spectrum of the population who were in need of help. This contributed to the spread of the movement and their teachings. It also explains the respect and protection that they experienced from ordinary people even under threat of life. Many of the Inquisition reports bear testimony to this, as is seen in Chapter three, page 109 of this study.

Perhaps the most important, un-researched aspect is the direct influence of the Poor of Christ on the Augustinian Order through the *Poor Catholics*.

Leppin (2016) sees a link between the Reformation and medieval Mysticism. In our discussion with him (Tübingen, 24.06.2016) he regarded the possibility of an influence of the Poor of Christ on Johann von Staupitz, Luther's confessor, as highly unlikely, since one would have to prove that the movement succeeded in reaching nobility or influencing the Augustinian Order. Subsequently we did establish that there was indeed proof of the latter and a strong argument for the former. We will deal with this in Chapter three:163ff of this study. The Augustinian Order and especially Johann von Staupitz played a central role in the formation of Martin Luther. This applies especially to the important role of Bible study in the Augustinian Order, the absolute loyalty to the Church whilst at the same time challenging doctrines and Church authority when they contradict scripture. (Fischer 1984: 80)

3. Research Objectives

This research has the following objectives:

a) Bringing the Poor of Christ into mainstream Church History Teaching

Too much credit is given to the 16th century reformers, and too little to those who prepared the scene. The role of the Poor of Christ has almost totally been overlooked in recent decades. This research shows the important part that they played. Their story is not just part of the history of the Waldensian Church, but an important part of the formation history of the Western Church, both Protestant and Roman Catholic. This story needs to become part of main stream Church History teaching.

The traces of the poor of Christ in France are visible, but not officially indicated in modern day France. This results in total ignorance amongst the relevant communities as to the important role that their towns played in the formation of modern European culture. In stark contrast, the cities in Germany that played a part

in the 16th century are proud to advertise the fact. The apology of Pope Francis to the Waldensians (Turin, 22.06.2015) opens the door to have these sites in France officially identified (Street in Lyon where Valdes lived, Schools that they established, the ruins of churches destroyed in their persecution, the sites of their execution). But this is not limited to France. Most of the German Reformation Cities are not aware of the much older Reformation story that played off within their walls.

b) The importance of laity in preparing 16th century Reformation

The Poor of Christ were predominantly a lay movement. During the Reformation, the main role players were theologians. This research, points out to laity that their involvement in the Church goes far beyond “nuts and bolts” and financial support. Through their biblical reflection, they play a key role in the continuation of the Church throughout the ages. The laity played a far greater role in preparing the soil for the Reformation than the theologians did. It was because of this preparation by laity that the 16th century Reformation Theologians could succeed.

c) The problematic role of church authorities

I am a Lutheran. However, the Roman Church is part of my church history. Quite a few of the wrongs of the Roman Church have been repeated by my Church, with less brutality, but still with vehemence and mercilessness. The Church, its theologians and leadership, need to understand the importance of being challenged by its lay members. This challenge needs to be treasured rather than to be suppressed.

d) The importance of studying and living out New Testament teachings

When celebrating 500 years of Reformation the focus was on doctrines, writings, and the main role players. I hope to highlight the “force behind this” - the important role that Bible study, sharing and living it out by ordinary people played to keep the Church on track, even when the leadership lost their way. The study of the New Testament and the implementation thereof is the primary trigger of the 16th century Reformation.

e) Lessons that church today can learn from the Poor of Christ.

Much can be learned from the Poor of Christ, their methods and values, but also from how the church reacted to them. These will be dealt with in the final chapter of this study.

4. Research Methods

The two methods used in this research are *Literature Review* and *Historical Contextual Analysis*. It is the combination of these two that provides the answers to the question what impact that the Poor of Christ had on the 16th Century Reformation.

Bradley&Muller (2016), in their discussion on research methods for Church History rightly say that ““one finds an increasing tendency in modern church historiography to place ideas in a wider intellectual context” “Increasingly, the more innovative techniques have revealed the inadequacies and imprecision of the traditional approaches, whether institutional or intellectual, when considered alone.” The traditional approaches that they refer to, are the dividing up of Church history into various independent components such as history of doctrine, or of liturgy, to which we would add the separation of church history from secular history.

Another important change is the greater awareness of ecumenism. Badley&Muller (ibid:24) point out that “Before the mid-eighteenth century, the study of church history was uncritical; it was invariably written from a confessional viewpoint and it was anything but detached or neutral.” This concurs with the observation of de Lange&Schwinge (2003:5) regarding the historiography on the Poor of Christ, which till the 1850’s was biased because of the uncritical theological bias of the historian.

In researching the material available we therefore have to be aware of this possible bias by the authors, but also of our own bias. The researcher, being a Lutheran, has to constantly remind himself that the period under investigation is part of his own church history, and that the history of the Lutheran Church after the Reformation is only a small part of church history.

a) Literature Review

This study relies to a large extent on literature review, which according to Efron *et al* (2018:2)

is a systematic examination of the scholarly literature about one's topic. It critically analyzes, evaluates, and synthesizes research findings, theories, and practices by scholars and researchers that are related to an area of focus. In reviewing the literature, the writer should present a comprehensive, critical, and accurate understanding of the current state of knowledge; compare different research studies and theories; reveal gaps in current literature; and indicate what needs to be done to advance what is already known about the topic of choice.

This study addresses the gap in literature when considering the historical role and development of the Poor of Christ which has been seriously neglected or even ignored all through the ages probably because of the preservation of Church tradition or the historian's biasness. The study uses some key primary and secondary sources to show how the Poor of Christ impacted the 16th Century Reformation.

McCombes (<https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/literature-review>, accessed 20.05.2020) divides the literature review process into five steps: "1. Search for relevant literature, 2. Evaluate sources, 3. Identify themes, debates and gaps, 4. Outline the structure, 5. Write your literature review."

Pietersen (<https://www.up.ac.za/media/shared/624/2017-literature-review-workshop-dr-mariana-pieteen.zp115590.pdf> , accessed 20.05.2020) expands on the third point, citing J Mouton⁴:

□ identify significant prior research: explain whether these questions have

⁴ Mouton, J. 2007. Workshop presented to Postgraduate students. SASA Congress, Uni. o. Stellenbosch.

been asked before, whether related questions have been asked, and what answers have been obtained - i.e. outline, evaluate and synthesise current state of critical/ theoretical debate

- identify limitations of past/ current research, and explain your point of entry into the debate (identify gaps/ misinterpretation/ errors/ contradictions/particular critical or theoretical problems); Preliminary literature study (Mouton, 2007)
- How you will build on past strengths while overcoming limitations
- Identify potential outcomes of your research and the importance of each
- Spell out key assumptions of research project
- Be explicit about limitations of research project: “This research will not...”
- Explain why your proposed research is worthwhile and necessary (rationale)
- Explain what original contribution your research will make to knowledge

The literature is generally divided into three main categories: Primary, secondary and tertiary sources. Efron et al (2018:59f) defines these as follows:

“Primary sources are first-hand accounts and reports written by the researchers who conducted the study, and they offer an insider’s view.” We add to this from Bradley&Muller (2016:48): “The “primary source” is a document, datum, or artefact that belongs to the era under examination and that offers the most direct access to the person or issues being studied.” – This also includes modern editions or translations of such texts into modern languages.

“Secondary sources are summaries, discussions, and interpretations of primary original-- work sources that were previously presented elsewhere. ... The authors of secondary sources do not have first-hand experience, but they have richer and often less biased perspective compared with that of the primary-source writers” (Efron et al 2018:60) On the other hand, Bradley&Miller (2016:49) point out that “Secondary works are, of their very nature, indirect sources of information. They must be used with care inasmuch as they embody elements of selectivity and

interpretation beyond the interpretive tendencies already present in the primary documentation. Secondary works also introduce their own errors and misconceptions into narrative accounts.”

“Tertiary sources are those that summarize and critically evaluate and review primary and secondary research sources. Examples of tertiary sources are encyclopaedias (including Wikipedia), textbooks, bibliographies, ... Sources classified as tertiary by some people or disciplines may be considered secondary by others.” (Efron et al 2018:60).

We agree with Bradley&Muller (2016:49) that “secondary and tertiary sources must not be used to fill gaps in one’s knowledge of the primary sources”.

The subject of this study presents various challenges. The major part of the period under research, 1174 to 1530, falls into the pre-printing-press area (prior to 1460). Primary literature is therefore mostly hand-written and often exists only as single copies. So far two copies of a major document (discussed in Chapter four of this study), the *Liber Antiheresis*, a handbook for preachers of the Poor of Christ, have been found. This particular document only became known in 1946 (Selge 1967 I: 1) Whereas official letters from the papacy and decrees of the various ecumenical councils have been compiled and are available for research, the documents of the *heretics*, when found, were burnt and only very few survived and the search for these is ongoing. De Lange&Schwinge (2003, 5) point out how the knowledge about the movement increases and also changes, as these are being discovered.

There is hardly any literature from the early time of the Poor of Christ. Nothing has been found that was written by Valdes, except for the statement of faith that he signed and augmented. (Selge 1967 I: 19ff) The most significant document so far found is the “*Liber Antihaeresis*”, a handbook for preachers, by Durand of Huscea, originally from 1184 (Selge 1967 I: 35ff)⁵. For this research we make use of the

⁵ Selge’s research on and analysis of the *Liber Antiheresis* and the *Liber Manichaeos* remains the most important reference work on these two documents and is therefore still the most current primary resource. This study makes extensive use of this research when dealing with those two documents, cited

work of Kurt Victor Selge, who compares the two editions of the *Liber Antiheresis* found so far and also cross references them to the *Liber contra Manicheos*, based on the former and written by Durand in 1220 after forming the “*Poor Catholics*” order with the permission of the Roman church. Selge still today is the scholar who has most comprehensively done the comparison of these two documents. This comparison offers important pointers for our research on the *Poor Catholics*. There are a few documents written by others, a tract against the Waldensians “*Adversus Waldensium sectam*” from 1190 and a document of the Bergamo conference of 1218. No sermons or other teachings have been preserved. (Molnár 1993: 370ff). Patchovsky and Selge compiled these sources as *Quellen zur Geschichte der Waldenser* (1973)

Another document found so far is a letter from the Lombards (the name given to the Poor of Christ in Italy) to their German brethren from 1218. Biller points out that there then is a gap of more than a century in which no literature written by the Poor of Christ is found. (Biller in Patschovsky 2011 XXV: 123). He concludes that the later movement was much less literate than the early one. (ibid: 135f) We disagree with this, since the lack of literature and evidence of critical reflection amongst the Poor of Christ can also be explained by the severity of their persecution. To be accused of being a heretic was often enough to result in execution. It was too dangerous to enter into theological debates with anyone outside of the community. The movement could however not have survived the centuries of persecution without solid teaching and critical reflection.

The Poor of Christ are regularly referred to as people with little books hidden in their garments or carried in bags. (Biller 2009: 32; Modestin 2007: 89ff) Indeed, many of the fragments and manuscripts found were of miniature size, indicating the importance of carrying and hiding them. This speaks to their literacy.

The result of the persecution and destruction of their literature is that much of what

as Selge 1967 I or II.

is written about the early period is legend rather than factual. This applies specially to stories around Valdes. Neither place and date of his birth nor death are known, almost nothing about his wife and daughters. None of his sermons, teachings or sayings are preserved. Thus, extensive biographies on Valdes normally rely on legend (e.g. Nigg 1986: 230ff). These legendary parts include the details of his conversion, what happened with his wife and children after the conversion and also details about his wealth. Although these legends make interesting reading, they are irrelevant for this study.

Other important primary sources are various records from the Inquisition. They do not expand on the teachings of the Poor of Christ, but rather on those issues that were punishable. For this study we made extensive use of the three volumes on the inquisition by Henry Charles Lea (1987 and <http://www.gutenberg.org/files>), since Lea has collected and analysed an immense amount of inquisition documents for the period in question, and helped us to get an overview of how the inquisition affected the Poor of Christ in particular.

The inquisition reports also indicate the accusations against the Poor of Christ and what they have been teaching. Due to the nature of the Inquisition of not allowing the accused to speak in defence or call witnesses for their defence, it remains a challenge to distinguish between factual, true statements and “fake news” originating from opponents to damage the reputation of the Poor of Christ. Such false accusations include that they were worshipping Satan, were cannibals and celebrated sexual orgies. (Patschovsky 2011 III: 147ff)

Another important primary literature source are the decrees of various ecumenical councils, which were evaluated to find those dealing with the Poor of Christ. They provide an important indication of how the church chose to deal with these heretics. But they also paint a picture of the problems that existed within the church, which explain why the Poor of Christ were well received by the population.

Correspondence between the pope, bishops and Durand of Huesca provided essential primary literature for the study of the *Poor Catholics* and the role that the church wanted them to play. It also gave essential information as to the church’s

intention behind the establishment of the Augustinian order.

Various other correspondence or reports by contemporaries of the Poor of Christ are another primary source that provide insight into the impact that the movement had on general society, and how it was observed by its opponents. These documents highlight those issues that made the Poor of Christ stand out and therefore provide outside information that partly makes up for the missing “inside” documents from the Poor of Christ themselves. They do, however, not provide information on their teachings, but rather on their lifestyle and methods.

Another source of primary literature are the intensive studies on the Waldensians from the 16th to 19th century. These includes works by Flacius Illyricus (1553), J.P. Perrin (1605), Jean Leger and Samuel Morland (1655,1669) Flacius remarks that the documents available to him are much younger than the movement and that nothing of the early period has survived (Molnár1993: 365-368). We regard all of these early studies as primary sources in so far as they provide information on the misconceptions that existed amongst post-Reformation protestant historians, which contributed to them giving much credit to this movement. De Lange *et al* (2003:5) points out that as these misconceptions were proven false, the interest in the movement subsided, till they were almost totally forgotten.

The secondary literature consulted ranges from more recent studies of the Waldensians in order to provide a general summary of the Movement, but also in order to help identify the research gap. The same applies to literature on the Augustinian Order and on important figures of the Reformation such as Johann von Staupitz.

General History was researched for the overview of church and secular authority during the period under review, especially 1174 to 1530. It was important to refer to the major church and secular developments from 1000 AD till 1174 as well, since that period saw a shift in power relationships between the two, but also the emergence of new political and economic forces that impacted on the Poor of Christ and their development.

Recent literature and articles were researched for specific information on matters such as the role of women in the Poor of Christ, and also references to most recent discoveries of ancient texts.

For the final chapter, looking at the example that the Poor of Christ can be for the church today, current articles and dissertations were researched to identify issues and link them up with qualities of the Poor of Christ that will be of help for us to deal with these issues.

The literature review was important to establish which of the teachings and values of the Poor of Christ eventually were carried through and influenced the thinking and theology of the 16th century Reformers, but also to show which of their values were not taken up, to the detriment of the church as a whole.

b) Historical Contextual Analysis and Synthesis

Coupled with the literature review method this research also used the historical contextual analysis and synthesis research methodology. Grace Fleming (<https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-historical-context-1857069> accessed 20.05.2020) defines historical context as:

historical context refers to the social, religious, economic, and political conditions that existed during a certain time and place. Basically, it's all the details of the time and place in which a situation occurs, and those details are what enable us to interpret and analyze works or events of the past, or even the future, rather than merely judge them by contemporary standards.

No work of literature can be fully appreciated or understood without historical context. What may seem nonsensical or even offensive to contemporary sensibilities, might actually be interpreted in a completely different manner by considering the era it is from.

Merriam-Webster dictionary (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>, accessed on 20.05.2020) defines *analysis* as: “a detailed examination of anything

complex in order to understand its nature or to determine its essential features : a thorough study”.

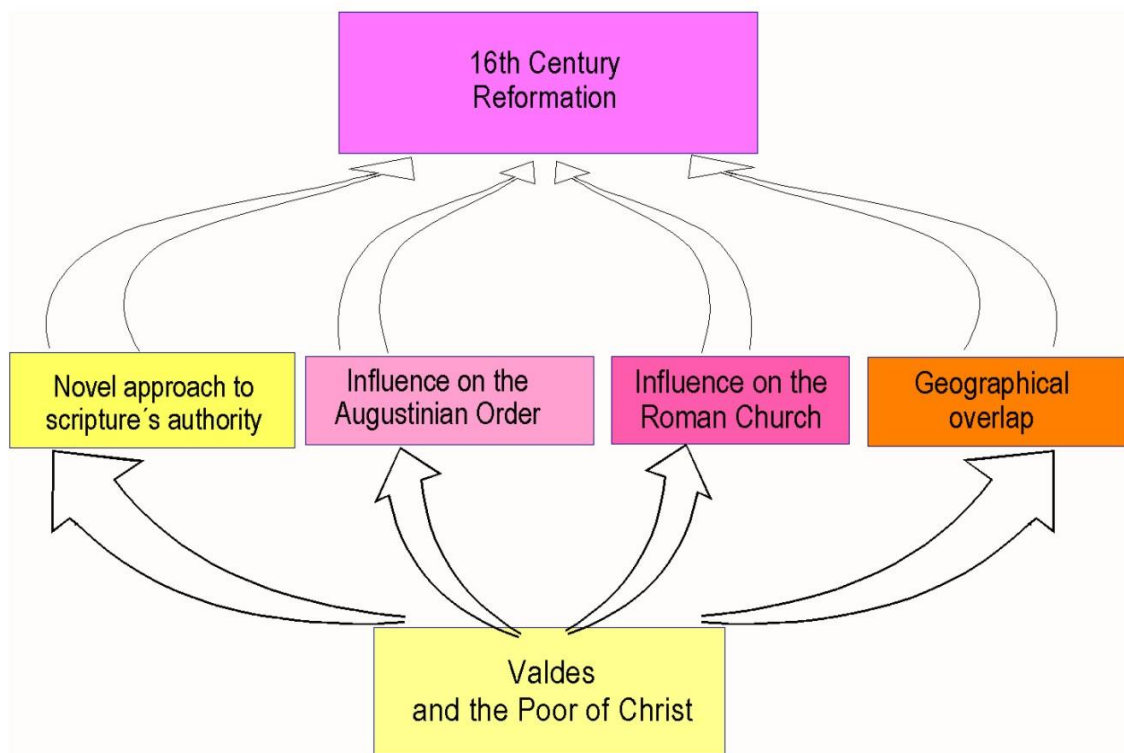
For *Synthesis* the Merriam-Webster definition: “the composition or combination of parts or elements so as to form a whole” applies.

Bradley&Muller (2016:39) state that “one of the near tragedies of twentieth-century historiography was the fairly open antagonism of some proponents of intellectual, political, and social history to one another’s work.” They offer various models for the study of the History of Doctrine, stating that “The best model for the history of doctrine is certainly the integral or organic model that attempts a synchronous understanding of the development of the central ideas of Christianity” (ibid, 38). They call it the “Integral, Developmental Model”

To establish the impact that the Poor of Christ had on the 16th century Reformation, a “synchronous understanding” of their teachings, methods and life style in the political and church environment is needed. We are showing the movement in its historical context, analysing not only how the context impacted on the movement, but also vice versa. The *synthesis* is understood as this “synchronous understanding” that brings these point together to show the impact that they had. This novel approach, takes cognisance of the fact that in some cases a large number of small, easily overlooked, factors combine to create an impact, that could not happen without that combination or synchronous understanding.

To show the impact that the Poor of Christ had, information was gathered on the political and church developments that created a window of opportunity for the Poor of Christ to start and develop, and then to show how these socio-religious-political elements again played an important role for the 16th century to succeed. In this process, the study shows how the Poor of Christ, who at their start, benefitted from the political and church environment, during the next 350 years impacted on these so that the climate became beneficial for the Reformation. This aspect has been overlooked so far, and forms an important argument of this study. The historical contextual analysis highlights the areas of influence, and the synthesis of these areas reveals the impact.

We then do the same with the relationship between the Poor of Christ and the Roman Church: How did the church impact on them, making them what they became, and on the other hand, how did they impact on the church through their underground ministry, impacting the build-up to the 16th Century Reformation. These various aspects are then brought together, synthesised, to show the impact. The Illustration below captures the four contexts analysed and synthesised, indicating the impact that the Poor of Christ had on the 16th century Reformation as a flow chart.



5. The connection between the Poor of Christ and the Waldensian Church

This study does not focus on the more known Romanesque wing of the Poor of Christ, that later formed the Waldensian Church. Although this church can trace its origins directly to Valdes, it is incorrect to link them directly to the spread of the Waldensian movement throughout Europe. This happened through the Germanic Wing. The Romanesque wing could survive in secluded valleys of the Alps as closed communities. The Germanic wing, persecuted in other parts of Europe, lived and worshipped in the parishes of the Roman Church, and received their teachings

in secret in their homes. Maps, indicating where the Inquisition found and tried Waldensians in Europe show how they were part of the community. (e.g. de Lange 2006: 171,174, 238,239). For this study, we therefore do not focus on the communities that escaped persecution due to isolation, because they also did not have a significant impact apart from on their immediate surroundings. We focus on those Poor of Christ who interacted and lived within their communities and thus had a much bigger impact. The map at the end of this chapter (page 34) shows how much broader the influence was than just the Cottic Alps, where the secluded communities survived.

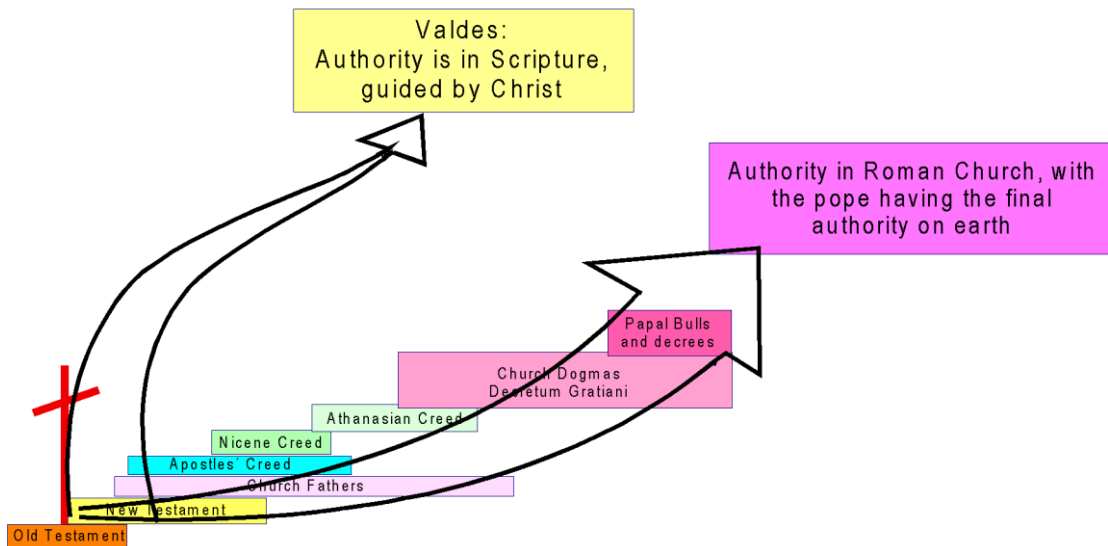
Most historians use the term “Waldensian” for both wings of the movement. Therefore, when citing such texts, the term *Waldensian* will be cited verbatim, but the context within we use the citation shows that it refers to the Poor of Christ as referred to in this study.

6. Research Gap

Various aspects of the Waldensians, Waldensian literature and the persecution of the Waldensians have been well researched. (De Lange 2003) This results in a general awareness of this movement as fore-runner of the Reformation. What however has not been researched is the bigger picture - that is, the impact that this movement had on the Roman Church, steering the Church in a specific direction. To use an illustration: A big ship is steered by its rudder. As ships became bigger, force needed to change the rudder became too much for the strength of the motor driving it. Thus a small rudder was added to the big one, called the “tab”. This tab is now steered, which, in turn, steers the rudder, which, in turn, steers the ship. With this research I wish to address this overlooked “chain reaction” that was started when Valdes had the New Testament translated into his mother tongue.

The chain reaction has four main parts or aspects: The **first aspect** is the unique distinction that Valdes made between the authority of Scripture and that of Church doctrine and clergy.

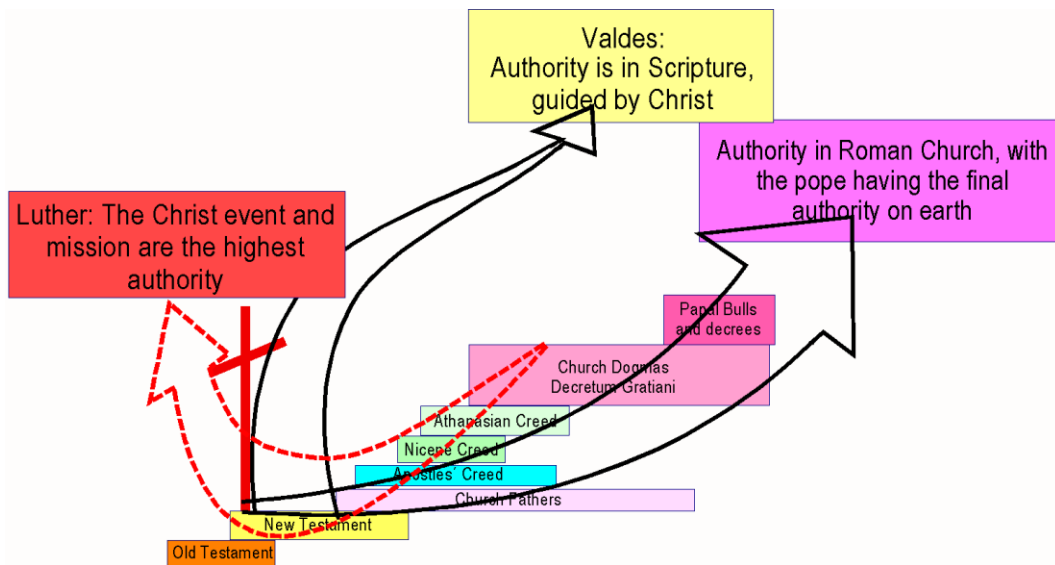
The Authority of Scripture and doctrine



The graph “The authority of scripture and doctrine” (Page 26), illustrates this new approach by Valdes and the Poor of Christ to discern between the Authority of Scripture and Authority of the Church and its doctrines. The illustration shows the writings, teachings and doctrines of the Church as they developed from its beginning. The first written authority of the Church were the Old Testament writings, followed by the epistles, gospels and other New Testament writings. Although only finalised in its present form in the 5th century, the New Testament was regarded as binding from early on. Next came the writings of the early Church Fathers. The first six centuries also saw the development of the ecumenical creeds - the Nicene, Apostolic and Athanasian creeds. They grew from the oldest Christian creed: “Kyrios Christos” - Christ is Lord, then followed centuries of Church doctrines, decrees and papal bulls. The Roman Church viewed its decrees and dogmas as of equal importance and even as more relevant than Scripture. The Christ-event and New Testament form the beginning, but the main emphasis was on the teachings and direction of the present time. Since these were all written in Latin, they were only accessible to clergy and those able to read and understand Latin, but excluding the bulk of the population. Valdes, through the access to the New Testament in his mother tongue, realised the unanswered and overlooked challenges posed by the New Testament. He did not have the capacity to approach the New Testament via the long list of traditions and doctrines. Instead he was

confronted by it in a fresh, original way. When the Church then wanted to stop him, he came to the unique conclusion that the authority of Christ through scripture outweighs that of the Church.

This is a conclusion which later became the core of the 16th century Reformation especially Martin Luther. (Figure – Luther’s approach to the Authority of Scripture and doctrine, Page 27)



Luther was a theologian, well versed in Latin, and in the study of the doctrines and teachings of the Church. Despite this, he took an approach similar to Valdes. Unlike Valdes, he knew the Latin writings and doctrines, and then chose to interpret and weigh them up through the lens of New Testament writings and the Christ event. To what extent can one claim that Valdes, through the Poor of Christ, in this approach had influenced Luther?

The influence of the Poor of Christ on the Augustinian Order has not yet been researched. This forms the important **second aspect** of this research. To what extent did the *Poor Catholics* survived and influenced the newly established Augustinian Order into which they were integrated? (See Chapter five: 157).

To what extent can the readiness of the 16th century Reformers to challenge Church and doctrine be ascribed to this? To what extent was the utmost regard for scripture as more binding than doctrine a result of this?

The **third aspect** to connect, is the reaction of the Roman Church to the movement through decrees and the Inquisition. Although the Inquisition is well researched (Lea I, II&II 1987), as are the doctrines of the Church of this time, (Wohlmuth 2000) as well as the impact that these had on the poor of Christ (Molnár 193: 104-175; Tourn 1983:13-69), the aspect that has been overlooked so far is the influence that this reaction had on the Roman Church itself. Setting the scene for the Reformation was not only done by what the poor of Christ taught and did, but just as significantly by the reaction of the Roman Church, since it contributed to a climate that made the Reformation inevitable.

In this regard we can learn from astronomers. They can deduct that distant planets have moons; by the way they orbit their star. A moon, invisible to the eye, influences the pattern of the orbit of the planet, although it is many times the size of the moon encircling it.

With this research I wish to show how the tiny, almost invisible movement of the Poor of Christ altered the “*orbit*”, the behaviour of the Church to such an extent that a reformation became unavoidable.

The **last un-researched aspect** that we focus on, is the geographical correlation between the spread of the Poor of Christ throughout western Europe and the 16th century Reformation hot spots. This will show a more direct influence of the movement on the Roman Church than through Jan Hus or Wycliffe. The thoughts and approach of the Poor of Christ are proven to have survived within the church and parishes till the late 15th century, as Inquisition documents reveal.

7. Chapter Outline of the dissertation

In order to answer the research question and fulfil the research aims and objectives, the study is divided into the following chapters to show the significant impact of the “Poor of Christ” on setting the scene for the 16th century Reformation

Chapter two gives back ground information showing how a window of opportunity opened up for a movement like the Poor of Christ to be established. It might very well be that prior to Valdes other individuals have embarked on a similar route as him, but without being taken note of, and without having lasting impact. Chapter two shows how various factors together contributed towards creating a window of opportunity in which the young movement of the Poor of Christ could gain sufficient momentum to survive for three hundred and fifty years. These factors include the changes in the secular political and economic climate without which Valdes would never even have started the movement. It deals with the power struggle within the church and between church and secular authority, which created pockets of safety for the Poor of Christ to grow roots. It deals with the detrimental church-internal developments especially regarding the moral standards of clergy and the financial exploitation by the church which made the Poor of Christ stand out with their integrity and humility. Furthermore, it shows how the Church, in reacting to the Poor of Christ, and trying to stop them, actually made the movement more resilient, whilst at the same time further weakening the churches own credibility.

Chapter three focuses on the reaction of the church and the actions that the *Roman Church* took against the Poor of Christ. However, it does not focus on the impact that this had on the Poor of Christ, but rather on the church itself. The decision to use brutal force against perceived heretics, not to engage in theological debate, and refusing to self-correct or be corrected steered the church into a very problematic direction, which, in the long run, had to lead to the reformation explosion. The brutality towards critical voices and extreme restrictive measures towards laity gave impetus to the underground movement of the Poor of Christ in the Holy Roman Empire, creating a tension between how church could look, and how it actually did look and operate to its own detriment.

Chapter Four then focuses on the Poor of Christ, and the impact that the church's actions had on the movement. It resulted in the split into the recognized *Poor Catholics* and the underground *Poor of Christ* in the Holy Roman empire, as well as the secluded communities of the Romanesque wing of the movement. The latter, due to its seclusion, no longer significantly impacted on the 16th century Reformation.

The chapter then shows how the *Poor Catholics* were integrated and to some extend

influenced the Augustinian Order. It also shows to what extent the Augustinian Order was formed by the Roman Church as an alternative instrument in the fight against the Poor of Christ, by simulating its methods and training. It shows that the method to fight same with same in this instance was not successful, but rather resulted in the Augustinian Order also becoming a major contributor to reformational thinking. It therefore also focuses on Johann von Staupitz, Martin Luther's confessor, coach and motivator.

As a next step the chapter then shows how the persecuted Poor of Christ built up resilience and continued to spread, influencing society from generation to generation. It also focuses on Friedrich Reiser, one of the last leading figures of the Poor of Christ, showing places of his frequent or extended visits, which time wise and area wise overlap with the parent generation of important 16th Century Reformation figures such as Staupitz.

Chapter Five then builds on this, showing how the movement continued to spread in the Holy Roman Empire, despite all Inquisition efforts. It shows that in some areas the movement was almost, and in some cases completely eradicated, whilst in other regions it did survive or even flourish, and gives an explanation for this, by showing that, where secular authorities and Inquisition worked together, it contributed to their demise, and when authorities refused to co-operate with the inquisition this provided space for them to flourish. The chapter makes use of maps to show known places of persecution and presence of the Poor of Christ. The maps are an important visual indication of the overlap between the Poor of Christ's presence and the places of the early 16th century Reformation explosion. It then also briefly touches on the synod of Chanforan, which in 1533 marked the end of the underground Poor of Christ movement and led to the formal acceptance of the secluded Romanesque communities to be recognized and accepted as Waldensian church in the reformed wing of the 16th century Reformation.

Chapter Six brings together the findings of the first five chapters to show the significant impact that the Poor of Christ had in affecting the climate conducive to the 16th century Reformation explosion. It shows that the impact was strongest on two theological aspects of the Reformation: *Sola scriptura* and *Solus Christus*. It also shows that, apart from the Swiss and Wittenberg Reformers, there were independent reformational thinkers coming from those areas with strong presence of the Poor of Christ, a link that has been

overlooked so far. Although there is no direct link between Valdes and Luther, the influence of the Poor of Christ can be seen in other reformational thinkers, pre-dating the time of Luther's discoveries and writings, and suggesting that 1174 rather than 1517 should be seen as the beginning of the 16th Century Reformation.

Chapter Seven then focuses on the relevance of the study for today, and what can be learnt from the Poor of Christ for our current context. Many of the issues that are described in this research are still issues today - Church, Power, Authority, Hierarchy remain challenges, resulting in tensions, splits, antagonism and sometimes bloody battles amongst Christian factions. The chapter then shows how to address these based on findings from this study.

It also deals with the relationship clergy-laity, showing how mistakes of the past are repeated when poorly trained clergy use their ordination authority to silence well informed and trained lay people, and offers suggestions, based on the ministry of the Poor of Christ, how the church can let the all-important lay portion of its membership develop its potential.

It points out that the equal role of women within the Poor of Christ made the movement much stronger, and how this aspect needs to be encouraged and developed today.

The Poor of Christ were loyal to the one church, and in the totally divided global church this awareness of the one-ness will have a huge influence on the impact that the Church can have. In the ecumenical context, the issue of heresy, conflicting doctrines and constructive co-operation remains a challenge. What can we learn from this subject to help us to work together, rather than against each other?

Lastly, continuous reformation is crucial for the Church. Each denomination must guard against doctrine and tradition clouding the core of our faith, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In this chapter we will point to further areas that can be researched as a result of this research, and give a conclusion showing how the research question has been answered.

8. Conclusion

In this chapter we identified the research problem and objectives of this study and showed the methods that will be used to answer the research question. The research gap was shown, and an overview of the various chapters given.

The next chapter will focus at the beginning of the movement and show how, due to a coming together of different circumstances, a window of opportunity was created, for the movement to start and quickly gain ground.

Chapter 2 The Poor of Christ: A window of opportunity

This chapter describes the environment into which Valdes was born, and in which the Poor of Christ developed. We will also briefly describe the Cathars, a sect that was often confused with the Poor of Christ, but ironically also ensured that the Poor of Christ clearly defined their loyalty to the Roman Church. Whereas the Roman Church fought the Cathars with force, the Poor of Christ engaged them in theological discussion and tried to win them back to the Church. In this process the Poor of Christ refined their own teachings.

We will give an overview of the power struggle between church and rulers. This, together with the crusades and also to some extent the battles with the Orthodox Church demanded most of the attention and resources of the Church and the rulers. The main source of money was the nobility and ordinary people who were taxed by both church and rulers. (Asbridge 2011: 416ff) This created an enormous distance between church and people with regards to their daily pressing needs. In fact, church and rulers were major contributing factors to their misery.

This opened a window of opportunity for the Poor of Christ. Their holistic missionary approach, focussing on proclaiming the gospel, providing health care, counselling and education meant that the general population felt taken seriously by them. This contributed to the incredibly fast spreading of the movement, as well as the protection of the Poor of Christ by the people.

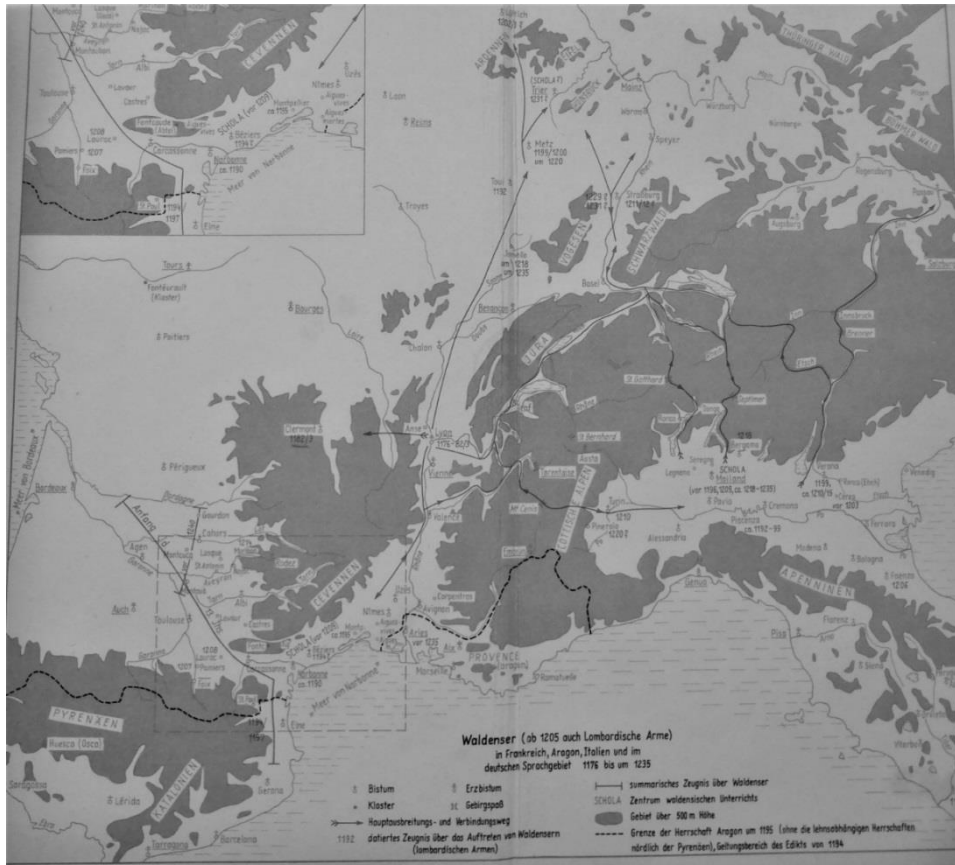
The power struggles also meant that the church could not focus on the Poor of Christ which initially was a very small and localised movement. This, however, gave them a head start - a few years of unhindered spreading. (See map of the spread during the first 50 years, page 34)

In this chapter we focus on the region of Western Europe and specifically the Holy Roman Empire, since that region became the birth ground of the 16th century Reformation.

The overview of the political powers serves to show the general political instability and struggle for power and dominance, which also created “pockets of safety” for the Poor of Christ where they could work unhindered, due to church and state struggling against another for power. At the same time, it created areas of extreme danger where political

powers wanted to express their loyalty to the church by actively assisting in rooting out perceived heretics, of which the Poor of Christ were the main target group.

In this chapter *literature review* is employed to obtain the necessary information on each of the areas – church, society, economy and Valdes, and then the historical contextual analysis and synthesis places them in relation to each other to show how the window of opportunity was formed for the Poor of Christ to be formed and establish a foothold.



This map (Selge I 1969: back cover) shows the rapid spread of the Poor of Christ during the first 50 years of their existence, due to the window of opportunity. Within 20 years they had reached Lüttich in central Germany, Milan in Italy and Narbonne in Southern France.

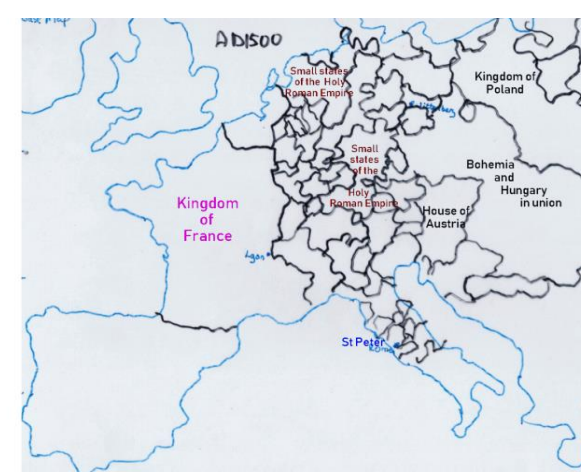
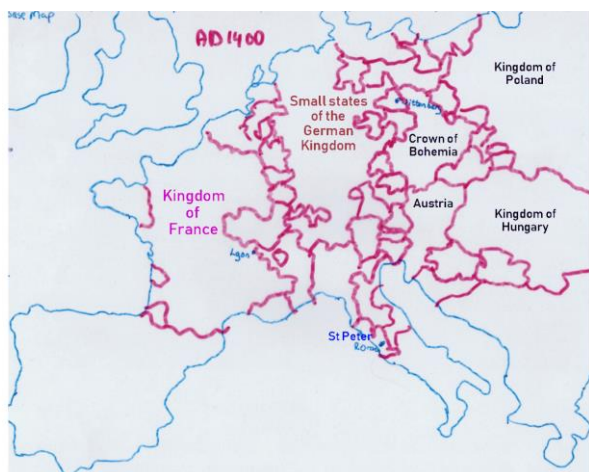
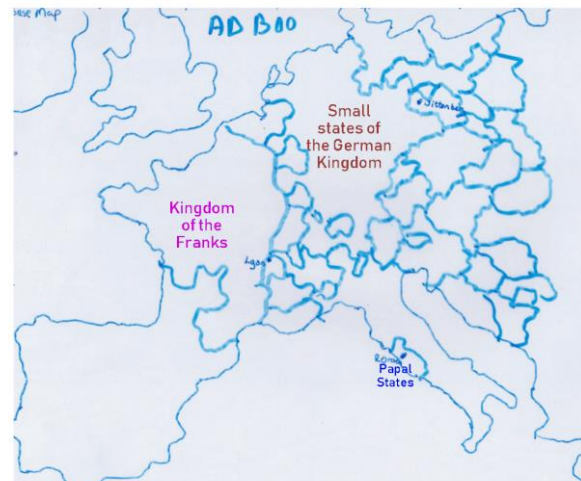
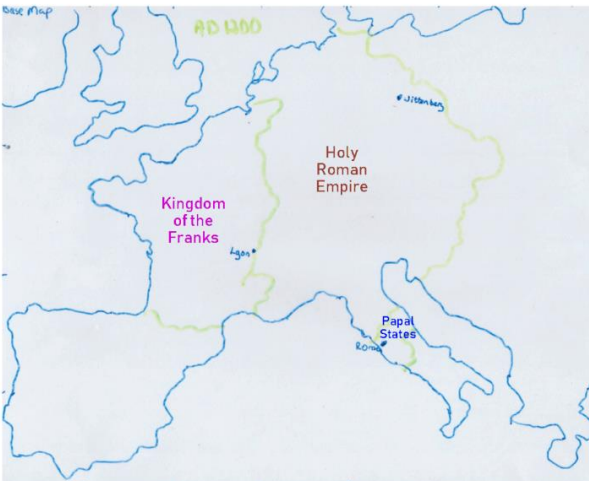
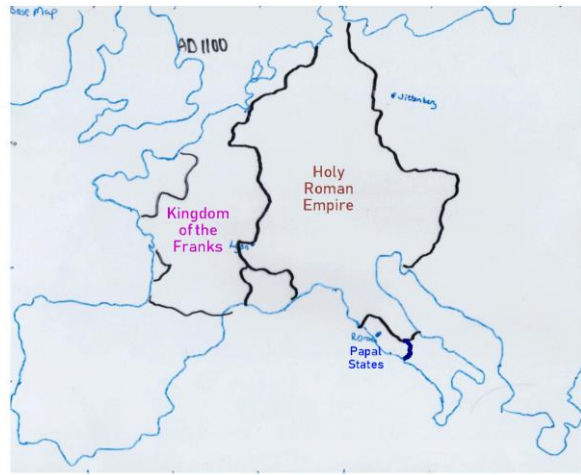
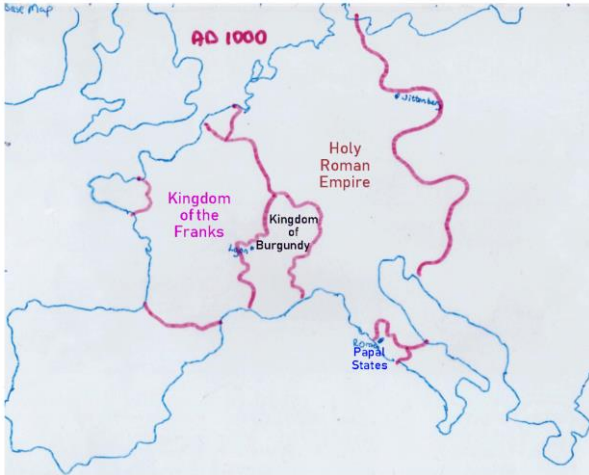
The various schools are indicated by "Schola" and existed in Beziers prior to 1209, Milan and Trier. The significant distance between these Schools (ranging from 700 to 1000 kilometres) are an indication that various teachers

were at work, independent of Valdes. It also shows the paths that they followed, all along the then trade routes via major cities.

1. 12th and 13th century Historical background of Central Europe

The following maps show the political developments in Europe from 1000 to 1500. It is important to note the growth and disintegration of the Holy Roman Empire in this period. In this chapter we will show how this contributed to the window of opportunity for the Poor of Christ to spread.

(The information for these maps was taken from www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/europe/images/map-europe)



a) Political powers and economy of the time

Rulers and ruling structures

The Frankish Empire broke up into Western, Middle and Eastern Frankia in AD843, when it was split between the three sons of Ludwig 1.

The city of Lyon became part of the “Heiliges Römisches Reich Deutscher Nation” in 1035 under **Conrad II**. During the period of this research it remained part of the Holy Roman Empire, and not of the Kingdom of France. For that reason, we will focus on the rulers of the Holy Roman Empire. As can be seen on the map of Europe AD 1100 (page 35) Lyon was “on the outskirts of the Empire,” and as such a good place for the growth of independent thinking.

For Conrad the church was a useful tool to expand his imperial power. He did this by appointing bishops into strategically important posts. (Walker 1976: 198)

Various rulers of the Holy Roman Empire preceding the time of the Poor of Christ did, directly or indirectly contribute to preparing the window of opportunity in which the Poor of Christ could then develop.

Conrad II was succeeded by **Henry III (1016-56)**. During this time the **crusades** started and the Great Schism took place. These were dictated by the church, but with close co-operation of the ruling political powers. On the one hand the crusades are an indication of the power that the church held over the rulers, since many a ruler did not only provide soldiers, but accompanied the crusaders at great danger to their own lives. At the same time the crusades for some rulers were an opportunity to expand their own influence, power and domain.

Asbridge (2011: 705ff) lists the impact that it had on commerce, shift in political powers and the sanctioning of violence as a holy weapon within Christianity. The crusades had a huge impact on the economy draining funds of rulers and church, resulting in a drastic increase of taxes to the people and counties, leading to an increase in poverty and misery.

The crusades also had a major impact on faith and theology. More than any institution before, it made violence not only acceptable to the church, but elevated it as a holy instrument for the furthering of the reign of the church. Violence became an accepted and sanctified tool of the church to combat its enemies. It did not take long before the church also used this instrument against “enemies in its midst” – heretics in her own domain.

The crusades had a twofold impact on the Poor of Christ:

- Their anti-violence stance, based on the Sermon on the Mount, made them stand out. Abridge (2011: 707) states that the Latin Christianity had wholeheartedly embraced the idea of using violence to protect and promote their faith. Thus, the refusal of the Poor of Christ to be part of violent actions brought them into conflict with the church. This was aggravated by the fact that the rise of the Poor of Christ resulted in a growing unwillingness of the population to become part of crusades (Asbridge 2011: 558) This made it even more important for the church to remove them.
- When the Inquisition turned against the Poor of Christ, they experienced this “sanctified violence” to the full, with brutal torture, the execution of thousands and destruction of whole communities and towns by the church in the name of God.

The Crusades also played a major role in the formation and rising of the Cathars (Walker 1976: 227f). This sect broke away from the Roman Church and formed an independent movement of “true believers”. Whilst the Poor of Christ were placed by the church in the same category than the Cathars, the Poor of Christ actively campaigned against the Cathars. The “*Liber Antiheresis*” by Durand of Huesca, from about 1186, is a handbook for preachers of the Poor of Christ to help them stand firm against the Cathars.

Henry IV 1056– 1106. His reign marks the beginning of the Investiture Controversy between emperor and pope (Schmidt 1975: 206f). Both worldly rulers and the pope were aware of the significance of the role of bishops and

archbishops, and both were eager to control the appointment of these. It was not, in the first instance, a theological issue, but a power struggle, and both parties would deploy non-clergy into these positions if it suited them best. The Investiture Controversy therefor was a power struggle between church and state, and theological reflection needed to serve this power struggle. *“Der Kampf um die kirchlichen Dinge entschied also zugleich die Rangstellung in der Welt”* (ibid: 206). Whoever controlled the bishops, to a large extent controlled the region.

This influenced the Poor of Christ in various ways: they often had to deal with bishops who had no clerical background or theological knowledge. In those cases, the lay person was a far better theologian than the bishop. Some bishops welcomed the Poor of Christ because they sensed their value. Others blocked and persecuted them, because they saw their own authority undermined. Theological considerations hardly ever informed these bishops.

Secondly, since the bishops were tasked with ensuring that there were no heretics in their diocese (Chapter three: 124). Depending on their loyalty to the pope they would comply or chose to ignore this instruction.

Also, the Inquisitors needed the cooperation from bishops.

Henry V 1105-1125 The Investiture Controversy heightened. Henry captured Pope Pashalis II and the cardinals, and forced the pope to crown him emperor and allow lay Investiture. Various bishops excommunicated Henry, who eventually pushed for the election of Gregory VII as anti-pope. His excommunication was lifted in 1119 when he banished pope Gregory and recognised Calixtus II as pope. The Investiture of lay people was banned (Walker 1976: 211f).

The intense power struggle between this and future emperors of the Holy Roman Empire weakened the authority of the pope in that Empire. This explains why the expansion of the Poor of Christ into that territory was much more successful and long-lasting than into the Kingdom of the Franks (See Map: Spread of the Waldensens in Europe between 1176 and 1232 on page 34).

A large portion of the 12th century experienced popes and anti- popes. It is not clear how much of this filtered down to the ordinary people, to what extent they were aware of it. It did, however, weaken the authority of the pope and strengthened secular powers.

Valdes was born and grew up during a period of popes and anti-popes, which had a direct impact on the early development of his ministry. (See next section, page 41 Victor IV; and page 48)

Frederick I (Barbarossa) 1155-1190 The maps on page 35 show how the Holy Roman Empire expanded between 1000 and 1200. During the reign of Frederick I, it reached its climax of expansion and power. He was one of the most powerful emperors of the empire, according to Davies:

It was his ambition to restore the old Roman Empire to its former magnificence, and he regarded himself as the successor not merely of Charlemagne and Otto the Great, but also of the Caesars. After the German princes had acknowledged him as Emperor he informed the Pope that the imperial dignity had been conferred upon him by God. He did not ask for papal approval like his predecessors. (Davies 1937: 313)

His ambition however also resulted in rebellion in regions such as the Lombard League, where eventually an agreement was reached that they would recognize him as emperor, and in exchange the cities were allowed to manage their own affairs (ibid).

He re-instituted Corpus Juris Civilis to counter balance papal power. He was crowned by Pope Adrian IV after reluctantly submitting to the pope's authority. He was also in conflict with the successor, Pope Alexander III, until signing the Peace of Venice, 1177 where Frederick acknowledged Pope Alexander III's sovereignty over the Papal States, and in return Alexander acknowledged the emperor's over-lordship of the Imperial Church. In the first statement Frederick acknowledges the supremacy of the pope over the church. (Quotes are from Henderson 1896: 425ff)

1. The lord emperor Frederick, according as he has received the lord pope Alexander as catholic and universal pope, so he will exhibit to him due reverence, just as his, Frederick's, catholic predecessors have exhibited it to his, Alexander's, catholic predecessors. He will also exhibit the same reverence to the pope's successors who shall be catholically enthroned.

The next 21 statements then commit the emperor to restoring to the pope what had been lost in the battles between papacy and empire.

Only in statement 22 the pope then acknowledges the emperor:

22. The lord pope, moreover, and all the cardinals, just as they have received the lord emperor Frederick as Roman and catholic emperor, so they will receive Beatrix his serene wife as catholic and Roman empress, Provided, however, that she shall be crowned by the lord pope Alexander or by his legate. They will receive, moreover, the lord Henry their son as catholic king.

Statement 6 is also of significance for this thesis:

6. Moreover the lord emperor and the lord pope will mutually aid each other in preserving the honour and rights of the church and the empire; the lord pope as a benignant father will aid his devoted and most beloved son, the most Christian emperor, -and the lord emperor, on the other hand, as a devoted son and most Christian emperor, will aid his beloved and reverend father, the vicar of St. Peter.

This opened the door for the Inquisition to meter out harsh punishment, which then would be implemented by the worldly powers.

The Poor of Christ started during the rule of Frederick I and within the boundaries of his empire. In the battle for power, Frederick appointed Victor IV as anti-pope to Alexander III, continuing the long list of anti-popes during the 12th century. It is not clear how much of this filtered down to the ordinary people, and to what extent they were aware of it. Valdes was born and grew up during such a period of popes and anti-popes.

The rule of emperor Frederick I influenced Valdes and the Poor of Christ in the following ways:

- The growing autonomy of cities including Lyon created the space for this ordinary man to become wealthy, influential and important to the archbishop.
- During the time of anti-pope Victor IV Pope Alexander III lived in Sens, France (1162-1165). Alexander consecrated Guichard as archbishop of Lyon en route on his return to Rome in 1164. Guichard became a friend of Valdes before the latter had the conversion experience in 1174. (Kerner 1874: 48). It is possible that Valdes had been part of those accompanying Guichard for his consecration, and that he had met pope Alexander. This might have played a part in Valdes's decision to approach the pope for permission to preach, and that the pope, upon meeting him, embraced him (Molnár 1993: 23). Had they met before when Alexander had fled to France?
- During the reign of Frederick I, pope Lucius III, in 1184, issued the decree *Ad Abolendam*, calling on all earthly rulers to assist in combatting heresies. The statement was issued after him meeting with Fredrick I. He refers to Frederick supporting this call. However, there is little or no evidence that Frederick honoured this commitment (Diehl, *Ad Abolendam*).

Frederick I was succeeded by Henry VI (1191-97) and Otto IV (1209-15). The gaps in the dates are an indication of the battle of kings to be recognised as emperors. In this case it involved simultaneous kings of the Germans, Philipp and Otto who both claimed the crown and the empire. Eventually Otto won. He was succeeded by Frederick II, who is a larger role player, also in view of this thesis.

What is of significance for this study is that this marks the beginning of the weakening of the Holy Roman Empire, which lessened the focus on and threat to the Poor of Christ.

Frederick II 1212/20 -50 and the emergence of regional centres of power

During this period the Church, royals and nobility were the major role players. Regional power-centres, the princes and counts, gain authority and autonomy. Whereas they used to be appointed by the emperors, the 11th century sees the beginning of family rule where descendants inherit the county. This results in a growing power of that family in the region, as opposed to Church authority and the emperors. (Bitsch 1971: 36). Although Frederick II has as main aim of his rule to increase his empire, and also succeeds in doing so, at the same time his direct authority in the counties continues to diminish. The comparison between the Holy Roman Empire in 1200 and 1300 (Maps, page 35) show this loss of influence. On the one hand he is the mighty emperor, on the other he is far removed from the politics in the regions. Regional rulers associate with him when it suits them, or go their own route when that is the better option.

The emperor interacts with the pope. In the case of Frederick II, the relationship is an uneasy one. Innocent III never really acknowledges him, whereas his successor Honorius manages to win him for the 5th crusade.

The tension between emperor and pope meant that no real effort was made to combat heresies, which created a good climate for people like the Poor of Christ, to spread their work. (Schneider 1981: 97)

While pope and emperor are negotiating, the real influence in a region however rests with the local bishop and the region's count. For the Poor of Christ, it meant that, even if they were banished at the highest level by church and emperor, there were some princes and counts that had a positive stance towards them – be it for power-political reasons, or because of respect for them. During the 16th century Reformation the princes too played a significant role in protecting the reformers, even against the emperor and the pope (See Chapter six). This lack of direct influence and authority in the regions also forced the church to make more use of the Inquisition, its rules and its methods, to assert its authority. The inquisitor received his authority from the pope (and emperor), and did not fall

under the authority of the local archbishop, bishop or count. He did, however, rely on the worldly ruler to implement the punishment.

b) Economy

The rise of European banking system from the 12th century onwards makes currency exchange easier, and later even the moneyless transfer of funds (Pohl 1994: 47ff, 185). This increases cross border travel and trade which in turn creates opportunities for the rapid spread of the Poor of Christ throughout Europe. Lyon, the city where the Poor of Christ started, was an important city in the twelfth century. Trade routes from east to west and north to south crossed through Lyon. As can be seen on the maps of Europe (page 35), its location was on the border of the Kingdom of the Franks and the Holy Roman Empire. This strategic position contributed to the rapid spread of the movement, since people from all over Europe frequented the city, and the trade routes from Lyon to other cities were well established (ibid). This is even more important if one considers, that unlike other movements of the time, the Poor of Christ did not seek seclusion and isolation, or drift into the deep rural areas, but chose to operate in larger towns and cities.

The rise of economy also meant that trade across all of Europe expanded. In quite a few Inquisition accounts the Poor of Christ are accused of being sly, by posing as traders. The "Passau Anonymous" states (Tourn 1983: 52):

Sie trachten auch mit List, wie sie sich in den Umgang mit Edlen und Großen einschleichen können. Das tun sie, indem sie den Herren und Damen willkommene Waren wie Ringe und Umhänge zum Kauf anbieten. Wenn der Käufer dann fragt: Hast du noch mehr anzubieten?, so lautet die Antwort: Ich habe noch wertvollere Edelsteine. Wenn ihr mir versprecht, mich nicht den Pfaffen zu verraten, würde ich sie euch geben. (Summary: They are sly in the way that they creep up to the noble and important people, by offering them merchandise. When asked for more they promise precious gems, provided that the priest is not told)

Although this is seen by the inquisitors as a disguise, for the Poor of Christ it had a different perspective: Their main aim was to preach the gospel (Losch in Frank 1999: 35) and the best way to achieve this aim was sought. Working as a merchant was very effective. Based on this description it ⁶is clear that they did not only have basic merchandise, but also things that were of interest to the wealthy and nobility. This shows how the rising economy and trade was to their advantage.

Although many preachers (Barbes or Masters) when formally installed, pledged to live a life of poverty, and only survive from what they receive as alms, (Feuchter in Frank 1999: 63) others did earn an income through a trade or as travelling traders. Being a trader for them was not a disguise, but an effective means of making contact with the population of a town and gaining confidence of people. They could blend in with other merchants, and in that way frequent the established trading routes undiscovered. It also gave them access to the powerful citizens and nobility, who had the money to buy from them, and gave them the opportunity to share their faith with them. (Patschovsky/Selge 1973: 74ff). Those who only preached, did as a rule, not get access to upper classes but could reach out to the average and also poorer people.

c) The rise of citizenry to power and influence.

Whereas up to now Church and King were the landowners, employers, and had the power of being educated, the twelfth century sees the beginning of the rise of independent cities and ordinary citizens to power and influence. The crusades had resulted in rulers sacrificing feudal lands and property. This created space for cities to develop their own power structures and independence. Added to this, the crusades also opened many new trade possibilities, which benefited these

⁶ Audisio (1999: 125f) explains the origin of the name "barbe" as "*a respectful title given to an elder in a community.*". Thus, the arrival of a preacher could be announced without creating suspicion, since it was a common term. He points out that this movement was the only one to choose this term for their leaders. It was mainly used in the Romanesque wing of the Poor of Christ. The German wing used "brother" or "Master".

cities and ordinary, clever citizens the most (Walker 1976: 224). As ordinary people accumulated wealth they could also afford receiving education. From being illiterate workers or peasants, some learned to read and write and became tradesmen, landowners and employers.

Just as the independent cities, this new class of citizens also became political role players in that both nobility and clergy vied for their friendship and support. Because of their wealth they could donate and lend money to church and nobility. Losing their favour could lead to formidable opposition, as Frederick I experienced from the Lombard League (see page 39 above).

Valdes of Lyon was such an ordinary citizen who managed to accumulate significant wealth as a merchant. He became a good friend of Archbishop Guichard of Lyon. This friendship with Valdes and other wealthy citizens is important to the archbishop, since he had begun with the construction of a new Cathedral in 1170, for which he needed funding. (Lyon Cathedral on site information 19 June 2016)

The power and independence of these cities also resulted in many of them tolerating the Poor of Christ. *“Von den Zeiten Inozenz’III. bis zu Innozenz IV beschwerten sich die Päpste bitter über die schlecht verhüllte liberale Duldung der städtischen Kommunen und auch einiger Herren gegenüber den Ketzern.”*(Molnár 1993: 129) – they had become a headache for the church, because the Poor of Christ could operate there openly up to the middle of the fourteenth century (ibid).

2. The Roman Church

In the period covered by this thesis many of the doctrines and teachings that later become main controversies in the Reformation, were formulated or refined. These include the teachings on purgatory, stricter separation of the tasks of laity and priests with the specific exclusion of laity from preaching or taking confession, supremacy of the pope amongst others.

The Roman Church during the time of Valdes differed vastly and significantly from the church during the time of Martin Luther. Valdes and his followers challenged many wrong developments that were still in their infancy. Their challenge and the unwillingness or inability of the church to deal with them on a theological level significantly influenced the development of doctrines and traditions.

Three hundred years later Luther and his fellow reformers fought against doctrines and traditions which, by now, were well defined and centuries old. Of special interest to this research are those that were written to restrict or act against Valdes and the Poor of Christ. In other words: The Roman Church developed some of its controversial doctrines in reaction to the Poor of Christ, which later became key issues of the Reformation.

a) The Gregorian Reform

A key development preceding this was the Gregorian Reform. Since the move of the Roman emperor Constantine to Constantinople and the declaration subsequently by emperor Theodosius of Christianity as state religion, (Davis 1937: 212) the Church, with its main seat in Rome, grew in power and influence. This battle for supremacy resulted, amongst others, also in the great schism between the Eastern Orthodox (based in Constantinople) and Western Latin (based in Rome) Church in 1054. For centuries the battle between church and emperor continued as to who had the highest authority. The pope crowned the emperor, and regarded himself as being the ultimate authority. On the other hand, the emperors nominated and removed popes, and saw themselves as the guardians of the church. When Emperor Henry III died (1056) and was succeeded by a child, the church used this period of weakness to firmly establish and formalise its authority. Gregory VII (1073-85) played an important role in this regard. He excommunicated Henry IV, and claimed the overlordship over the earth as representative of Christ (Schmidt 1975: 187ff). The intensity of this power struggle can be sensed when reading the letter that Gregory wrote to the Germans to defend the excommunication:

For offended at being taken to task or rebuked by any one, he not only could not be induced to make amends for the deeds perpetrated, but, carried away by a still greater fury of spirit, did not cease until he had caused the bishops-nearly all of those in Italy; in German lands as many as he could-to shipwreck the faith of Christ, compelling them to deny the obedience and honour due to St. Peter and the apostolic see and granted to them by our Lord Jesus Christ. (<https://avalon.law.yale.edu/medieval/inv06.asp>)

This power struggle resulted in a series of popes and anti-popes. Often the cause for division was the loyalty of one candidate to the emperor and the strife for independence of the other. They excommunicated one another, or were declared official pope or fake pope by the emperor. In this battle for power and authority religious orders and sects became useful allies or dangerous opponents. Withholding or granting salvation was the most powerful tool that the pope (and the church) had, and many a ruler submitted to church authority out of fear of eternal damnation.

The growing power of the church also created the climate for the Inquisition to become a brutal instrument to stamp out opposition and enforce obedience to those in power. Whereas initially, and in its intention, it was a theological instrument to deal with theological controversies and heresies, it developed into a legal arm of the church. All too often the Inquisitor played the role of police, judge and executer, all in one person.

b) The popes in the time of Valdes (see time line 12th 13th century.xls)

i. Alexander III (1159-81)

As can be seen from the list below, there was a rapid change in the papacy during the life time of Valdes. Of these perhaps only Alexander III ever met him. Alexander III was regarded by many as a “weak pope”, since he did not use force to assert his authority. He opted to live in exile in Sens, France, rather than to have cities destroyed in an attempt to get rid of him. Despite being in

exile, he had much wider support amongst the clergy, and even worldly rulers, than any of the counter popes during his rule.

He was succeeded by no less than 5 popes in a period of 17 years. As can be seen on the map on page 34, this period of rapid change in papacies coincides with the rapid spread of the Poor of Christ, despite the fact that in this period they were excommunicated and declared heretics. The instability in the papacy seems to have benefited them significantly.

Pope	Anti-Pope
Alexander III 1159 – 81	Victor IV 1149 - 56 Pashalis III 1164 - 68 Calixtus III 1168 - 78 Innocent III 1179 - 80
Lucius III 1181 – 85	
Urban III 1185 – 87	
Gregory VII 1187	
Clement III 1187 – 91	
Celestine III 1191 – 98	
Innocent III 1198 – 1216	

It was during the reign of pope Innocence III that the persecution was intensified significantly. He came from a powerful family and had studied theology and law. He became pope at the age of 39 and was a powerful ruler, despite the fact that he never left Italy during his reign. His self-understanding as Vicarious Christi was that he had the highest authority on earth, and the right to enthrone and remove earthly rulers. In his sermon at his enthronement as pope he quoted Jeremiah 1,10 as the authority given to the pope. (Fassmann 1978: 550)

ii. **Innocence III (1198-1216)**

Schmidt (1975: 210) calls him “*der größte Papst, vielleicht aller Zeiten, der die römische Kurie führte*”, perhaps the greatest pope of all times, and Walker (1976: 259) says: “*under him the papacy reached its highest actual power*”. His rule coincides with a weakened Holy Roman Empire after the death of emperor Frederick I.

Innocence III was in almost constant conflict with the German emperors. It was a battle for supremacy and authority. This might have contributed to the much faster spread of the Poor of Christ through the then German empire, especially since the tension between pope and rulers also had an influence on the loyalty of the bishops and archbishops and their willingness or unwillingness to implement decisions of the church. Innocence III switched loyalty quite a few times, which resulted in the clergy also changing their preaching and teaching frequently, and lost trust of the population as a result (Schmidt 1975: 211). This would make the integrity of the Poor of Christ stand out even more. Shortly before his death he convened Lateran IV (November 1215). This council put into words and paragraphs what Innocence III had practised – giving to the pope the status that elevated him above all other humans.

It was also Innocence III who re-directed crusades, which up to then were tools against perceived outside enemies of the church (Islam) to be a church -internal instrument. He called for the crusade against the Cathars, which eradicated large portions of the Albigensian population and infrastructure. (Fassmann 1978: 565f) This signalled the start of institutionalised inner-church brutality.

An achievement of Innocence III that is significant for this thesis is his insistence on proper administration by the church. This means that as from his reign documentation on events in Church and Society is fairly detailed and substantive, providing valuable material for later research (Exempla historica 1984: 93ff). This is also reflected in Constitution 28 of Lateran IV (see page 64)

For the purpose of this thesis, however, the decrees issued during his time, that dealt with heretics are of much more importance, since they had a direct

impact on the Poor of Christ and future developments in the church necessitating the later Reformation.

Finally, it was Innocence III who gave recognition to the Franciscan Order, the one order that was closer to the Poor of Christ than any other, and, ironically, at the same time intensified the war against the Poor of Christ. The Franciscans, in the century to follow, also often provided inquisitors, who then hunted for and eradicated the Poor of Christ (Tourn 1983: 39f).

This, perhaps greatest, mediaeval pope saw the Poor of Christ as a threat, because they acted outside of the oversight by the church. The fact that he promoted the *Poor Catholics* and Franciscans, both being so similar to the Poor of Christ, shows that he did actually see the need for such movements – but would only allow them if they swore obedience (Molnár 1993: 86).

What would have happened, had Innocence III reflected theologically on these movements, rather than focussing on their oath of obedience to the Pope? How different would the Roman Church have developed, if the Poor of Christ would have been seen as an asset, and their ministry encouraged, rather than forbidden!

c) The great Schism East-West, 1054

It indirectly affected the spread of the Poor of Christ, in that they only spread throughout the Roman Church. Although they ventured quite far into the eastern territories, there is no account of them working in areas that were under the domain of the Orthodox Church.

d) Lateran Councils 1-4 (1123-1215)

Since the Lateran Councils were well recorded, and the resolutions preserved, they provide a valuable tool to show the status of the church and also its way of dealing with dissidents.

These ecumenical councils were called to ensure that the church, over all its territory, was acting congruently. A normal part of most Councils then also was the identification and condemnation of those in the church who refused to toe the line. The Councils also dealt with other inner-church issues, such as guidelines for priests, bishops and archbishops, moral standpoints, and the recognition or not of new orders and movements.

In this section I will point out those items from councils that in one or the other way had an impact on the Poor of Christ – either by creating an environment that needed to be addressed, or by highlighting issues that the Poor of Christ were criticising. The councils also decided on measures to be taken against heretics such as the Poor of Christ. Wolmuth (2000) provided the main source of information on the Councils, since all the decrees of each council are listed there. For the English citations however <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/> was used.

i. **Lateran III (1179)**

has various sections dealing with the wealth and immorality of clergy and attempting to curb it. It starts off with admonishing the highest orders:

4. Since the apostle decided that he ought to support himself and those accompanying him by his own hands, so that he might remove the opportunity of preaching from false apostles and might not be burdensome to those to whom he was preaching, it is recognized that it is a very serious matter and calls for correction that some of our brethren and fellow bishops are so burdensome to their subjects in the procurations demanded that sometimes, for this reason, subjects are forced to sell church ornaments and a short hour consumes the food of many days. Therefore we decree that archbishops on their visitations of their dioceses are not to bring with them more than forty or fifty horses or other mounts, according to the differences of dioceses and ecclesiastical resources; ...

It continues limiting the excesses of cardinals, bishops, archdeacons etc.

Also, the simple clerics are admonished:

11: Clerics in holy orders, who in open concubinage keep their mistresses in their houses, should either cast them out and live continently or be deprived of ecclesiastical office and benefice.

13. Because some, setting no limit to their avarice, strive to obtain several ecclesiastical dignities and several parish churches contrary to the decrees of the holy canons, so that though they are scarcely able to fulfil one office sufficiently they claim the revenues of very many, we strictly forbid this for the future.

The fact that a large portion of decrees deal with issues of finance: Payment for services rendered, fees for ceremonies, all of which are forbidden, shows that these customs were wide spread. (Wolmuth 2000 II: 213)

The Poor of Christ, in strong contrast with this practise, did not receive payment for their services and did not accumulate wealth. Thus, the excesses of the clergy made the integrity and humility of the Poor of Christ stand out even more, and made them much more convincing to the population.

The life style of clergy was of grave concern. Not only the Poor of Christ speak to this – the Cathars as well as later orders such as the Franciscans and Dominicans speak out on this issue. The councils saw this problem and took decisions that should address them. Yet it seems as if these decisions did not really have an impact, since the same issues are being addressed during various synods and councils. The corrections demanded were not implemented, leaving the church open to justified criticism. As is the case in many corrupt organisations, if nothing is done, the corrupt expand their power and suppress their critics. For the Poor of Christ such corrupt priests, bishops, archbishops and popes were their most dangerous enemies.

Regarding heretics, decree 27 is important. It addresses Cathars and other heretics. It pronounces anathema over them and all those who support them in any way. Every “Christian” (meaning of course “member of the church”) is called upon to eradicate heresies. Those who are away from home in pursue of heretics, receive special protection from the church. Anybody who causes

these defenders of the faith damage in any way will be excommunicated, until the damage has been compensated fully.

Here a portion of that decree:

27. As St. Leo says, though the discipline of the church should be satisfied with the judgment of the priest and should not cause the shedding of blood, yet it is helped by the laws of catholic princes so that people often seek a salutary remedy when they fear that a corporal punishment will overtake them. For this reason, since in Gascony and the regions of Albi and Toulouse and in other places the loathsome heresy of those whom some call the Cathars, others the Patarenes, others the Publicani, and others by different names, has grown so strong that they no longer practise their wickedness in secret, as others do, but proclaim their error publicly and draw the simple and weak to join them, we declare that they and their defenders and those who receive them are under anathema, and we forbid under pain of anathema that anyone should keep or support them in their houses or lands or should trade with them. ... On these and on all the faithful we enjoin, for the remission of sins, that they oppose this scourge with all their might and by arms protect the christian people against them. Their goods are to be confiscated and princes free to subject them to slavery. Those who in true sorrow for their sins die in such a conflict should not doubt that they will receive forgiveness for their sins and the fruit of an eternal reward. We too trusting in the mercy of God and the authority of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul, grant to faithful Christians who take up arms against them, and who on the advice of bishops or other prelates seek to drive them out, a remission for two years of penance imposed on them, or, if their service shall be longer, we entrust it to the discretion of the bishops, to whom this task has been committed, to grant greater indulgence, according to their judgment, in proportion to the degree of their toil....

... Bishops and priests who do not resist such wrongs are to be punished by loss of their office until they gain the pardon of the apostolic see.

These measures are an indication as to how deeply concerned the church was about the growth of these movements. There is, however, no theological reflection as to the validity of the teachings of the heretics. Nor does it show the connection between their rise and the vices of the clergy. This is a serious failure of the theologians and authorities of that time.

This pattern of non-reflection continues and intensifies for centuries to come: Once a heresy has been declared, no dialogue takes place with the heretics.

Indications, however, are that, despite these harsh measures from the top, for the time being dialogue and debate did continue on local level between clergy and heretics. The debate between Durand of Huesca and Dominic de Guzman in Pamiers, 1205 (see Chapter five: 146) was, strictly speaking, a contravention of this decree. The theological debate with heretics on lower levels was not ended immediately.

This also was to the advantage of the Poor of Christ, since they very often were better equipped for theological discussion than their clerical counterparts, and could stand their ground in a debate. The *Liber Antiheresis* (see page 76) shows how important it was for the Poor of Christ to be well equipped for dialogue and debate. Bernhard of Fontcaude reports on debates between them and clergy in Narbonne in 1190 (Selge 1967 I: 259)

ii. **Lateran IV (1215)**

was called by Innocence III. Considering that 29 years had lapsed since the previous council, a study of the decrees building on to Lateran III give an insight into the developments during those three decades. In 1179 the issue of heresies was only dealt with in the last decree. In 1215 this moves to the beginning.

Although the first constitution seems to be a summary of the Apostolic faith, there is an important addition in the third article on the church, which states that the sacrament of the altar can only be effected by an ordained priest (Baptism, on the other hand, is valid when correctly carried out by anyone).

From Constitution 1:

There is indeed one universal church of the faithful, outside of which nobody at all is saved, in which Jesus Christ is both priest and sacrifice. His body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the forms of bread and wine, the bread and wine having been changed in substance, by God's power, into his body and blood, so that in order to achieve this mystery of unity we receive from God what he received from us. Nobody can effect this sacrament except a priest who has been properly ordained according to the church's keys, which Jesus Christ himself gave to the apostles and their successors.

By this time the Poor of Christ, although seeing themselves as fully part of the Roman Church, had also started to celebrate communion in homes. This decree declares that communion invalid.

The third decree then deals with heretics. Whereas Lateran III still named the groups, this decree condemns all heretics, whatever names they go under. This shows that by now there was growing support amongst ordinary believers, with the rise of many movements. The Poor of Christ, because of not having a hierarchical structure, and because it did not split from the church, but was a movement in the church, was known by many names.

We quote this decree in its entirety, since it gives an impression of the aggressive approach of the church towards heretics. We will then highlight some of the most significant aspects.

<p>3. On Heretics</p> <p><i>We excommunicate and anathematize every heresy raising itself up against this holy, orthodox and catholic faith which we have expounded above. We condemn all heretics, whatever names they may go under. They have different faces indeed but</i></p>	<p>Researcher's observations:</p> <p>The grouping of all heretics into one, stating that ultimately, they are all the same, shows the unwillingness or inability of the church to engage them theologically.</p>
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<p><i>their tails are tied together inasmuch as they are alike in their pride.</i></p> <p><i>Let those condemned be handed over to the secular authorities present, or to their bailiffs, for due punishment. Clerics are first to be degraded from their orders.</i></p> <p><i>The goods of the condemned are to be confiscated, if they are lay persons, and if clerics they are to be applied to the churches from which they received their stipends.</i></p> <p><i>Those who are only found suspect of heresy are to be struck with the sword of anathema, unless they prove their innocence by an appropriate purgation, having regard to the reasons for suspicion and the character of the person. Let such persons be avoided by all until they have made adequate satisfaction.</i></p> <p><i>If they persist in the excommunication for a year, they are to be condemned as heretics.</i></p> <p><i>Let secular authorities, whatever offices they may be discharging, be advised and urged and if necessary be compelled by ecclesiastical censure, if they wish to be reputed and held to be faithful, to take publicly an oath for the defence of the faith to the effect that they will seek, in so far as they can, to expel from the lands subject to their jurisdiction all heretics designated by</i></p>	<p>Throughout there is a distinction between heretic clergy and laity, showing that clergy too became part of these movements. Durand of Huesca was such a clergy in the ranks of the Poor of Christ.</p> <p>Secular authorities are commanded to execute punishment. The property of lay heretics goes to the authority, of clergy to the church. This was a clever move, to encourage authorities to act. There was something to be gained!</p> <p>The policy of “guilty until proven innocent” is applied, putting the onus on the accused to prove their innocence. This too made the process much easier for the persecutors.</p> <p>Should someone not be able to prove their innocence, or not doing it to the satisfaction of the judge, their heretical status is finalised.</p> <p>This section of the decree is an illustration of the power-relation between church and empire: the authorities addressed are not those of the empire, but of the counts and regional lords, and, in this definition would include independent cities-states.</p>
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the church in good faith. Thus, whenever anyone is promoted to spiritual or temporal authority, he shall be obliged to confirm this article with an oath.

If however a temporal lord, required and instructed by the church, neglects to cleanse his territory of this heretical filth, he shall be bound with the bond of excommunication by the metropolitan and other bishops of the province. If he refuses to give satisfaction within a year, this shall be reported to the supreme pontiff so that he may then declare his vassals absolved from their fealty to him and make the land available for occupation by Catholics so that these may, after they have expelled the heretics, possess it unopposed and preserve it in the purity of the faith — saving the right of the suzerain provided that he makes no difficulty in the matter and puts no impediment in the way. The same law is to be observed no less as regards those who do not have a suzerain.

Catholics who take the cross and gird themselves up for the expulsion of heretics shall enjoy the same indulgence, and be strengthened by the same holy privilege, as is granted to those who go to the aid of the

Strictly speaking the church has no legal authority over temporal lords, and therefore invokes the power of eternal damnation.

It assumes that the faith of the church is the only valid one, and requires the allegiance of all temporal rulers to this faith (as defined in the first decree)

The church realises that it does not have the power to remove a regional ruler – and therefore applies a different method: The citizens of an uncooperative ruler are absolved from all their duties towards that ruler (rates, taxes, fines, dues) and “all Catholics” are given the right to grab hold of the rulers’ possession.

The important observation on this is: such a method would, in most societies, lead to a quick end of all heretics, since greed and land grabbing are legitimised. The fact that, despite this, the Poor of Christ continued to exist for centuries, gives testimony to how well they were respected by communities and local rulers.

Lateran III already promised indulgence to those who fought heretics. This is now increased to the same level as participation in a crusade. Again, this should have resulted in swift eradication of heretics, since now indulgence could be won without

<p><i>holy Land. Moreover, we determine to subject to excommunication believers who receive, defend or support heretics.</i></p> <p><i>We strictly ordain that if any such person, after he has been designated as excommunicated, refuses to render satisfaction within a year, then by the law itself he shall be branded as infamous and not be admitted to public offices or councils or to elect others to the same or to give testimony. He shall be intestable, that is he shall not have the freedom to make a will nor shall succeed to an inheritance. Moreover nobody shall be compelled to answer to him on any business whatever, but he may be compelled to answer to them. If he is a judge sentences pronounced by him shall have no force and cases may not be brought before him; if an advocate, he may not be allowed to defend anyone; if a notary, documents drawn up by him shall be worthless and condemned along with their condemned author; and in similar matters we order the same to be observed.</i></p> <p><i>If however he is a cleric, let him be deposed from every office and benefice, so that the greater the fault the greater be the punishment.</i></p> <p><i>If any refuse to avoid such persons after they have been pointed out by the church, let them be punished with the sentence of excommunication until they make suitable</i></p>	<p>the hardship of a crusade, whilst at the same time being able to enrich yourself with the belongings of the heretic.</p> <p>This portion of the decree already is an indication that the church is not winning. Already three decades earlier heretics were stripped all their rights. And yet, it seems that they continued to be respected people in society, even were judges and advocates.</p> <p>Declaring their judgements invalid, their statements inadmissible would strengthen the ruthless and win them to eradicate heretics – yet still it was not successful!</p> <p>What is perhaps most amazing is that the decree silently acknowledges that the church is powerless to strip these people from their rank and status, and therefore tries to declare their actions invalid.</p> <p>When it comes to the clergy, the church does have power to remove from office. Therefore, the sentence is swift and short.</p> <p>This section is testimony to a long and largely unsuccessful struggle against heretics. Considering what is forbidden, it shows how these heretics still were fully part of society and respected by it.</p>
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satisfaction. Clerics should not, of course, give the sacraments of the church to such pestilent people nor give them a christian burial nor accept alms or offerings from them; if they do, let them be deprived of their office and not restored to it without a special indult of the apostolic see. Similarly with regulars, let them be punished with losing their privileges in the diocese in which they presume to commit such excesses.

“There are some who holding to the form of religion but denying its power (as the Apostle says), claim for themselves the authority to preach, whereas the same Apostle says, How shall they preach unless they are sent? Let therefore all those who have been forbidden or not sent to preach, and yet dare publicly or privately to usurp the office of preaching without having received the authority of the apostolic see or the catholic bishop of the place”, be bound with the bond of excommunication and, unless they repent very quickly, be punished by another suitable penalty.

We add further that each archbishop or bishop, either in person or through his archdeacon or through suitable honest persons, should visit twice or at least once in the year any parish of his in which heretics are said to live. There he should compel three or more men of good repute, or even if it seems expedient the whole neighbourhood, to swear that if anyone knows of heretics there or of any persons

Again, the church must make use of its powers to defrock clergy in order to force them to fulfil these instructions.

This portion is aimed directly against the wandering preachers of the Poor of Christ. The content of their preaching is not dealt with, merely the fact that they preach without permission of the bishop or pope. That alone is enough to have them excommunicated.

We interpret the phrase: “punished by another suitable penalty” as a sign of helplessness. Repent, “or else....” – for thirty years now the preachers have continued to fulfil their calling, and the people continue to listen to them, despite excommunication and proclaiming eternal damnation on them.

Lateran III stated that clergy (including bishops) that allow heretics in their realm, will be defrocked. Now the bishops and archbishops are tasked to purposefully look for heretics at least once a year.

How can heretics be identified? Again, it is not their teachings, but their life-style that should give them away. Ironically, the different life style of the Poor of Christ gained them respect because of their

<p><i>who hold secret conventicles or who differ in their life and habits from the normal way of living of the faithful, then he will take care to point them out to the bishop. The bishop himself should summon the accused to his presence, and they should be punished canonically if they are unable to clear themselves of the charge or if after compurgation they relapse into their former errors of faith.</i></p> <p><i>If however any of them with damnable obstinacy refuse to honour an oath and so will not take it, let them by this very fact be regarded as heretics.</i></p> <p><i>We therefore will and command and, in virtue of obedience, strictly command that bishops see carefully to the effective execution of these things throughout their dioceses, if they wish to avoid canonical penalties. If any bishop is negligent or remiss in cleansing his diocese of the ferment of heresy, then when this shows itself by unmistakable signs he shall be deposed from his office as bishop and there shall be put in his place a suitable person who both wishes and is able to overthrow the evil of heresy.</i></p>	<p>dependability and integrity. Various Inquisition reports testify to this.</p> <p>This paragraph in the decree encourages people to betray the Poor of Christ and relies on envy or jealousy of their opponents.</p> <p>This short sentence became one of the major tools to identify the Poor of Christ. They refused to take any oath. By requesting an oath of loyalty to the church (not just a declaration) the mere refusal of an oath, even if the person was totally loyal to the church, was enough to find them guilty.</p> <p>The harshness of this threat is an indication that there were bishops and archbishops who did not wish to persecute the Poor of Christ. Again, no room is left for dialogue or theological interaction. A heretic should not be invited for discussion.</p> <p>If a bishop, for whatever reason, does not execute these instructions, he will be removed and replaced by someone who complies.</p>
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Decree 8 deals with inquests. It focuses on prelates and priests that are accused of wrong behaviour, and provides the accused with a fair chance to defend him or herself. Anonymous accusations are not allowed, and the accused is allowed to question witnesses and defend himself:

Prelates cannot please everyone since they are bound by their office not only to convince but also to rebuke and sometimes even to suspend and to bind. Thus they frequently incur the hatred of many people and risk ambushes. Therefore the holy fathers have wisely decreed that accusations against prelates should not be admitted readily, without careful provision being taken to shut the door not only to false but also to malicious accusations, lest with the columns being shaken the building itself collapses.

This is in stark contrast to the way heretics are treated, as can be seen above. Once accused of being a heretic, most of the normal rights no longer apply. Someone with a high church rank clearly has more rights than others, especially suspected heretics.

Constitution 10 and 11 are also relevant for this study. They address the importance of preaching and training in the Church – both areas where the Poor of Christ excelled.

10. On appointing preachers

Among the various things that are conducive to the salvation of the christian people, the nourishment of God's word is recognized to be especially necessary, since just as the body is fed with material food so the soul is fed with spiritual food ...

It often happens that bishops by themselves are not sufficient to minister the word of God to the people, especially in large and scattered dioceses, whether this is because of their many occupations or bodily infirmities or because of incursions of the enemy or for other reasons-let us not say for lack of knowledge, which in bishops is to be altogether condemned and is

not to be tolerated in the future. We therefore decree by this general constitution that bishops are to appoint suitable men to carry out with profit this duty of sacred preaching, men who are powerful in word and deed and who will visit with care the peoples entrusted to them in place of the bishops, ... and will build them up by word and example. ... We therefore order that there be appointed in both cathedral and other conventual churches suitable men whom the bishops can have as coadjutors and cooperators not only in the office of preaching but also in hearing confessions and enjoining penances and in other matters which are conducive to the salvation of souls. If anyone neglects to do this, let him be subject to severe punishment.

11. On schoolmasters for the poor

Zeal for learning and the opportunity to make progress is denied to some through lack of means. The Lateran council therefore dutifully decreed that “in each cathedral church there should be provided a suitable benefice for a master who shall instruct without charge the clerics of the cathedral church and other poor scholars, thus at once satisfying the teacher’s needs and opening up the way of knowledge to learners”. This decree, however, is very little observed in many churches. We therefore confirm it and add that not only in every cathedral church but also in other churches with sufficient resources, a suitable master elected by the chapter or by the greater and sounder part of it, shall be appointed by the prelate to teach grammar and other branches of study, as far as is possible, to the clerics of those and other churches.

The Poor of Christ focused their teaching on ordinary people to whom they preached, and whom they counselled. A huge emphasis was placed on the training of wandering preachers (see Chapter five: 169). This explains why these lay preachers were often better qualified than priests. Constitution 11 refers to a previous decision that teaching should happen at cathedrals, which was not really observed. This is now re-confirmed and expanded the instruction, but at the same time narrowing it down to clergy. Innocence III, who

himself had studied theology, knew the importance of education, also in view of combatting heresies. His attempts to combat the Poor of Christ with similar movements such as the *Poor Catholics* and Franciscans were not enough – the priests themselves needed to be well educated – and even more importantly, the bishops, as is slyly remarked in constitution 10.

Decree 22 deals with another aspect that was important in the holistic ministry of the Poor of Christ: Caring for the sick (see page 96 and Chapter six: 214).

22. Physicians of the body to advise patients to call physicians of the soul

As sickness of the body may sometimes be the result of sin ... so we by this present decree order and strictly command physicians of the body, when they are called to the sick, to warn and persuade them first of all to call in physicians of the soul so that after their spiritual health has been seen to they may respond better to medicine for their bodies, for when the cause ceases so does the effect. This among other things has occasioned this decree, namely that some people on their sickbed, when they are advised by physicians to arrange for the health of their souls, fall into despair and so the more readily incur the danger of death.

At the time of Lateran IV, the Poor of Christ had already established care centres where sick people received assistance, and true to their calling, they combined this physical care with counselling, witnessing, confession, repentance and prayer – a holistic ministry. With this decree the church separates physical and spiritual care to end this practise of the Poor of Christ, by forcing any physician to first call a priest.

Constitution 27 addresses the selection and training of priests.

27. Candidates for the priesthood to be carefully trained and scrutinized

To guide souls is a supreme art. We therefore strictly order bishops carefully to prepare those who are to be promoted to the priesthood and to instruct them, either by themselves or through other suitable persons, in the divine services and the sacraments of the church, so that they may be

able to celebrate them correctly. But if they presume henceforth to ordain the ignorant and unformed, which can indeed easily be detected, we decree that both the ordainers and those ordained are to be subject to severe punishment. For it is preferable, especially in the ordination of priests, to have a few good ministers than many bad ones, for if a blind man leads another blind man, both will fall into the pit.

This constitution addresses one of the issues that provided good opportunity for the Poor of Christ to do their work: bad priest. The church recognizes it, but interestingly places the emphasis on correctness based on practise and tradition, not so much on understanding and definitely not on discerning. This emphasis would even put a well-trained priest into stark contrast to the Poor of Christ, who were able to reflect on and challenge tradition and custom when contrary to scripture. The average well trained priest, let alone the poorly trained one, would not be able to respond to this challenge at all, except through laws. On the other hand, this explains why often the Poor of Christ were allowed, and even welcomed to preach in Churches, since good priests were very much aware that they could offer more to the people than their own training prepared them for. Thus, poor biblical and theological training of priests contributed to the rapid spread of the Poor of Christ in urbanised Europe.

Constitution 38 gives very specific instructions as to how trials need to be recorded.

8. Written records of trials to be kept

An innocent litigant can never prove the truth of his denial of a false assertion made by an unjust judge, since a denial by the nature of things does not constitute a direct proof. We therefore decree, lest falsehood prejudice truth or wickedness prevail over justice, that in both ordinary and extraordinary trials the judge shall always employ either a public official, if he can find one, or two suitable men to write down faithfully all the judicial acts — that is to say the citations, adjournments, objections and exceptions, petitions and replies, interrogations, confessions, depositions of witnesses, productions of documents, interlocutions, appeals,

renunciations, final decisions and the other things that ought to be written down in the correct order — stating the places, times and persons. Everything thus written down shall be given to the parties in question, but the originals shall remain with the scribes, so that if a dispute arises over how the judge conducted the case, the truth can be established from the originals. With this measure being applied, such deference will be paid to honest and prudent judges that justice for the innocent will not be harmed by imprudent and wicked judges. ...

Although the intention of this was to ensure justice to prevail, the discussion on constitutions 3 and 8 above show that two sets of “justice” existed. Since those accused of being heretics were guilty until proven innocent, the result of this detailed recording did not serve them, but rather meant that later Inquisitors could use the detailed records of previous hearings to severely punish “repeat offenders” (see page 73 below).

This practise also made these documents targets of arson, since it was in the interest of the accused to have them destroyed.

For research purposes these documents provide valuable information. At the same time the destruction of these in some regions results in no or hardly any information being available for that region. The map of known places of persecution (Chapter five: 187) is largely informed by records that survived.

By the time of Lateran IV, the Poor of Christ had spread through most of Western Europe (see map on page 34) and were highly appreciated by the people.

Lateran IV, in summary, decided on aggressive steps to stop heresies. The steps have repercussions for all levels of society. Bishops and priests can be suspended and defrocked if they tolerate them. Lay people – from nobles to peasants - that harbour them, lose their possessions, they lose all rights, including the right to inherit and bequeath. Worldly authorities must swear to drive them out or be declared illegitimate.

Lay preachers who preach without permission and physicians who refuse to call a priest, are excommunicated.

Lateran IV paved the way for centuries of brutal persecution by the church of its own, not only of the Poor of Christ, but of any opponent of the church. (See Chapter three).

Although there is an indication of awareness of the church's shortcomings, and some steps taken to correct these, there is no deeper reflection on how these shortcomings provide a window of opportunity to the Poor of Christ and their ministry.

Admonishing clergy for their unbefitting life style still takes up a significant number of constitutions, 30 years after Lateran III's dealings with them. A list of the headings of these constitutions gives an indication as to the poor moral state of clergy:

14 Clerical incontinence

15 Clerical gluttony and drunkenness

16 Decorum in the dress and behaviour of clerics

17 Dissolute prelates

18 Clerics to dissociate from shedding-blood

19 That profane objects may not be stored in churches

So, apart from lack of theological ability and preaching capacity, this lack of moral integrity of clergy meant the preachers of the Poor of Christ were more convincing in all of these areas, but somehow the church did not see this connection, and how the church itself provided the climate for the Poor of Christ to spread.

If one then further considers that these decisions were taken about 38 years after the start of the movement, and 30 years after their first banning, and that, despite these steps, the Poor of Christ then continued for another 300 years, it is clear that the church had totally failed to understand them and the positive impact that they had on the communities where they were active.

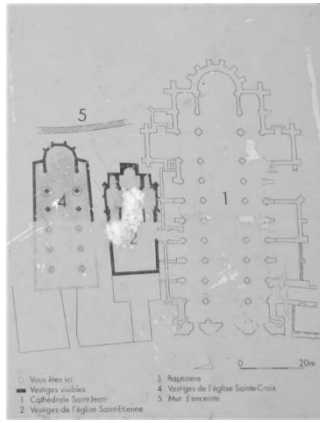
e) The rise of great cathedrals and the implication thereof.

Many of the significant cathedrals of Western Europe were built or started in this period, such as the Cathedrals of Saint Jean in Lyon, 1170-1481, Strasbourg 1176-1439, Würzburg 1040, Worms 1130-1180, Freising 1159, Cologne from 1248, Albi 1282.

The cathedrals were a visible statement to reflect the supreme power of the church, even over worldly authority. These buildings were expensive, and the funds were raised through patronages, taxes, payment for church services and indulgences. In the power play between worldly and church authorities the worldly leaders also contributed significantly – either by force, not to lose their position through excommunication, or by choice, to win the favour of the local bishop and thus gain more power. Monies also were raised through taxes from and fines to the ordinary citizens. In that way the building of the cathedrals contributed to the growing distance between ordinary people and the church and its officials. Thus, the cathedrals, while awe-inspiring, also alienated the people from the church. Lea (Gutenberg I: 23) comments on the effect that their building had on the people:

There was another source of oppression which had a loftier motive and better results, but which was none the less grinding upon the mass of the people. It was about this time that the fashion set in of building magnificent churches and abbeys, and the invention of stained glass and its rapid introduction show the luxury of ornamentation which was sought. While these structures were in some degree the expression of ardent faith, yet more were they the manifestation of the pride of the prelates who erected them, and in our admiration of these sublime relics of the past, in whatever reverential spirit we may view the towering spire, the long-arched nave, and the glorious window, we must not lose sight of the supreme effort which they cost—an effort which inevitably fell upon suffering serf and peasant. Peter Cantor assures us that they were built out of exactions on the poor, out of the unhallowed gains of usury, and out of the lies and deceits of the *quæstuarii* or pardoners...

The Cathedral of St Jean in Lyon is a good illustration of this extravagant expansion. The foundations of the previous two buildings are



Sketch and photo of Foundations of prior cathedral and church Photo H Müller

today visible next to the current cathedral. The difference in size is remarkable.



1 Frontal view of completed cathedral with cathedral school on the right Photo H Müller

Furthermore, the mediaeval school for priests that pre-dates the current cathedral survived and is today directly connected to the cathedral. It looks diminutive in comparison to the cathedral. (Photos taken by author during on site visit, 19 June 2016)

The nave of the current cathedral was started in 1170, before Valdes had his conversion experience. The nave is bigger than both older church buildings and also bigger and higher than the school for priests. (Visit on site, June 2016).

The school was in existence and active during the time of Valdes, and the nave was under construction, with the old St Etienne Church already being dwarfed



2 Nave of New Cathedral started in 1174 Photo H Müller

by it. One can assume that Valdes was one of those who generously contributed to the new project, due to his own wealth, and in building up his own wealth, that he did not have an issue with the much wealthier church building such a wonderful cathedral.

When seeing this stark contrast between the older, more simple buildings and the majestic new project, it is understandable that Valdes, after reading the gospels and the call to a simple life style, must have been overwhelmed by the realisation how far the church had moved away from its calling.

It is also understandable that his conversion at this early stage of the building of the new Cathedral brought him into conflict with the bishop and clergy. The fact that he then gave away all his money to the poor, and not to the church and the building project, must have been a bitter pill to swallow.

As mentioned above, during this time many cathedrals were either in the process of being built, or in the planning phase. Another such example is the cathedral in Strasbourg. It was built between 1176 and 1439, and replaced the previous cathedral that had been damaged by lightning. However, this cathedral too was much taller and impressive, again pointing to the power and authority of the church. The fact that Strasbourg also was a stronghold of the Poor of Christ during the whole construction period of 250 years highlights this potential for irritation and conflict with the local church authorities. The presence of the Poor of Christ was counterproductive to their plans and dreams.

Ekelund et al (1997) in *Sacred Trust*, show how the church raised funds through “including tithes and land rents, donations and bequests, judicial services and monastic agricultural production”. A large portion of the funds of society at large went into the construction of these cathedrals, but not only their monies, but also their labour.

Again, this opulence was in stark contrast to the simple life style and little requirements (food and accommodation) of the Poor of Christ.

f) The crusades

With them the church started to defend the faith with physical might. The crusades were in complete opposition to the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount. They resulted in the establishment of religious orders that were not spiritual, but military by nature.

Pope Urbanus II at the council in Clermont, 1095, called for the first crusade. After sketching the Muslims as brutal killers of Christians, he stated that Christ himself calls the church to a holy war. Whoever participates, receives forgiveness of all sins (Asbridge 2011: 50ff)

The “holy war” against Muslims was soon expanded to a holy war against Jews and opponents within the church. Crusades later became an instrument of the pope to enforce his power on a region within the Church. The most severe “Church against itself” crusade was called by Pope Innocence III in 1209 and lasted for 20 years. It was aimed against the Cathars and known as the Albigensian crusade, but in the process a whole region was destroyed, and most of its population eradicated.

Innocent III preached a crusade against them which did not end until the heresy had been effectually crushed and the South of France reduced to a pitiable condition by the mixed force of devout Catholics and adventurous scoundrels of whom the crusading army was composed! (Davies 1937: 328)

The promise, that captured land can be kept by those who captured it, (see page 56) was a fruitful incentive. It also encouraged non-discriminatory eradication of the population. Dead people cannot plead their innocence.

The crusades created a culture within the church that violence is not only acceptable, but, in certain cases, Christ-ordained, when it comes to protect the church and Christianity. This paved the way for the Inquisition approach and atrocities, and, once again, put the church in stark contrast with the non-violent

nature of the Poor of Christ. So, on the one hand, this culture led to immense suffering for them, on the other it made them the more convincing.

g) The Inquisition

Dietrich Fischinger gives a short overview of the rise of the Inquisition (Fischinger 1986: 40f). Although already established in 769, it only gradually developed its brutal side, reaching its climate of brutality with the rise of Catharism and the spread of the Poor of Christ. In 1184 Emperor Frederic I gave permission that heretics, once found guilty by the Inquisition, could receive worldly (i.e. state) punishment. In 1197 Peter II of Aragon introduced the death penalty by fire for heretics, which was confirmed by emperor Frederic II in 1224 (Lea I 1987: 89).

In 1215 Lateran IV introduced church- and worldly penalties and punishment for authorities that allow heretics in their midst (See page 55).

In 1252 torture is allowed as an instrument to entice heretics to confess and betray their colleagues (Walker 1976: 231f).

These measures do not only highlight the willingness of the church to make use of brutal methods, but also show that the church was fighting a losing battle against these movements, especially the Poor of Christ. Catharism was eradicated by the middle of the 13th century, but the Poor of Christ continued to operate till the 16th century (See Chapters V&VI). It highlights the fact that the Poor of Christ were well received and respected by society, forcing the church to make use of brutal methods to eradicate them, and despite this, did not succeed. Also, the Inquisition and the records of it highlight the fact that the church would not enter into meaningful dialogue and debate with the Poor of Christ. (One noteworthy exception is the Inquisitor Peter Zwicker, who at the end of the 14th century, made various attempts to argue with and convince heretics to recant, and wrote a tract (de Lange 2006: 176-188)). The Inquisition became one of the major “derailments” of the church, pushing it away from its core task of proclaiming the gospel. Not only did the church then punish the Poor of Christ who were striving to fulfil this calling, but it acted in total contradiction to its core task.

Fischinger gives a short overview of the process followed by the Inquisition (Fischinger 1986: 41):

- i. At the public announcing of it, heretics are invited to surrender themselves, and, failing which, the faithful (especially parents or children) encouraged to report them.
- ii. Suspects are guilty till proven innocent. They are placed under arrest and put on trial. The aim is to obtain a confession of guilt, renouncement, and providing the names of colleagues.
- iii. The sitting is opened by imploring the Holy Spirit to guide it, and demanding the oath of total obedience to the church from the accused.
- iv. Witnesses are called. They can be anonymous. Council for the defence is not allowed. (This is in stark contrast with Decree 8 of Lateran IV discussed above)
- v. When torture was introduced, it could only be applied once, but with interruptions – effectively nullifying the “once only” rule. Torture instruments are consecrated with holy water to show that they are tools of the church.
- vi. Those who recant receive fines, their clothes are marked with the sign of heretics, and they might even be imprisoned for life.
- vii. Those found guilty and not recanting are burnt on the stake, their possessions confiscated, and their descendants dishonoured for three generations.
- viii. The execution is preceded by a sermon to the population and the singing of the “Te deum”. Ashes are either scattered in the wind or in a river to avoid remains becoming relics.

The instruction regarding remains shows that the church was well aware that the Inquisition did not manage to eradicate heretic movements. There were enough “undiscovered” followers that would turn the executed into martyrs. This

supports my view that the Poor of Christ had a much wider support than indicated by the Inquisition reports.

Charles Lea published a substantial encyclopaedia with three volumes on the total period of the Inquisition. We made use of the German edition of 1987 (Lea I, II, III, 1987) and English Version from <http://www.gutenberg.org/files>.

The Inquisition was a desperate, and to some extent successful attempt of the Roman Church to combat opponents - political, doctrinal or otherwise. Whereas an inquest and other legal processes aimed at finding the truth, and granted the accused a substantial amount of protection (see page 61), once someone was accused of being a heretic, that person lost all their rights to a fair trial (see page 55).

The laws governing the Inquisition meant that the inquisitor was the accuser, judge and executor. As the powers of the Inquisition grew, it became a monster, useable for any conceivable purpose.

The members of the Inquisition were by law, above the law and therefore untouchable. This gave them the power to also declare those who criticised them and their methods as heretics and imprison or even execute them. They had unlimited power (Schmidt 1975: 248).

The story of one such inquisitor, Konrad of Marburg, is extensively documented by Lea (II 1987: 379ff). Konrad used a very simple method of trial: The accused can either confess and be punished, or deny and be sent to the stake. This method specifically resulted in the abuse of the Inquisition by disgruntled people to get revenge on their enemies (ibid 382). Konrad himself was eventually murdered in 1233 by people on his list of accused (ibid 387).

One of the laws on the Inquisition was that all processes needed to be documented. This resulted in "long term memory", increasing the power of the Inquisition. Example: A young woman was brought to court as heretic. She recanted. 50 years later she was accused again, and based on the old records,

received jail sentence for life. On the other hand, this material became a useful source of information for later church historians.

Because of the immense powers hidden in the documentation many attempts were made to destroy the archives in order to erase evidence. In Narbonne the citizens twice destroyed all of these, in 1235 and 1248, so that the synod of Albi in 1254 gave the instruction that duplicates of all proceedings needed to be kept in a safe place. (Lea I: 425)

Some of the archives destroyed were from areas and periods where Waldensians were brought before the Inquisition, resulting in lack of research material for these areas.

However, Inquisition documents remain a vital source of information also to establish where and during which time Poor of Christ were found in Europe.

Lastly, as stated above, the Inquisition did not eradicate the Poor of Christ – on the contrary, it strengthened their underground network and at the same time emphasised their integrity in contrast to that of the church.

h) The Cathars

The Cathars need to be mentioned when dealing with the Poor of Christ, mainly for two reasons: The Roman Church classified many “heretics” as Cathars, and justified their harshness towards all of them by assuming that all would have similar schismatic tendencies and non-substantive “divine revelations” that determined their doctrines. *“We condemn all heretics, whatever names they may go under. They have different faces indeed but their tails are tied together inasmuch as they are alike in their pride.”* (Decree 3, Lateran VI also quoted above, page 55). When, during the crusade against the Cathars (see page 70) whole regions were destroyed, this also included Poor of Christ.

Secondly, the most significant document from the founding time of the Poor of Christ, *Liber Antiheresis*, (see page 76) is a handbook for preachers, providing

them with biblical arguments against the Cathars. It goes to great lengths to ensure that the Poor of Christ are clearly set apart from the Cathars, which they too regarded as heretics to be resisted. Although the author, Durand, does not use the term “Cathars”, whenever he speaks of heretics, it refers to the Cathars. (Selge 1967 II: 51). Hence the name of the book: “*Liber Antiheresis*”.

The Poor of Christ saw it as one of their objectives to counter the heresies of the Cathars with New Testament teachings (Segl in Frank 1999, 39f). The *Liber Antiheresis* refers to the many disputes that the Poor of Christ have with Cathars (Selge 1967 II: 9) Selge also points out that the Poor of Christ were actually the first ones to seriously, and successfully enter into theological debate with the Cathars. Later Dominic de Guzman, who got to know Durand of Huesca, made use of their approach as well. (Selge 1967 II: IX)

Background to the Cathars

Like with most heretic groups, the name Cathars was not their own choice, but given by the Roman Church, based on how they summarised this grouping. It is based on John 15,3, where the true disciples are declared clean, *katharoi*. (Roll 1987: 20) This group saw themselves as the true, cleansed disciples of Christ that had to keep themselves separate from the defiled church. They, not the Roman Church, were the only True Church, and by 1200 had developed their own church structures, including a bishop and sub-leadership positions (Segl in “Katharer”, Buchberger 1993 V: 1328f).

The beginning of these is the early 11th century, first with peasants that claimed to follow divine inspiration and revelations, soon followed by nobility, claiming the same. Monteforte, near Turin, had a group of 30 noble men and women living together as a community, claiming to be enlightened and connected to other true believers globally through the Holy Spirit. (Roll 1987: 24)

With time more and more nobility joined the movement.

The next two centuries saw a growing resistance of the Roman Church against heretics, with a gradual increase of measures to combat these. One quite

efficient way was to link Catharism with Manichaeism, a movement that had been declared a heresy by St Augustin. If St Augustin already had warned against them, they cannot be tolerated. (The revised *Liber Antiheresis*, written by Durand for the *Poor Catholics* in 1224, bears the name: *Liber contra Manichaeos*, based on this theory.)

According to Roll (1987: 47), the Cathars were not influenced by Manichaeism, but only became aware of it because of the church's accusations.

The Cathars rejected infant baptism. Instead adults had to receive the baptism in the Spirit to be part of the true believers. (Selge 1967 II: 56).

They also rejected the church fathers, and did not see them as authoritative. Durand, in his introduction to the *Liber Antiheresis*, points out that it is not useful to cite the church fathers in the arguments against Cathars, since they only accept the authority of scripture, and reject that of the fathers. (Selge 1967 II: XXI f). In this regard, the Poor of Christ were much more successful in combatting Catharism than the Church, since they also argued from scripture.

As Valdes and his followers increased in influence and numbers, the church slotted them into the same category and used the same arguments and methods against them. (See comments on Decree 3 of Lateran IV, page 55) They too were accused of rejecting infant baptism, which is, however, not the case.

3. Lyon in the 12th century

Lyon was established by Romans 43 BC as Lugdunum. It became the capital of Gaul, and was an important juncture of Roman Roads throughout Gaul.

With the split of the Frankian empire and the Treaty of Verdun of AD843, Lyon went to Lothair I, ruler of Middle Francia and was part of the Kingdom of Arles. Under Conrad II, in 1032, it became part of the Holy Roman Empire (Heiliges Römisches Reich Deutscher Nation) It only became part of France in the 14th century.

The geographical location of Lyon is significant for this study. Whereas the Kingdom of France to the left of Lyon consolidated into one strong, centralised kingdom, the Holy Roman Empire to the right consisted of many counties, smaller kingdoms and even independent cities. The emperor had limited influence on individual regions. However, his relationship to the church impacted on the whole empire. When it was a good relationship, those rulers that also were faithful Catholics would together form a substantial power block. When he was critical of the church and the pope, the independent thinkers were stronger. However, unlike the former group, they would not form a power block, due to their independent thinking.

The many fairly autonomous sub-regions and independent cities such as Strasbourg, provided for a conducive climate for independent and new developments to happen – such as the rising of ordinary citizens to wealth, as mentioned in 1.3, page 44 above, and the start of religious movements like the Poor of Christ and the Franciscans. (Lateran VI saw itself forced to issue a decree against the establishment of new religious orders, since they were mushrooming all over the empire).

In Lyon the political overhand was won by the archbishops towards the end of the 12th century (Bitsch 1971: 3). As a result, this region was then governed by the archbishop as an archdiocese. The archdiocese was to the left and the right of the banks of the Saone and Rhone, with 9 dioceses on each side (Bitsch 1971: 5). They had a large degree of independence and autonomy, and, although being Archdiocese, they had a large degree of independence from the pope.

The wealthy merchant Valdes was befriended with the Archbishop Guichard. After Valdes's decision to follow Christ to the letter, Guichard allowed him much freedom in the city and diocese, so that the movement in its infancy was not threatened.

This quickly changed with the appointment of Archbishop Jean Bellesmains after the death of Guichard. He banished Valdes and the Poor of Christ from Lyon and the archdiocese. Since he also was the secular ruler, he could implement the ban for the whole archdiocese (Selge 1967 I: 259), but by now the movement had

gained sufficient strength and support to continue outside of Lyon. The banning, ironically, contributed to the fast spreading of the movement into other regions during the following decades, since those banned continued working elsewhere.

The banning of the movement by Archbishop Bellesmains and the church also had the unintended result that those regions that were critical of the church and church hierarchy would be interested in what these banished ones had to offer.

Thus, whilst the hostile attitude of the church made life for the Poor of Christ difficult, at the same time it opened doors in other regions.

Thus, the Poor of Christ benefited from the fact that the movement started off in Lyon, the fairly independent archdiocese, and the fact that Valdes prior to his conversion had been a friend of the archbishop.

4. Valdes of Lyon

Very little is known about this man, since he had no noble background. His date and place of birth are unknown, as are the date and place of his death. As the movement grew over centuries, so did the legends and stories of his life. Books published in the 16th and 17th century often contains a substantial amount of background information on “Petrus Waldus”. I had the privilege to work through a number of these in the Archives of the Moravian Town of Herrnhut (02.06.2016). These books belonged to the Bohemian Refugees that fled to Germany in the early 18th century. The Bohemian Brothers treasured the memory of Valdes and regarded him as part of their roots. This accounts for the fairly large number of writings on him amongst their literature. (Visit to Herrnhut Archive, 28.05 2016)

The most reliable information on Valdes can be found in reports from the Inquisition, namely Anonymous of Prague, and Stephen of Bourbon. These Inquisition documents reveal that, before his decision to follow Christ, Valdes was a wealthy citizen of Lyon, who possessed shops, houses, fields, forests and other properties.

That nothing at all is known about his earlier life speaks to the fact that he was an ordinary citizen with no noble connections, who only became prominent as he accumulated wealth and with it influence.

That nothing is known about his death, on the other hand, speaks to the fact that the Poor of Christ had hardly any hierarchical structure, and unlike the Dominicans or Franciscans, that were founded in the same period, the founder Valdes did not play a leadership role.

For this reason, this research does not extensively go into his life story but focuses on those matters that had an impact on the development of the Poor of Christ.

Selge (I: 196, 227- 242) deals extensively with the various accounts and fables around the conversion and early ministry of Valdes, and then summarizes the most likely facts as follows (pg239)

Das sind die Fakten der Vorgeschichte des Waldensertums, die wir der Legende entnehmen können: Der reiche Valdes löst sich von Gut und Familie; er gibt seine Töchter nach Fontévrault; er speist im Hungerjahr die Armen; er beginnt zu wandern, öffentlich Zeugnis zu geben, vom Bettel zu leben; ihm wird verboten, in Lyon von anderen als seiner Frau Almosen anzunehmen. (Translation: These are the facts of the pre-history of the Waldensens, that we can deduct from legend: The wealthy Valdes gives up his possessions and family; he gives his daughters to Fontévrault {a monastery for women}; in a year of hunger he feeds the poor; he starts his wanderings, publicly proclaims, lives from begging; he is prohibited, when in Lyon, to receive alms from anyone but his wife.)

He was befriended with the Archbishop Guichard of Lyon (1164-1181). The archbishop had started with the building of a new Cathedral to replace the old church. The nave of this cathedral, which was built during the time of Valdes, already was the tallest building of the city, and the nave alone was almost as big as the existing cathedral (see diagram, page 68) One can assume that Valdes was a contributor to this building fund, and perhaps also because of his wealth, a much closer friend of the archbishop. Selge (ibid, 242) comes to the conclusion that

Valdes, before his conversion, was highly regarded in Lyons. Durand, in *Liber Antiheresis* calls him “dominus Valdesius” – a title used for important nobility and people of stature.

Unlike most ordinary citizens Valdes could read and write, but only in his mother tongue, not Church Latin. He commissioned a translation of the New Testament into his mother tongue so that he could read and study it himself.

This particular aspect is of utmost importance for the rise and development of the Poor of Christ. (See diagram “Authority of Scripture” Chapter one: 26)

Latin was the language of instruction and of academics. Church schools taught in Latin. The Bible at that stage, was almost exclusively available in Latin. All church doctrine was written and taught in Latin. Therefore, if lay persons, not conversant in Latin, wanted to learn about faith, they had to rely on a learned priest (by far not all priests were learned!) to teach them.

Because Valdes possessed a New Testament in his mother tongue he could read and study the Bible *without* the assistance and interpretation of a priest. What is more significant is that he did so without most of the doctrinal lenses, since the doctrines were not necessarily taught to the population at all.

He therefore could re-discover the teachings of Jesus and the apostles without the baggage of eight hundred years of doctrinal interpretation. He discovered core aspects of the New Testament Church which had become lost in the Church, clouded by doctrinal developments. This had significant implications.

The Sermon on the Mount had a great impact on him. Much of it was in stark contrast to how he had experienced church up to then.

- “*Let your yes be yes, your no be no*” (Mt 5,37) was revolutionary, since church and society extensively operated with oaths – oaths of loyalty, oaths to ensure that truth is told etc.

- “Love your enemies” (Mt 5,44) was in direct opposition to the widespread calls for crusades against enemies. Clearly, killing others did not tally with what Valdes read in his Bible.

When he then read in Matthew 10 of Jesus sending out the disciples without provisions, to preach and heal, Valdes took it as his own calling and implemented it to the letter, giving up all his wealth and becoming a wandering preacher.

In doing so he also applied to the letter Matthew 28, teaching others to obey the teachings of Jesus. This became a crucial multiplication factor, especially for the first few decades of the Poor of Christ, since many heard the message, were taught and then went out themselves to proclaim and teach.

Selge (I: 1976, 246f) points out that Valdes and the Poor of Christ, unlike many other wandering preachers, did not focus on the wrongs of the clergy and the church, but called each listener to repent of their own wrongs and start to follow Christ.

The teaching was done either by making the people memorise portions of the New Testament, or by letting those, who could write, copy his New Testament. With that his followers had direct access to the New Testament, as did he, and therefore did not depend on him being present to teach them. The number of people that were studying and learning without the assistance of clerics grew almost by the day, much quicker than if Valdes had been the central figure. The movement and its spread did not depend on a central leadership figure, but on people learning, copying and teaching the New Testament.

The passage from Matthew 9, 37f par was important in their thinking: “*Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”*” (Selge 1967 I: 245).

a) The Profession of Faith by Waldes of Lyons

Despite the fact that Valdes was a key player in the start of the movement, no single sermon, letter or other material that he wrote has been found so far. The

only exception is the “profession of faith” cited on page 83. It is contained in one of the two copies of the *Liber Antiheresis* found so far, the Madrid manuscript. (Selge 1967 II: 3f; I: 19ff)

It was not formulated by Valdes, but is based on a basic confession of faith, the oldest known version being from 1054 (Selge 1967 I: 21) and Valdes was requested to sign it. It contains rejections of most of the recognised contemporary heresies, and specifically teachings of the Cathars. The fact that it was signed by Valdes and “his brothers” indicates that they did agree with it, even if they would not have thought of all the issues themselves. Most significant, however, is the part that was clearly added by them (69-76), since it indicates what was important to them, but not so relevant to the church. As was custom, the founder of a movement had to present such a statement of faith to the pope, and some indications are that this happened in 1179 when Valdes appeared before Pope Alexander III or two years later in Lyon, after having met with the pope. (Selge 1967 I: 23ff)

We cite it in full. The numbering was done by us to synchronise this translation with the original Latin version of the *Liber Antiheresis* in Selge (1967 II: 5ff)

(Source of English translation: <https://www.baptistboard.com/threads/waldes-of-lyons-profession-of-faith.39783/>)

A Profession of Faith by Waldes of Lyons	Our comments
<p><i>“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and of the Most Blessed Mary, ever virgin.</i></p> <p><i>Let it be known to all the faithful that I, Waldes, and all my brethren, with the Holy Gospels placed before us, believe in heart, perceive through faith, confess in speech, and in unequivocal words affirm</i></p> <p><i>6 that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three persons, one God, the whole Trinity of Godhead coessential, consubstantial, coeternal, and co-omnipotent; and that each Person of the Trinity is fully God, all three persons one God, as is contained in the creeds, the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed.</i></p> <p><i>12 We believe in heart and confess in words that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the one God to whom we testify is creator, maker, governor, and, in due time and place, disposer of all things visible and invisible, all things of the heavens, in the air, and in the waters, and upon the earth.</i></p> <p><i>17 We believe that the author of the New and Old Testaments, that is, of the Law of Moses and of the prophets and of the apostles, is one and the same God who, existing in the Trinity as we have said, created all things; John the Baptist, holy and righteous, was sent by Him and was filled with the Holy Spirit in his mother’s womb.</i></p> <p><i>23We believe in heart and confess in words that the incarnation of divinity came to pass, not in the Father or in the Holy Spirit, but only in the Son, so that He who in divinity was the Son of God the Father, true God from the Father, was true man from His mother, having true flesh from the womb of His mother and a rational human soul, of both</i></p>	<p></p> <p>It is not clear whether these “holy gospels placed before us” refers to the New Testament that they carried with them, or to a Bible placed in front of them.</p> <p>The matters addressed here are not based on the teachings of Valdes, but are an affirmation of Valdes that he adheres to these doctrines of the church.</p> <p>17ff does not reflect the importance that the Poor of Christ gave to scripture and its authority but is aimed at those heretics who reject the Old and New Testament.</p> <p>23ff: The profession deals with the various doctrinal controversies and heresies of the early church, and also</p>

<p><i>natures at one and the same time; that is, He was both God and man, one Person, one Son, one Christ, one God with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ruler and author of all, born of the Virgin Mary by true birth of the flesh.</i></p> <p><i>We believe in heart and confess in words that He ate, drank, slept, and rested when weary from travel; He suffered with true passion of His flesh, died in a true death of his body, rose again with true resurrection of His flesh and true restoration of His soul; in that flesh He afterward ate and drank, ascended into heaven, sits at the right hand of the Father, and in it shall come to judge the quick and the dead.</i></p> <p><i>35 We believe in one Church, Catholic, holy, apostolic, and immaculate, outside of which no one can be saved. We do not in any way reject the sacraments which are celebrated in it with the aid of the inestimable and invisible power of the Holy Spirit, even though they be ministered by a sinful priest, as long as the Church accepts him; nor do we disparage the ecclesiastical offices or the blessings celebrated by such a one, but with devout mind we embrace them as if performed by the most righteous.</i></p> <p><i>We approve, therefore, of the baptism of infants for we confess and believe that they are saved if they shall die after baptism before they commit sin. We believe, indeed, that in baptism all sins are remitted as well that original inherited sin as those which are committed voluntarily.</i></p> <p><i>46 We hold that confirmation performed by a bishop, that is, by the imposition of hand, is holy and worthy of reverent acceptance.</i></p> <p><i>48 We firmly believe and absolutely accept that the Eucharist, that is, the bread and wine after consecration, is the body</i></p>	<p>the teachings of the Cathars.</p> <p>35ff: Although this formulation too was not by Valdes, it captures an essential aspect of their self-understanding. They saw themselves as fully part of the Roman Church, and participated in the life and rituals of the church as devout Catholics, since the Roman Church was the only church.</p>
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and blood of Jesus Christ and in this nothing more is accomplished by a good priest, nothing less by an evil one.

50We acknowledge that God grants forgiveness to sinners truly penitent in heart, who confess in words and do works of satisfaction in accordance with the Scriptures, and most willingly will we consort with them.

53We venerate the anointing of the sick with consecrated oil.

55We do not deny that carnal marriage may be contracted, as the Apostle says; we utterly forbid that those united in lawful fashion may separate; also, we do not condemn a second marriage.

57We humbly praise and faithfully venerate the ecclesiastical orders, the is, the episcopate and the priesthood and the others of higher and lower degree, and all that is in good order appointed to be read and sung in the Church.

61We believe that the devil was made evil not by nature but by his will.

62We put no reproach at all upon the eating of meat.

64We believe in heart and confess in words the resurrection of the flesh which we bear and no other.

65We firmly believe and affirm that judgment is still to come and that each person will receive either reward or punishment for those things committed in the flesh.

67We do not doubt that alms, and the Mass, and other good works can be of benefit to the faithful who have died.

53f: This short reference to the anointing of the sick does not reflect the ministry to the sick that was practised by the Poor of Christ, which far exceeded the ritual anointing.

Sections 55 – 62 deal specifically with issues that were rejected by the Cathars.

The Cathars rejected marriage, which explains the inclusion of this passage. It is even more relevant if one considers that Valdes after his conversion, did leave his wife behind, although he did not divorce her.

<p>69 <i>And since, according to James the Apostle, “faith without works is dead,” we have renounced the world; whatever we had we have given to the poor, as the Lord advised, and we have resolved to be poor in such fashion that we shall take no thought for the morrow, nor shall we accept gold or silver, or anything of that sort from anyone beyond food and clothing sufficient for the day. Our resolve is to follow the precepts of the Gospel as commands.</i></p> <p>76 <i>We wholeheartedly confess and believe that persons remaining in the world, owning their own goods, giving alms and doing other good works out of their own, and observing the commandments of the Lord, may be saved.</i></p> <p>79 <i>Wherefore, we earnestly assure Your Grace that if any shall chance to come to your vicinity, declaring that they come from us but having not this faith, you may know with certainty that they come not from us.”</i></p>	<p>69 to the end is the addition of Valdes.</p> <p>69 deals with their specific trade mark: Poverty. It is, however, not poverty in order to gain salvation, but poverty in order to follow Christ. For that reason, 76 is important: You don’t need to become poor in order to be saved. This too sets them apart from the Cathars who claimed that only those like them could be saved.</p>
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b) A summary of the core aspects of Valdes’ discoveries and approach

Since no written documentation of Valdes himself is available, this summary is based on the profession of faith, early Inquisition reports and reports by his critics, such as Walter Map.

i. Christ is the Lord and centre of the Church and its highest authority.

Scripture, rather than church doctrine, is the core for Christian teaching and needs to be studied and known (Selge 1967 II: XII) Biller asks the question whether the movement can be called “literate”, since their study of the Bible was not critical, and there is not much exegetical reflection on texts. (Biller in Patschovsky 2011 XXV: 112) We are of the opinion that the decision to declare the Bible as norm above Church doctrine and Church writings could only be

reached through study of scripture and critical reflection on it. This viewpoint is not a discussion within the New Testament. Even the often cited 2 Timothy 3.16 *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness”* is not a statement of the author on the authority of the Bible above other writings, but on the usefulness of God-inspired writings for teaching, learning and admonition. At the time of the finalisation of the New Testament Canon in 382 (Lohse 1972: 14ff), various doctrines had already been developed, such as the Nicene Creed in 321/381 (Walker 1976: 118). The New Testament writings already deal with heresies (e.g. Galatians and Colossians – Lohse 1972, 35&54) and in dealing with them, point at the Christ event. The church was developing its doctrines such as the Trinitarian doctrine (Schmidt 1975: 105ff). The challenge was to explain issues on which the New Testament was silent. In this process various splits happened within the church. In defining “true faith” and “heresy”, the final verdict often was based more on doctrine than on New Testament writings, as these were silent on the details. As a result, Church thinking, theology and praxis put the authority of doctrine on the same level, and in situations of conflict, above authority of scripture. The prayer of Jesus in John 17 *“that they may be one”* always was outweighed by doctrinal differences. Scripture, although the first authoritative writing, was part of a long list of equally, or even more authoritative dogmas and decrees, either building on scripture or previous dogmas and decrees (See Graph: Authority of Scripture, Chapter one: 26).

The position taken by the non- theologian Valdes, after nearly 12 centuries of this development, is the result of critical reflection: What is the authority-relationship of the New Testament to the later doctrines and authorities? His conclusion, that the New Testament is the higher authority, and Christ the ultimate authority, is unique, but based on the same way that New Testament writers reflected on false teachings. Unlike the dogmas of the church he did not claim authority of a new discovery or explanation, but relied on the authority of the New Testament, and especially the gospels. This position brought him into lifelong conflict with his church, which he regarded as the only church – also in line with New Testament thinking.

Valdes managed to maintain his position, existing within the tension of regarding Christ as highest authority, and staying in the church that rejected him because of this, since it is Christ's Church. This sets him apart from most others who were classified as "heretics", who opted to establish their own true church in opposition to the Roman Church. He accepted and respected the authority of church hierarchy, but in case of conflict, Christ's authority was higher.

The Pope and most clergy would agree to the statement that Christ is the ultimate authority. However, due to the church's dogmatic developments, they would then also state that, through their ordination or consecration, they were acting as representatives of Christ and therefore shared his authority, the highest authority (See page 46ff).

Valdes, however, would measure this claimed authority against the teachings of Christ in scripture. This was the beginning of *sola scriptura*, which later became a core criterion for 16th Reformation thinking. We deal with this further down.

ii. **Preach in the language of the People.**

Biller, in his discussion on the literal ability of Valdes, places much emphasis on the Poor of Christ's lack or insufficient command of Latin, which was the language of the learned. (Biller in Patschovsky 2011 XXV: 113ff)

But to regard the lack of command of Latin as a sign of poor literacy is just as short sighted as Europeans assuming that Africans who could not speak, read and write in their European language were illiterate. To link the definition of literacy to the command of a specific language such as Latin, or in our time English is in fact narrowing literacy down to the literacy in that particular language. The Poor of Christ could very well reflect and argue in their own mother tongue – probably better than many theologians, who could only do it in Latin, and thus where, by deduction, fairly illiterate in the local vernacular. Because most Poor of Christ could not debate in Latin, Church theologians regarded them as illiterate barbarians. Berthold of Regensburg calls them "*toti*

stulti et rusticanie, unvolch et idiote" (Schneider 1981: 115) because those that he encountered, could not even read or write. However, the fact that they had succeeded in having "illiterate peasants" memorising large portions of the New Testament, was overlooked. For these people, however, it meant that they were developing their knowledge and their intellectual capacity. This made the Poor of Christ even more attractive to them (ibid).

The Poor of Christ took the decision to work and witness in the local language. In that they followed the apostle Paul:

20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. 23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. (I Corinthians 9, 20-23)

That is how they understood their calling: go to the people, speak to the people, teach the people in the language of the people. The Poor of Christ saw themselves sent just as Christ was sent. Just as Christ became human for the sake of humans, they were to the people what the people were. As the movement spread, literature, and especially Bible translations, in the local vernacular was compiled. As early as 1231 the Inquisition already found German Bibles in Trier. (Schneider 1981: 96, 113)

The Poor of Christ did not want to be lay theologians, nor did they claim to be that. They wanted to do what the church failed to do: speak the message of Christ to the people in a language that they could understand.

Molnár (1993: 179) points out that there were also theologians versed in Latin amongst their preachers. One of these was Durand of Huesca (see Chapter five: 144).

Also, the correspondence between the Lombards and the German Poor of Christ in 1218 (at that stage Durand had already left the Poor of Christ) shows that the writers had a good knowledge of Latin and could well reflect on Biblical passages and the Church Fathers. The same applies to correspondence in the latter half of the 14th century between Lombards and the Austrian Poor of Christ.

iii. **Study the scriptures.**

The first thing confiscated from the Poor of Christ, when they were caught, was their literature. Possessing literature also was often the give-away of their being Poor of Christ. The fact that the *Liber Antiheresis*, the manual for preachers, was only discovered in the mid twentieth century, and only two copies so far, is an indication of this. Considering the rapid spread of the movement in the first thirty years, many copies of this manual and many portions of the New Testament must have existed and many must have been burnt. One that survived is a German Bible, most probably of a *Meister* from the 14th century, Codex Teplensis (Haupt 1885). For that reason, as persecution increased, writing was kept to a minimum, and much was memorised. (see Chapter five: 168). Selge (1967 I: 263) remarks: “*Der Passauer Anonymus hat einen Mann ohne Schulbildung gesehen, der das Buch Hiob auswendig konnte, und mehrere andere, die das ganze Neue Testament konnten.*” The fact that they had no formal schooling did not stop them from memorising scripture. When documents were put in writing they were often miniscule in size, so that they could be hidden effectively. The most important document for the Poor of Christ was the Bible. Even the *Liber Antiheresis* is to a large extent a compilation of Bible texts and a reflection on Bible passages. One could see it as a help to understand the Bible.

Their high regard for studying scripture becomes evident in the following:

- The Poor of Christ were also known as the people with the little books. They copied portions of the New Testament which they carried with them, hidden in their garment (Audisio 2009, 32).

- The spread of the movement coincides with the appearance of Bible translations into local vernacular. Biller states that “*Arguably, Waldensianism and the work of translating the Bible into the vernacular were virtually synonymous around the year 1200*” (Biller in Patschovsky 2011 XXV: 116)
- The emergence of schools in which ordinary people learned to read and write (See map on page 34). Since this reading and writing was in the local vernacular, it was frowned upon by the clergy, who regarded Latin as the language for the learned. The general population, however, benefited from this opportunity to learn to read and write.
- In the Inquisition documentation on the persecution of the Poor of Christ it is regularly remarked that the heretics were educated, some even having attended theological training centres. (Biller in Patschovsky 2011 XXV: 126)

iv. **Authenticity: Repentance and absolution lead to a new life.**

Repentance and absolution are not religious rituals, but a tangible interaction with God that leads to tangible, transforming, results in a new life and life style. Here a closer look at the Profession of Valdes is revealing. 50 (page 85) deals with confession and forgiveness, but purely confirming the traditional Roman view that a truly penitent heart, followed by spoken confession, has to lead to works of satisfaction. The actual approach of Valdes then is covered in 69 to 76. Repentance and forgiveness lead to a new, transformed life. The good deeds are not deeds of penitence or works of satisfaction, as stated in 50. The distinction is important, since the approach of the Poor of Christ means that life after forgiveness is lived “forward” in following Christ, whereas the approach of 50 means that life after forgiveness is lived “backwards”, doing good to pay off debt, constantly reminding the penitent of the sin for which they are doing penance. The approach of Valdes and the Poor of Christ is a liberating one, setting free and moving forward. This authentic life style contributed to the rapid spread, in a time and environment where the church heavily relied on punishment, threats and using fear of hell to control the people.

Valdes's approach also explains why the lowest in society were so open and welcoming to the Poor of Christ – here, at last, were messengers that brought them relieve and peace of mind, without any monetary expectations.

With regards to repentance and a transformed life, 76 is important to consider. Not everybody is expected to give up everything and become a wandering preacher. But everybody is expected to live a transformed life, doing good “out of their own”, caring for the poor and adhering to the commands of the Lord.

This too is recognized in many an Inquisition report, where the inquisitor secretly admires the integrity and goodness of the heretic that he has to condemn. Lea (Gutenberg.org: 85) states:

In fact, the unanimous testimony of their persecutors is that their external virtues were worthy of all praise, and the contrast between the purity of their lives and the depravity which pervaded the clergy of the dominant Church is more than once deplored by their antagonists as a most effective factor in the dissemination of heresy. An inquisitor who knew them well describes them: “Heretics are recognizable by their customs and speech, for they are modest and well regulated. They take no pride in their garments, which are neither costly nor vile. They do not engage in trade, to avoid lies and oaths and frauds, but live by their labor as mechanics—their teachers are cobblers. They do not accumulate wealth, but are content with necessaries. They are chaste and temperate in meat and drink. They do not frequent taverns or dances or other vanities. They restrain themselves from anger. They are always at work; they teach and learn and consequently pray but little. They are to be known by their modesty and precision of speech, avoiding scurrility and detraction and light words and lies and oaths. They do not even say *vere* or *certe*, regarding them as oaths.

v. **The wandering preachers**

Perhaps, the main reason for the vast spreading of the Poor of Christ is touched upon in 69 of the Profession of Valdes. It describes the approach of the

wandering preachers. This needs to be expanded a bit more. Being a wandering preacher (often referred to as Uncle, later as Master, Mistress – “Meister, Meisterin”) meant the following:

vi. **Follow Christ in the most literal way possible**

- 1) Abandon wealth and even family (such as cited in Mt 19,29). Valdes led by example by giving away his money, sending his daughters to a convent and leaving all his possessions to his wife so that she could cope. (Molnár 1993: 8ff)
- 2) Dress according to sending command: Sandals and one garment only. (Mk 6,9) The early sources do not describe their appearance. Walter Map describes them as “*people without abode, going in pairs, barefoot, with woollen garments, without possessions and sharing everything with each other. “nudi nudum Christum sequentes”*” (Selge 1967 I: 139). The Poor of Christ were also frequently referred to as the “Sandal wearers” which indicates that they did not always go barefoot.
- 3) Be hosted by the community that you visit. (Mk 6,10) This too is witnessed to in many Inquisition reports, where people confessed to hosting wandering preachers, or being invited to a house where such a wandering preacher was accommodated for a few days.

This approach brought the wandering preachers much closer to the general population than the clerics managed to get. Clerics and the preachers of the religious orders tended to stay with other clerics or in monasteries, the Poor of Christ stayed with the people and were thus in contact with the whole neighbourhood.

- 4) Don't settle down, but move from town to town (Mt 10, 12-23) Their task was not to settle down elsewhere, but to stay only for a short period and then move on. This too contributed significantly to their rapid spreading all across Europe.
- 5) Don't go alone, but in two's. (Lk 10,1) Although this is in general a healthy approach, Valdes took this route based on the instruction of Jesus. This

approach has an inherent multiplication factor: If one person hears the calling and wishes to follow Christ in this way, another person needs to be found. It also became a major training method, with new recruits accompanying masters for several years before becoming masters and trainers themselves (See Chapter five: 169).

- 6) Men and women have equal status and calling. There are no indications as to whether in the first years after the conversion of Valdes women were part of the preaching teams. It is, however, documented a few years down the line. (Selge 1967 I: 34). Bernard of Fontcaude, already in 1191 in his *Adversus Waldensium sectam* complains about the fact that women are preaching in this sect (Molnár 1993: 54). Feuchter, in his essay "Waldenserinnen im Mittelalter" (Frank 1999: 51-69) shows that they always played a significant role, but were a special irritation to the church. "*Törichte Weiblein, mit Sünden beladen, die in fremde Häuser eindringen, neugierig und geschwätzig, zudringlich, frech und schamlos*" is how Gottfried, abbot of Clairvaux, describes them in the 1180's (ibid, 51). His heaping of insulting words, translated as *nosey, talkative, pushy, cheeky and shameless* is actually quite revealing. If one considers that the church was male dominated, any good woman counsellor, teacher and preacher will receive these attributes from male opponents!

One of the problems is that the Inquisition reports don't always indicate the sex of a heretic, making it difficult to get a clear picture. Feuchter comes to the conclusion that, with time, the role of women was reduced from equal status, including preaching and wandering from place to place, to focussing on women during their journeys, to becoming "sisters" based in one location and taking care of the wandering (male) preachers (ibid, 65). On the other hand, Nicolaus of Dresden, when executed in 1417, maintained that all Christians, including women, have the right to preach (de Lange 2006: 271), which is an indication that their status had not been reduced, but perhaps only their numbers.

Machilek (2006: 300) speaks about Anna Weiler, a woman who had accompanied Friedrich Reiser (Chapter five: 174) for many years and sees that

as an exemplary case of the important role that women played in the movement even at that stage.

This high regard for the woman, also as a teacher, meant that the Poor of Christ could have a much broader and deeper impact on society than the church, where only men were allowed to preach, teach and counsel.

vii. **Preach the Gospel**

- 1) Proclaim the Gospel of Salvation in Christ.
- 2) Lead the people to repentance. Ezekiel 18, 21-24 played an important role in the theology of the Poor of Christ in this regard:

But if a wicked person turns away from all the sins they have committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, that person will surely live; they will not die. None of the offenses they have committed will be remembered against them. Because of the righteous things they have done, they will live. Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?

But if a righteous person turns from their righteousness and commits sin and does the same detestable things the wicked person does; will they live? None of the righteous things that person has done will be remembered. Because of the unfaithfulness they are guilty of and because of the sins they have committed, they will die.

The focus was not on inherited sin, but turning away from your own wrongdoings to a life pleasing to God. (*Liber Antiheresis*, as discussed by Selge 1967 II: 44f and I: 108). The exemplary life style of the Poor of Christ was a logical consequence of this emphasis. (See page 91)

Through preaching, people need to become aware of their sins and repent. (Selge 1967 II: 58)

Pronounce forgiveness in Christ, not through works or indulgences, but to counsel people to live a new life out of forgiveness. This links up with the “living forward” – it is not enough for people to confess their sins, they need to be understood and helped to move forward.

- 3) Call people to follow Christ. It was not expected of every one to become a wandering preacher, but definitely to live a life serving Christ in their existing environment and community. This is an important distinction between the Poor of Christ and the Cathars. The Cathars insisted that they were the only true believers, and you had to join them. The Poor of Christ taught that poverty and being wandering preachers is their specific calling, but not the only way of following Christ, as stated in the Profession of Faith of Valdes, cited above, 69 to end (page 86).

viii. **Heal the sick**

This was a key aspect of the work and ministry of the Poor of Christ, based on Mt 10:8. They would not only pray for the sick, but even more importantly, treated illnesses with ointments. Many became known for their medical expertise. Lea (Gutenberg II: 32) states that the Inquisition revealed that “*The Waldenses had great reputation as skilful leeches*” and “*They were constantly consulted in cases of disease or injury, and almost without exception they refused payment for their ministrations, save food.*” (ibid 146)

This resulted in the establishment of hospitals and places of care for the sick. The Inquisition reports reveal that a large number of people had their first contact with the Poor of Christ because they were seeking medical help. Lea (Gutenberg II: 347) mentions a school for lepers in Newenhoffen.

This holistic ministry resulted in the Poor of Christ being welcomed by society and taken seriously. Also, as persecution started and grew it explains why they were protected by their communities. It needed extreme measures and punishment from the side of the inquisitors to force the population to betray and surrender people that were of such benefit to the population.

ix. **Make disciples of all nations**

The Poor of Christ were different from many other heretical movements, and also from the general tendency in the Church in that their ambition was not to achieve their own salvation or holiness, but to spread the gospel of Christ to others.

Die Waldenser hatten in ihrem eigensten Auftrag einen besonderen Grund, das Martyrium nach Kräften zu fliehen. Ihr Amt diente dem Heil der Menschen, indem es sie zur Buße und zur Treue in guten Werken rief; nicht die persönliche Heiligung war der erste Auftrag der Waldenser. So hatten sie auch einen sachlichen Grund, in ihrem Auftreten alles äußerlich Auffallende zu vermeiden. (Selge I 1967: 304). (Summary: The Waldenses had a good reason not to become martyrs: Their task was not their own sanctification, but to call people to repentance and a new life. So they needed to be inconspicuous)

Whereas eremite orders withdrew into monasteries and closed communities, the Poor of Christ purposefully went into cities and towns, preached in churches and in market places.

Part of the “making disciples” was their concerted effort to teach others. Within a short period of time schools had been established where people were taught to read and write. They were encouraged to copy portions of the New Testament for their own use. Anonymous of Passau comments on this (Peters 1980: 152):

In all the cities of Lombardy and the province of Provence, and in other kingdoms and lands, there are more schools of the heretics than of theologians, and they have more hearers; they debated publicly, and they convoked the people to solemn disputations in fields and forums, and they preached in houses, nor was there anyone who dared to stop them, on account of the power and number of their sympathizers.

I myself have frequently been present at the inquisition and examination of heretics, and there are calculated to be in the diocese of Passau forty churches that have been infected with heresy. And in the parish of Kemenaten alone there are ten schools of heretics...

As the movement spread to other regions and dialects, the scriptures were then translated and written in that vernacular, making the New Testament accessible to non-clergy and clergy alike.

x. **Undivided loyalty to the Roman Church**

Valdes was a loyal member of the church and had no ambition to start a new church (Schneider 2015: 3) nor to fight against the church. Molnar states: *“Die Waldenser gaben niemals die subjektive Überzeugung auf, Glieder der allgemeinen katholischen Kirche zu sein.”* – they never gave up the subjective view that they were members of the catholic church. They criticised the structures but continued to see themselves as in the fold of the Roman Church (Molnár 1993: 401) He and his followers saw themselves as lay people, called by Christ, to work in the church on those things neglected by the clergy. This includes highlighting the failures of the clergy, as seen at various places in the *“Liber Antiheresis”*, especially the chapter *De ordinibus ecclesiasticis* (Selge 1967 II: 59ff). Listing these failures aimed at calling those clergies to repentance and not to justify a schism from the church. As part of the church they understood themselves to be called to fight heresies, especially the Cathars. Even after their excommunication they did not form a break away church. They continued to preach against heresies, calling heretics back to the true church, the Roman Church. (Selge1967 II: XI) This shows that they never accepted their excommunication, and for a long period just ignored it. (ibid 62). They did not regard themselves as a new church, but as part of the one Roman Church. When allowed, they were fully part of the community and church life, and could influence their communities with their teaching, preaching and especially their life style.

This was in stark contrast to the Lombards in Italy, also called “Poor in Spirit” who were closely linked to the Poor of Christ, but differed in a few important matters: They regarded the Roman Church as well as the priests, bishop and pope as not being the true church, and their officiating at sacraments as nullifying the validity of the sacrament. For this reason, the Lombards could not stay part of the Roman Church, but had to form separate communities. They ordained their own priests and work against the Roman Church. Valdes rejected this, and with it the Lombards. After the death of Valdes new attempts were made to bring the Lombards and the Poor of Christ together. Agreement was reached on some issues such as that it was allowed for members of the movement to have an income earning occupation. Disagreement continued on the rejection or acceptance of the Roman Church and its clergy. (Selge I 1967: 310ff)

The Poor of Christ, however, due to their insistence on being part of the church, and their participation in the church in the cities of Europe, and their holistic ministry in these, continued to impact on the thought development of the laity.

5. Conclusion

Valdes was born into a time that created an ideal climate for the Poor of Christ to grow and flourish. The historical-contextual analysis of various factors show that the window of opportunity was created because of the synthesis of the following factors:

- i. The shifting of powers in Europe resulted in Lyon, the birthplace of the Poor of Christ, being a very independent archdiocese where such a movement could start.
- ii. The crusades had contributed to a shift in power from imperial rulers to independent city-states, *free imperial cities*, and had introduced new trading opportunities. These, in turn, made it possible for ordinary people such as Valdes, to become wealthy and respected and gain access to basic education. It also contributed to

- the expansion of trade routes linking the cities of Europe, which also became the expansion routes of the Poor of Christ.
- iii. The series of popes and anti-popes had weakened the papacy, and possibly had resulted in Valdes meeting Pope Alexander while the latter was in exile.
 - iv. A lay person, Valdes, could accumulate enough wealth to commission two priests to translate the New Testament into his mother tongue. This is perhaps the most significant single development, since working with the New Testament and living it out became the main mission of and the main controversy for the Poor of Christ.
 - v. His good relationship to his archbishop and Pope Alexander III gave Valdes some form of protection when the movement was in its infancy and vulnerable.
 - vi. The banishment of Valdes and the Poor of Christ from Lyons contributed to their faster spreading into the rest of Europe.
 - vii. Pope and Emperor were in a constant battle for supremacy taking up much of their energy and leaving scope for the development of independent thinkers – theologically, economically and politically.
 - viii. The poor moral state of the clergy across all ranks made the Poor of Christ stand out as shining examples of integrity and trustworthiness, contributing to their spreading and acceptance despite all prohibitions.
 - ix. The attempts of the church to halt the Poor of Christ through decrees and punishment drove the church further away from its core task, creating more space for the Poor of Christ to operate.
 - x. The Holy Roman Empire with its multitude of local rulers, kings, archdioceses, counties and independent free imperial cities, provided pockets of safety for the Poor of Christ where they could work unhindered and unaffected by the banishment from the church. Chapter five of this study will take this up again and will show the importance of this political development for the ministry of the Poor of Christ and the 16th century Reformation.

- xi. One of the most important aspects highlighted in this chapter is the insistence of the Poor of Christ to stay within the church rather than forming isolated communities. This meant that the Poor of Christ through their ministry could help shape communities and their thinking over generations. Religious orders could be controlled by the church hierarchy to serve its purpose. The Poor of Christ remained independent influencers, without the blessing of church authority, but because of that also without being prescribed to by this authority.
- xii. Their co-existence with the Cathars and their attempts to engage them in debate and discussion in order to convince and win them back sharpened their theological thinking and helped them to define their own position as part of the church. It helped the Poor of Christ to confirm their loyalty to the church, even after being excommunicated. The more the church lost its integrity, the more brutal its methods to root out opposition became. Whereas this created fear amongst the population on the one hand, it also further increased the credibility of the Poor of Christ, who declined using power, political influence or wealth, but relied on their message, actions and way of life.
- xiii. The crusades had sanctified violence as a tool of the church to protect Christianity. During the Inquisition this brutal tool of violence became an instrument of the church against its own. While it caused the Poor of Christ much misery and resulted in countless, brutal executions of them, it also strengthened its underground structures and helped it to survive till the Reformation. Chapter Three looks into this aspect.

Chapter three will then focus on the steps that the church was willing to take to silence the Poor of Christ. The initial banning and excommunication did not yield the desired results, so new measures had to be decided on, which effectively meant that the church was starting a war on its own dedicated members.

Chapter 3 The Poor of Christ: A church at war with itself

Chapter Two showed how various circumstances created an atmosphere well suited to the start and growth of the Poor of Christ, despite it being excommunicated fairly soon after its start. In this chapter we focus on the actions that the Roman Church took against the Poor of Christ. For this decrees of ecumenical councils will be reviewed as primary literature. What is unique, however, is that we aim to show the impact of this not so much on the Poor of Christ, but rather on the church itself. This is in view of the research objective to show the problematic role that church authorities played. We will show how the church, through these decrees, steered itself into an increasingly problematic direction, which eventually made the 16th century Reformation a necessity. We will show how the church became increasingly brutal towards its own members, and extremely restrictive towards laity. We will show the initial attempts that the Poor of Christ made to get the approval of the church, and refer to various testimonies throughout the period 1174-1500 showing that, even though excommunicated, they continued to see themselves as members of the church and not a separate church.

This chapter shows that the church was caught off-guard by these lay members. This aspect speaks to the research objective to show the important role that laity played in preparing the 16th century Reformation. The church was so enshrined in its theological ivory towers, that it did not have the tools, the willingness nor the knowledge of how to deal with substantiated challenges from the grass roots. Power, rather than theology, was chosen to deal with these uncomfortable voices. As a result, the theological reflection and self-correction did not happen. The church did not hear the important message that the Poor of Christ were spreading, so that it spread in secret and underground until it eventually informed the 16th century Reformation theologians, who brought it to the surface. This applies especially to the central role of scripture in guiding theology, already highlighted in chapter one, page 25 of this study, which developed into the *Sola Scriptura*, and the unconditional adherence to Christ as Head of the Church and highest authority, discussed on pages 86ff of the previous chapter, which became the *Solus Christus* of the Reformation.

We will briefly discuss why Francis of Assisi was allowed to work unhindered, and even declared a saint, whereas Valdes and the Poor of Christ, who were very similar to the Franciscans, were declared heretics, excommunicated and persecuted for more than 300 years? This will also explain why Franciscans could be used by the Inquisition to assist in judging and condemning the Poor of Christ.

This chapter, through historical contextual analysis and synthesis wants to show how the church, through its defensive and destructive actions and decrees against its own dedicated members, painted itself into a corner that could eventually only lead to large-scale reformation or to its total collapse.

This, sadly, was not the first, nor the last time in the history of the Church that the leadership and theologians turned against those whom they were supposed to serve and guide, instead of welcoming and accommodating their initiative. The church during its history has become its own greatest enemy and destroyer. This is eventually again referred to in Chapter seven of this study.

1. The prayer of Jesus in John 17:20f and the failure of the Church to act on this petition.

“Beratungsresistent” – this fascinating German word-creation describes someone who is resistant to good advice, fool-hardy, thick-headed; listening, but not heeding. *Beratungsresistent* is an appropriate description of the church during the middle ages, and, as will be shown in Chapter six of this study, seemingly of the church in general.

John 17, 20f shares Jesus praying: “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”

This prayer touches a very sore point of the Church of Christ of all ages: The inability of Christians, and especially clergy of all ranks, to work together for the common good of the Church of Christ. Although this chapter deals with the actions of the Roman Church, the failure to take seriously this prayer of Jesus forms part of the history of

almost every Christian denomination. Perhaps the biggest difference is the aggressiveness with which this prayer is ignored.

The Poor of Christ are one of few examples of movements in the history of the church that took this prayer seriously. In *Liber Antiheresis*, under the heading: De unitate ecclesie (Selge 1967 II: 40) Durand quotes various New Testament passages speaking about the one church, John 10,14ff, Rev 21, 9f and then John 17, 20f in full: *“Non pro his rogo tantum, set pro heis qui cedituri sunt per verbum eorum in me. Sicut tu pater in me, et ego in te, ut et imsi in nobis unum sint, ut mundus credit, quia tu me misisti”*

The fact that he does not stop at the *“that they may be one”*, but continues and includes: *“so that the world may believe that you have sent me”*. With that he captures the essence of this sentence, which is not unity for the sake of unity, but unity so that the world can recognize Christ as the one sent by the Father.

He then continues to explain that due to the wide geographical spread there might be many churches, but in Christ they are all one.

As shown at various places in this study, the Poor of Christ, true to this prayer, maintained their loyalty to the Roman Church, which in their understanding was the only Church. Chapter six of this study will show how this loyalty to one-ness resulted in some of the Reformation theologians resisting the forming of new churches.

2. The approach of Valdes and the Poor of Christ regarding their calling.

The approach of Valdes and his followers can in no way be seen as a rebellion. They were loyal members of the only church they knew, the Roman Church. Based on their reading of the gospel they chose a life of poverty, preaching the gospel, caring for the sick and studying the scriptures. This studying continued to strengthen their resolve to follow Christ in this way. When their initiatives were questioned by priests or bishops, they approached the next level of authority for permission, ending up sending a delegation to Rome where Lateran III was meeting (See Chapter one: 5). Despite their being ridiculed at the council, it seems that they did indeed get permission to continue

with their calling, including that of preaching – subject to the approval of the local priest or bishop. Selge (1967 I: 253) quotes the Anonymous of Passau stating that pope Alexander III embraced Valdes and gave him permission to preach, subject to the approval of the local bishop or priest: *“Waldesium amplexatus est papa, approbans votum quod fecerat voluntarie paupertatis, inhibens eidem, ne vel ipse aut socii sui predicationis officium presumerent nisi rogantibus sacerdotibus”*.

Another hearing took place a year after their visit to Rome, led by the Archbishop of Lyon and Cardinal Henry of Clair Vaux, where Valdes signed his profession of faith (see Chapter two: 83 above). Here too a similar conditional permission to preach was given, albeit orally. (Audisio 1999: 14f)

Their approach of loyalty to scripture and to Christ above loyalty to the church did not mean that the church should not be obeyed. But should the church hinder the mission of Christ, Christ’s authority superseded that of the church. To Valdes and his followers, loyalty to the church was non-negotiable. This tension is also visible in the *Liber Antiheresis*, where one chapter, “De statu ecclesie” is dedicated to the relationship to the church, (See Chapter two: 84 and Chapter five: 145) and yet it also states in the chapter on the regulations: *“Obedire oportet deo magis quam hominibus.” Et alibi: „Si quis“, inquit paulus, „vobis evangelizaverit preterquam quod evangelizavimus vobis anatema sit.”* (Selge 1967 II: 61) – quoting from Acts 5, 29 – *“We must obey God rather than human beings!”*, and Paul from Galatians 1, 8: *“But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse!”*

Thus, clearly their loyalty to the church was subject to their loyalty to the Gospel, which was absolute. For them it was clear that the church too had to submit to Christ’s authority and scripture. Bernard of Fontcaude, in his *Adversus Waldensium sectam* uses this as a main argument against them. Obedience, according to him, should be towards the institutions of organized church, from the pope to the lowest cleric. The Poor of Christ, however, only want to obey God, and in that their total ministry is to be rejected. (Molnár 1993: 54)

Apart from lay preachers not giving up preaching even when permission was not given, two other factors significantly contributed to them being declared heretics at Lateran IV. Introduce the points that follow:

- As good Catholics, and based on their understanding of the gospel call, they insisted on the sacrament of confession or penance for Christians. They differ from Roman teaching in that they don't insist on penance. *“die Buße besteht, um den terminus technicus zu gebrauchen, in der contrition cordis, die allerdings die Bekehrung zu einem neuen Leben bedeutet.”* Selge 1967 I: 95). The purpose of confession is to lead to a changed life (see also Chapter two: 91f).

Many ordinary people had lost their trust in the priests – priests that openly lived and did what they were supposed to confess to, or that showed little interest in hearing confession. Although the Poor of Christ regarded the sacraments, including taking confession and absolving, as valid even when done by a wicket priest (see Chapter two: 84 lines 35f), they also, in such situations started taking confession and do counselling to honour the commitment to the sacrament. This, however, was strictly against church law and order, since these were lay people not ordained nor commissioned to take confession, and did it without any permission. Lateran IV, constitution 21 clearly stated:

All the faithful of either sex, after they have reached the age of discernment, should individually confess all their sins in a faithful manner to their own priest at least once a year, and let them take care to do what they can to perform the penance imposed on them... ..If any persons wish, for good reasons, to confess their sins to another priest let them first ask and obtain the permission of their own priest; for otherwise the other priest will not have the power to absolve or to bind them.

- Furthermore, especially in those areas where Catharism was strong, they started the celebration of communion outside the church. Cathar preachers and teaching rejected the sacrament of communion and actively discouraged

people to receive it. As a result, in those areas where the Cathars were strong, participation at communion suffered immensely. Communion, however, was a very important sacrament to the Poor of Christ. The Poor of Christ saw it as their task to counter the Cathar teaching and bring the people, including the Cathars, back into the fold of the (Roman) Church. Celebrating communion for them was an important part of this ministry, since it became a visible sign of people rejecting Catharism. Anselm of Alessandria remarks that anybody, also lay people and women, would administer the body of Christ. (Selge 1967 I: 161). The church, however, did not appreciate the intention of countering Catharism, but saw it as a valid reason to declare the Poor of Christ heretics, since they had not been called and ordained by the church to administer this sacrament. (Audisio 1999: 17f)

Despite the re-affirmation and intensifying of the excommunication (See Chapter one: 6 and Chapter two: 55f) the Poor of Christ continued their mission, often respected not only by communities, but also by priests, even bishops. Audisio states (1999: 16f):

During this period, {1184 to 1215} and even beyond, as we have seen, the Poor of Lyons still considered themselves to be faithful to the Roman Church, in spite of their condemnation. How was this possible? The answer is partially to be found in the fact that, as has been seen, some prelates continued to discuss with them, in no way treating them as excommunicates. The judgement remained theoretical to some extent. Moreover, the Poor of Lyons were in constant contact with the people and lower clergy who considered them to be Catholics, that is to say anti-Cathars; this was also their own opinion.

One can only imagine how conflicted these clergies must have been when meeting the Poor of Christ and finding no fault with them, and at the same time being told that these were declared to be heretics and enemies of the church.

The Inquisition reports reveal that public preaching, even in churches, happened as late as 1228, almost 50 years after their first excommunication. It did, however,

become extremely dangerous after eighty Poor of Christ were burnt on the stake in 1211 in Strasbourg. (Lerner 1986: 241).

As the intensity of the Inquisition grew, the Poor of Christ were more and more forced into hiding, and into secrecy. Eventually the public preaching stopped completely because it had become too dangerous. *“By analysing the small number of testimonies, ..., it would appear that after 1230 there was no longer any trace of Waldensians preaching in public.”* (Audisio 1999: 29). Instead it happened at night and in homes where they were welcomed, and guests were invited to attend. In this way the preaching continued to contribute to the spread of the movement, albeit at a much slower rate and a smaller footprint. (ibid)

The structures began to form early, forced by the growing persecution. As more and more of them were expelled from their parishes, they started forming separate communities (Molnár 1993: 74), the leadership started to meet annually, and tasks were assigned to specific persons. They distinguished between the brothers and sisters that had given up on their past profession and possessions and were wandering preachers; new converts that were “in training” and not yet allowed to preach; and friends of the society – people that continued with their regular lives and professions, but came to the meetings, listened to the teachings and supported the preachers. (Schneider 1981:19) But Schneider also points out that these were not rigid structures, since the Poor of Christ in most regions saw themselves as integral part of the church (pg. 63f).

However, over the years they did become much more refined. Tourn states (1983: 74):

Die von den Barben gegründete Organisation hat eine einzigartige Wirkung: Die Arbeitsgebiete sind genau begrenzt, die Begegnungen pünktlich, und die Nachrichten sind exakt. Beweis dafür ist die Tatsache, dass es der Inquisition nur selten gelang, sie zu fassen. (As an underground movement they had to know exactly what they were doing, how and when, resulting in the inquisition only seldomly succeeding to apprehend them.)

In the early phase the structuring focused more on practical issues in the young movement. As reported on at the Conference of Bergamo 1218. (Selge 1967 I: 162) 34 years after their initial excommunication, and four years since the intensifying persecution announced at Lateran IV, the conference reflects on matters such as who should administer Holy Communion. The first priority still is that it be received from a priest, but failing that, new converts (*nuper conversi*) or friends that have kept their possessions (*amicis in reus permanentibus*) (*ibid*) could be appointed to do this. This applies to communities that have been formed. The new converts are “still” stationary, and might become wandering preachers. The friends are those that follow the teachings, but without following the route of poverty. As stated in the *Profession of Faith* (see Chapter two: 86) those choosing to maintain their old profession and wealth are fully accepted and not discriminated against in any way – even to the point of being ordained to administer communion (*ibid*).

Their healing ministry (see Chapter two: 96) continued and was well received. It was combined with counselling and sharing the gospel. This continued throughout the time till the 16th century Reformation. Audisio (1999: 133ff) shares examples that came to light during the Inquisition.

There are many indications that health was one of the barbes' special concerns. In 1487, Odin Crespin from Freissinie Áres in the Dauphiné recounted during his cross-examination how, some years before, he had had an injured leg. His uncle told him, ‘If you will believe me, I shall take you to a man, a great cleric, who will quickly cure you.’ This is what happened. Odin's uncle and the barbe spoke together, then Odin came into the room alone with the barbe who questioned him about the place where he lived and asked him if he habitually swore oaths. He was then examined medically: ‘Then he wanted to see his injured tibia and said to him; if you will do as I say you will recover. And he told him that he would apply a herb called miltalha to it.’ Morel and Masson confirm this particular concern for sickness: ‘When someone is ill, if we are called we visit the patient to bring consolation in the form of exhortations and prayers; and sometimes we visit the infirm, without even being called, being aware of

their indigency, to help them spiritually and physically.'

Audisio further explains that this ministry of healing was non-negotiable for two reasons: The Poor of Christ rejected the practise of praying to the saints when ill, and had to offer an alternative – that of applying medication. Furthermore, Jesus had ordered his disciples not only to preach, but also to heal the sick – therefore they had to follow that instruction (ibid 134). We have shown in Chapter two of this study (pg. 63) how the church did not allow for a combining of spiritual and physical care. The healing ministry therefore was a constant challenge to the church.

Regarding the wandering preachers, their continued commitment to a life of poverty did not attract much attention, since other orders such as the Franciscans and Dominicans, existed in that time that had poverty as main virtue. Therefore, their continued open adherence to this quite visible virtue did not give them away and did not endanger them as such.

However, their loyalty to scripture, and taking scripture literally, continued to expose them – firstly because lay people, and, for that matter not even most priests, would study scripture, let alone possess a Bible or parts of it. Secondly, their adherence to scripture resulted in them refusing to take an oath. This became a guaranteed giveaway, since any inquisitional hearing started off by demanding an oath of loyalty to the church. Loyal they were – but they refused to swear to it. A fascinating example of this is cited by Lea (Gutenberg II: 148). Around 1290, a priest, Jean Philibert, is charged to trace and capture a wandering preacher. In the process he gets acquainted to a community of the Poor of Christ *“holding regular assemblies and preaching and performing their rites, although they attended the parish churches to avert suspicion. Their evangelical piety so won upon him that, after going home, he returned to Auch and formally joined them.”* (ibid 148). Upon returning, this change does not go unnoticed, and in 1298 he is brought before the Inquisitor Bernard Gui.

...when he refused to take an oath and was consigned to prison. Here he abjured, and on being liberated returned to the Waldenses of Gascony, was again arrested, and brought before Bernard Gui in 1311, who finally

burned him in 1319 as a relapsed. (ibid).

As a priest he was used to swearing an oath of allegiance to the church, and requesting people to swear an oath as well, but upon adopting the teachings of the Poor of Christ, he refused, which ended him up in prison.

In Volume I Lea writes (Gutenberg I: 87f):

The sincerity with which the Waldenses adhered to their beliefs is shown by the thousands who cheerfully endured the horrors of the prison, the torture-chamber, and the stake, rather than return to a faith which they believed to be corrupt. I have met with a case in 1320, in which a poor old woman at Pamiers submitted to the dreadful sentence for heresy simply because she would not take an oath. She answered all interrogations on points of faith in orthodox fashion, but though offered her life if she would swear on the Gospels, she refused to burden her soul with the sin, and for this she was condemned as a heretic.

Their adherences to scripture also made them reject any form of violence, which made them a soft target, since they would not retaliate, nor find ways to forcefully remove their adversaries. Lerner (1986: 245) states:

For Waldensian believers the resort to violence meant departing from their faith's prohibition of homicide, but when hunted heretics felt desperate enough, they were willing to make this compromise in the hope of survival.

He lists a few cases where violence was resorted to: An uprising which resulted in many being imprisoned in Prague in 1339, and the burning of a priest in his house in Steyr (ibid 246). He then states:

Violence, however, was an exceptional response of utter desperation: in lieu of the organization necessary to burn and the courage to stab, most heretics who wished to avoid incriminating themselves or others before

tribunals simply took flight. (ibid).

Another issue that caused them many problems was the doctrine of purgatory, which was formalised during this period at the 2nd Council of Lyon, 1274 (<http://catho.org/9.php?d=bxx> 856, accessed 4.04.2020), and which the Poor of Christ rejected, since it is not found in the New Testament. This doctrine resulted in many activities and rituals, such as mass for the deceased, penance for deceased, and penance for own sins, mostly connected with a monetary offering. It resulted in a major income source for the church (Selge 1967 I: 153f). When the Poor of Christ were active in an area, the priest would quickly become aware of this because of a decline in demand, participation and, most significant, decline in income from these rituals. Even if the priest was tolerant towards the Poor of Christ, the annual visit of the bishop would reveal that something was “not right”, just by looking at the finances of a parish.

In the introduction we asked why the Franciscans, who in many ways resembled the Poor of Christ and their ministry, were accepted by the church, and Francis even sanctified, while Valdes and the Poor of Christ were declared heretic?

The most important difference to the Poor of Christ was that they submitted completely to the authority of the church. They only did what the church permitted them to do. As a recognised religious order, they were allowed to teach and preach, unlike the Poor of Christ. Also, since they did not put an emphasis on the study of scripture, they would not easily become aware of dogmas and practises that were in conflict with the teachings of Jesus. This also explains why they, for a significant period were tasked as inquisitors to hunt down the Poor of Christ, and were willing to do so: The church had instructed them and they had to obey. The church had declared the Poor of Christ heretics, and this should not be questioned.

In this regard the apology that Pope Francis offered to the Waldensian Synod on 22 June 2015 was significant, since, with this apology, he acknowledged the wrongdoings of the church and of the fledgling Franciscan order towards the Poor of Christ.

Looking back at the history of our relations, we cannot but feel sadness when we recall the arguments and violence committed in the name of

one's own faith. I ask the Lord to grant us the grace for us all to recognise ourselves as sinners and be able to forgive one another. It is thanks to God, who never gives up in the face of human sin, that new fraternal paths are opening up before us and we cannot back away from this. On the part of the Catholic Church, I ask your forgiveness, I ask it for the non-Christian and even inhuman attitudes and behavior that we have showed you ... In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, forgive us (Libiero 2015: 95).

The *Poor Catholics*, (See Chapter four: 144) who broke away from the Poor of Christ under Durand of Huesca also subdued to authority and structures of the church and thus were not persecuted. The reason for their willingness to be completely obedient is not clear. Indications are that many of them were clergy, who had taken the oath of obedience at ordination, and felt bound to that oath of obedience. This is further discussed in Chapter four.

3. Reaction of the Church to the Poor of Christ

Initially the main irritation caused by the Poor of Christ was that they preached without being called by the church to the ministry. In the early phase they received verbal permission from the pope), and thereafter most likely also from the Archbishop of Lyon (see page 105), to preach, provided that the local priest permitted it. Some priests welcomed them, others felt threatened, especially when preachers spoke about a Christian life style to strive for, that was in stark contrast to the life style of the priest. The strongest initial reaction however came to women preaching, since the church had reserved that exclusively for men and would under no circumstance grant a woman the right to public preaching As indicated in Chapter two: 94 of this study, strong reaction to these women preachers came as early as 1180's, with protest writings against their role in the movement. The insults heaped up against them on closer inspection actually describe qualities of efficient counsellors, teachers and preachers, only of the wrong gender.

When the Poor of Christ were first excommunicated in 1184, it was not for being heretic, but schismatic (Audisio 1999: 16), for refusing to obey, rather than for what

they were teaching. The church regarded their activities as threatening the unity and authority of the church. Therefore, they had to be stopped.

The response of Valdes, to obey God before men, (see page 105) angered the church. The statement in itself questioned the self-understanding of church and clergy, who, by church dogma, were regarded as speaking on behalf of God. If anyone claimed that church instructions contradicted God's instructions, it was much more than disobedience to the church. In the eyes of the church it was disobedience to God and tantamount to blasphemy (see page 105).

Despite the excommunication, priests and bishops that appreciated the work of the Poor of Christ continued to give them permission to preach in their towns and churches and even entered into public debate with them. (Audisio 1999: 15f) This indicates that some of those in close contact with the Poor of Christ did not view them as heretics or deserving excommunication.

How could or should the church then respond to the perceived threat from the Poor of Christ? The first, and in church context, most obvious response would be a theological one – to analyse what they are teaching, and how, and then give solid counter arguments and alternatives – or be corrected by them.

a) Theological response to the Poor of Christ

The challenges posed by the Poor of Christ had to do with a conflict between their interpretation of the Bible, especially the New Testament, and the teachings and praxis of the church. Since these teachings were based on interpretation of scripture, theological developments on those, and conclusions based on the theological developments (See diagram: Authority of scripture, page 26), one would think that the church would engage these preachers theologically- analysing their preaching and pointing out where the theological error is perceived as well as explaining how the church could justify the dogma that was in contradiction of scripture.

However, no real attempt was made by the church to engage in theological debate on the work and preaching of the Poor of Christ, even less to allow its dogmas to be questioned. In the early phases there are records of dialogue and disputations such as the disputation between Durand and Diego of Osma (Chapter five: 146). The unknown Inquisitor from Passau (around 1260) makes it very clear that it does not make sense to enter into theological discussions with them. There is no room for subtle discussion – it's all about establishing the facts to prove them guilty (Molnár 1993: 121f). Was it because the Poor of Christ, as a rule, were untrained, not educated in the doctrines of the church, and not able to debate in Latin? In that case the church could have entered into a “lower level” conversation. Was it not capable to do that? Rather, it seems that the church saw no reason to seriously consider theological arguments from lay people.

Furthermore, the fact that the Poor of Christ were preaching without being authorised and sent by the church was sufficient reason to declare them heretics without entering into any further discussion (see page 105). The content of their preaching became irrelevant. It was all about authority not being obeyed. For this reason, there also was hardly any theological reflection by the church on the message, challenges and criticism coming from the Poor of Christ. They did not have the authority to speak, and therefore there was no need for the church to listen to what they said.

Ironically, councils such as Lateran III that condemned the Poor of Christ spent much more time, and formulated a number of decrees condemning unbecoming behaviour of clergy and hierarchy. They failed, however, to make a connection between the preaching of the Poor of Christ and their own concerns. Just as the church failed to make use of the Poor of Christ in its battle against the Cathars, where the Poor of Christ were much more successful in stopping that heresy, it also failed to make use of them as an instrument of renewal that the church so desperately needed. (See Chapter two: 66).

It was a strange situation where time and again the church, whilst condemning the Poor of Christ at the same time lauded their integrity and sincerity (See Chapter two: 92). But rather than listening to the core message and discovering its

relevance for the church, the emphasis of the church was on finding the weaknesses of the Poor of Christ according to the doctrines of the Roman Church – and this weakness was not to accept the authority of the church being supreme.

A most striking early example of this is when the delegation of the Poor of Christ appeared before the Lateran council in Rome in 1178, and was interrogated as to their adherence to Roman Doctrine. Walter Map reports (Map 1966: 77):

The bishop ordered me, who was making ready to reply, to try my eloquence against them. At the outset I suggested the easiest questions, which anybody should be able to answer, for I knew that when an ass is eating thistles, its lips disdain lettuce: 'Do you believe in God the Father?' They answered, 'We believe.' 'And in the Son?' They replied, 'We believe.' 'And in the Holy Spirit?' Their reply still was, 'We believe.' I kept on, 'In the Mother of Christ?' And they again, 'We believe.' Amid the derisive shouts of all, they withdrew in discomfiture, which was richly deserved, because they were ruled by none, and sought to be made rulers ...

They failed the test when they confirmed their belief in Mary, the mother of Jesus. The correct answer would have been: Mary is the mother of God. Every theologian worth his salt knew that this long debate had shortly before been concluded and agreed upon. Clearly these uneducated lay people had no idea of these so important discussions and articles of faith! One can thus only come to the conclusion that the church failed dismally in one of its core tasks: To reflect theologically and interact theologically with its own members that did not toe the line. This attitude of non-reflection and non-self-correction continued, and was still prevalent when 350 years later Martin Luther appeared before the Diet in Worms and was requested to withdraw all of his writings. He made an effort to give a qualified response, and requested to be proven wrong. There was however, no willingness to engage with him theologically or otherwise on the merits of his arguments. Rather he was presented with two options: Recant – yes or no? (Friedenthal 1967: 333-339) Chapter seven will ask the question whether church today has changed, or is still unwilling to self-correct.

This self-assuredness of the church in the 12th and 13th century and the unwillingness to be challenged theologically by the Poor of Christ led to a growing shift towards emphasising its authority, rather than sound theology. The authoritarian, rather than theological approach of the church to them and towards other dissidents became the norm for its dealing with dissent. Perhaps the most well-known illustration of this development is the appearance of Martin Luther at the diet of Worms mentioned above.

b) Authoritarian reaction to the Poor of Christ – the Inquisition

As shown in Chapter two, the church for centuries had already been involved in a battle with worldly rulers as to who had the ultimate authority. If the church, as representing God, was indeed the highest authority, as it believed, to enforce this authority on its subjects was a logical conclusion. Excommunication was a powerful tool in this process – basically threatening eternal damnation for those who did not obey the church. The original intention of excommunication was to bring the stray ones back into the fold. In the New Testament, various passages such as 1 Corinthians 5, 1-6, speak about a situation of immorality, where the culprit is to be handed “*over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.*” However, there are very few instances where it refers to wrong teachings or distortions of the gospel, such as in 1 Timothy 1, 18-20:

Timothy, my son, I am giving you this command in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by recalling them you may fight the battle well, holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.

Although the phrase “handed over to Satan” is not explained in detail in the New Testament, it does not refer to execution, but to exclusion from the congregation and, according to Fascher (1984:159f), the intention is twofold: To protect the congregation and to correct the person gone astray.

With time, however, it also became an instrument of power to subdue and enforce obedience. As shown in Chapter two (page 46) it was an effective measure against worldly rulers who failed to obey.

However, not everybody seemed to accept their excommunication or was intimidated by it. Those who did not believe that the church had the authority to condemn them before God, or send them to hell, would not be intimidated by it. For these, harsher methods were needed. This harsher method was the Inquisition with all tools available to the inquisitor. The Inquisition became the main tool of the church to deal with the Poor of Christ, since their excommunication did not force them into obedience. Their first excommunication in 1184 did not hinder them from spreading all across Europe in the decades that followed.

This section expands on some of the authoritarian measures introduced by the church. Although it is not expressly stated that these measures were aimed at the Poor of Christ, this was the only group that continued to grow and spread despite all measures taken against them. Because of their persistence, "Waldensian" later became synonymous with "heretic". Audisio (1999: 76) states that with time "*all kinds of villains to be called vaudois and made the term itself an insult.*"

The Poor of Christ were people of integrity, and were experienced by society as counsellors, healers and bringers of good news. They taught people to read and write *and* they were loyal to the Roman Church, so that society in general, and many regional rulers were more than reluctant to get rid of them. For that reason, additional measures of authority had to be introduced by the church to ensure compliance. These measures had no theological foundation, but were a show of force and authority.

The Inquisition, as it developed, was in direct conflict with core aspects of Christ's teachings especially the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7). If one then considers that the Sermon on the Mount was a core guide of the Poor of Christ one can only imagine how outrageous it must have seemed to the Poor of Christ when they were condemned for following this sermon, and punished with methods rejected in this sermon, all by their own and only church.

You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift (Mt 5, 21-24).

The Poor of Christ, loyal Catholics, were used to hearing these words, and knew them off by heart. It must have been bitter to then be persecuted by their brothers and sisters, with no attempt of reconciliation, to be burnt on the stake with a church service starting the procedure (Chapter two: 72).

The Inquisition alienated the church from its loyal laity, from those who knew the teachings of Jesus. Even worse: it alienated the church from its own core task and calling to represent Christ on earth. In that the church became its own worst enemy.

The purpose of the Inquisition was to find heretics, prove them guilty and then punish them. Lea writes (Gutenberg I: 305):

When the existence of hidden crime is suspected there are three stages in the process of its suppression—the discovery of the criminal, the proof of his guilt, and finally his punishment. Of all others the crime of heresy was the most difficult to discover and to prove, and when its progress became threatening the ecclesiastics on whom fell the responsibility of its eradication were equally at a loss in each of the three steps to be taken for its extermination.

Bishops up to then regularly made use of the "Divine judgement" or "Ordeal" to establish guilt or innocence of an accused:

The judicial use of torture was as yet happily unknown, and the current substitute of a barbarous age, the Ordeal, was resorted to with a

frequency which shows how ludicrously helpless were the ecclesiastics called upon to perform functions so novel. Even St. Bernard approved of this expedient, and in 1157 the Council of Reims prescribed it as the rule in all cases of suspected heresy. More enlightened churchmen viewed its results with well-grounded disbelief, and Peter Cantor mentions several cases to prove its injustice. A poor woman accused of Catharism was abandoned to die of hunger, till in confession to a religious dean she protested her innocence and was advised by him to offer the hot-iron ordeal in proof, which she did with the result of being burned first by the iron and then at the stake. A good Catholic, against whom the only suspicious evidence was his poverty and his pallor, was ordered by an assembly of bishops to undergo the same ordeal, which he refused to do unless the prelates would prove to him that this would not be a mortal sin in tempting God. This tenderness of conscience was sufficient, so without further parley they unanimously handed him over to the secular authorities, and he was promptly burned. (ibid 305f)

This cruel practise of the Ordeal was forbidden by Innocence III (ibid 306).

More reliable procedures needed to be drawn up to eradicate heresies. This became the task of the Inquisition.

To ensure proper procedures to be followed, proper records had to be kept of each investigation. In Chapter two 2.6 (page 72) an overview of the process of the Inquisition is given. At a first glance the process seems to be well thought through and at least to some extent fair. But closer inspection reveals some serious shortcomings in determining the guilt of an accused. Perhaps the only improvement is that the *Divine judgement* or *Ordeal* no longer features. Instead witnesses are called to testify against the accused to determine their guilt.

The huge shortcomings become apparent when looking at Decree 3 of Lateran VI below. The accused is guilty till proven innocent. There is no space what so ever for a theological debate or theological encounter between the inquisitor and the accused. This again shows that the church was neither capable nor willing to

properly interrogate heretics on a theological level. It was enough that a movement had been declared heretic. The inquisitor now only had to establish whether the accused was indeed a member of that group or associated with it, to pronounce guilt and punishment.

If an accused pleaded innocence, the statements of the witnesses could not be interrogated by the accused. Therefore, despite the appearance of an improved system, an accused stood very little chance to escape being declared guilty. The safest option for an accused, even if not guilty, was to confess and recant. Then at least the punishment normally would not be the death penalty. It entailed being forced to wear the mark of a repentant heretic and often imprisonment, even for life. But at least one did not have to endure a fire death.

Decree 3 of Lateran IV, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum12-2.htm>.

The researcher's comments are in the right column. The numbering of paragraphs in the text is for ease of reference.

<p>3. <i>On Heretics</i></p> <p>1) <i>We excommunicate and anathematize every heresy raising itself up against this holy, orthodox and catholic faith which we have expounded above. We condemn all heretics, whatever names they may go under. They have different faces indeed but their tails are tied together inasmuch as they are alike in their pride.</i></p> <p>2) <i>Let those condemned be handed over to the secular authorities present, or to their bailiffs, for due punishment.</i></p>	<p>Researcher's comments:</p> <p>1) Lateran III still spelled out the names of heresies. By now many more had sprung up, amongst them the Poor of Christ, who were known by various names, since they had no central hierarchical structure, and did not see themselves as a group apart from the church.</p> <p>2) The church expected secular authorities to comply.</p>
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<p>3) Clerics are first to be degraded from their orders. The goods of the condemned are to be confiscated, if they are lay persons, and if clerics they are to be applied to the churches from which they received their stipends.</p> <p>4) Those who are only found suspect of heresy are to be struck with the sword of anathema, unless they prove their innocence by an appropriate purgation, having regard to the reasons for suspicion and the character of the person. Let such persons be avoided by all until they have made adequate satisfaction. If they persist in the excommunication for a year, they are to be condemned as heretics.</p> <p>5) Let secular authorities, whatever offices they may be discharging, be advised and urged and if necessary be compelled by ecclesiastical censure, if they wish to be reputed and held to be faithful, to take publicly an oath for the defence of the faith to the effect that they will seek, in so far as they can, to expel from the lands subject to their jurisdiction all heretics designated by the church in good faith. Thus whenever anyone is promoted to spiritual or temporal authority, he shall be obliged to confirm this article with an oath. If however a temporal lord, required and instructed by the church, neglects to cleanse his territory of this heretical filth, he shall be bound with the bond of excommunication by the metropolitan and other bishops of the province.</p> <p>6) If he refuses to give satisfaction within a year, this shall be reported to the supreme pontiff so that he may then declare his vassals absolved from their fealty to him and make the land available for occupation by Catholics so</p>	<p>3) The guilty ones do not only receive death penalty, but all possessions are confiscated.</p> <p>4) The onus is on the accused to prove their innocence. Until that happens, they are to be shunned by society.</p> <p>5) With this section, the church now enrolls secular authorities in its combat against perceived heretics. These authorities are not asked to judge for themselves, but merely to execute punishment, based on the judgement of the church.</p> <p>The self-understanding of the church is clear: it has the right to prescribe to secular authority, which is compelled to obey.</p> <p>6) Not only that, the church can dethrone a ruler who refuses to obey. The process is interesting: The church</p>
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that these may, after they have expelled the heretics, possess it unopposed and preserve it in the purity of the faith — saving the right of the suzerain provided that he makes no difficulty in the matter and puts no impediment in the way. The same law is to be observed no less as regards those who do not have a suzerain.

7) Catholics who take the cross and gird themselves up for the expulsion of heretics shall enjoy the same indulgence, and be strengthened by the same holy privilege, as is granted to those who go to the aid of the holy Land.

8) Moreover, we determine to subject to excommunication believers who receive, defend or support heretics. We strictly ordain that if any such person, after he has been designated as excommunicated, refuses to render satisfaction within a year, then by the law itself he shall be branded as infamous and not be admitted to public offices or councils or to elect others to the same or to give testimony. He shall be intestable, that is he shall not have the freedom to make a will nor shall succeed to an inheritance. Moreover nobody shall be compelled to answer to him on any business whatever, but he may be compelled to answer to them. If he is a judge sentences pronounced by him shall have no force and cases may not be brought before him; if an advocate, he may not be allowed to defend anyone; if a notary, documents drawn up by him shall be worthless and condemned along with their condemned author; and in similar matters we order

absolves its members from all duties towards the ruler, and gives “Catholics” (Those loyal to the church) the right to annex and occupy the land after expelling the perceived heretics. Effectively with this the church instigates mutiny. This led to various instances where whole regions were destroyed and the population murdered.

7) When ordinary believers punish heretics, it has the same benefits for them as taking part in a crusade: it brings salvation to those who participate.

8) Because the Poor of Christ are appreciated by society, additional measures have to be introduced to force the population to surrender them. Excommunication alone does not help. A series of tangible punishments have to be added. These include:

Removal from public office, losing the right to inherit or bequeath, and nullifying their occupational qualifications.

<p><i>the same to be observed.</i></p> <p>9) <i>If however he is a cleric, let him be deposed from every office and benefice, so that the greater the fault the greater be the punishment.</i></p> <p>10) <i>If any refuse to avoid such persons after they have been pointed out by the church, let them be punished with the sentence of excommunication until they make suitable satisfaction. Clerics should not, of course, give the sacraments of the church to such pestilent people nor give them a christian burial nor accept alms or offerings from them; if they do, let them be deprived of their office and not restored to it without a special indult of the apostolic see. Similarly with regulars, let them be punished with losing their privileges in the diocese in which they presume to commit such excesses.</i></p> <p>11) <i>“There are some who holding to the form of religion but denying its power (as the Apostle says), claim for themselves the authority to preach, whereas the same Apostle says, How shall they preach unless they are sent? Let therefore all those who have been forbidden or not sent to preach, and yet dare publicly or privately to usurp the office of preaching without having received the authority of the apostolic see or the catholic bishop of the place”, be bound with the bond of excommunication and, unless they repent very quickly, be punished by another suitable penalty.</i></p> <p>12) <i>We add further that each archbishop or bishop, either in person or through his archdeacon or through suitable honest persons, should visit twice or at least once in the year any parish of his in which heretics are said to live. There he should compel three or more men of good repute, or even if it seems expedient the whole neighbourhood, to swear that if anyone knows of heretics</i></p>	<p>9) Since the church has direct jurisdiction over clergy, they are immediately fired and stripped of all rights and privileges when refusing to cooperate.</p> <p>10) This paragraph deals with those who continue to support those who refused to act against heretics. It is thus “punishment in the second degree” and almost as harsh as that for the previous category.</p> <p>11) This is aimed against the Poor of Christ and their preaching, referring to their refusal to stop preaching, obeying Christ rather than church authority. It states clearly that no one is allowed to preach, neither in public nor in private without having been called by the church. This forbids the core activity of the Poor of Christ.</p> <p>12) The hunt for heretics is made obligatory through an annual visitation. Communities visited have to swear under oath that they will point out anyone who stands out as different. Again,</p>
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<p><i>there or of any persons who hold secret conventicles or who differ in their life and habits from the normal way of living of the faithful, then he will take care to point them out to the bishop.</i></p> <p><i>13) The bishop himself should summon the accused to his presence, and they should be punished canonically if they are unable to clear themselves of the charge or if after compurgation they relapse into their former errors of faith.</i></p> <p><i>14) If however any of them with damnable obstinacy refuse to honour an oath and so will not take it, let them by this very fact be regarded as heretics.</i></p> <p><i>15) We therefore will and command and, in virtue of obedience, strictly command that bishops see carefully to the effective execution of these things throughout their dioceses, if they wish to avoid canonical penalties. If any bishop is negligent or remiss in cleansing his diocese of the ferment of heresy, then when this shows itself by unmistakable signs he shall be deposed from his office as bishop and there shall be put in his place a suitable person who both wishes and is able to overthrow the evil of heresy.</i></p>	<p>this is aimed at the Poor of Christ and them striving to live out the Sermon on the Mount with all its challenges.</p> <p>13) Since the visitation is to happen annually, no one can only pretend to repent!</p> <p>14) The Poor of Christ refuse to take an oath. This becomes the easiest way to expose them.</p> <p>15) Since the church has direct power over the bishops, it will remove any bishop who does not follow these orders.</p> <p>Disobedience will lead to loss of status, attractive income and all the privileges linked to the episcopacy</p>
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This decree is an excellent example of how the church, in its reaction to the heresies, steers itself into a very problematic direction, rather than self-correcting. There is no attempt made to distinguish between heresies, as stated in point 1, since *“their tails are tied together inasmuch as they are alike in their pride”*. With this statement any theological criticism of the church, and especially church authorities, can be brushed aside as *“pride”*.

The refusal to engage theologically or entertain dialogue is highlighted in the following points from the decree:

Abuse of power – internal

Points 3,9,12 and 15 speak to the authority that the church has over its own clergy and those who work for the church. Here the church is ruthless in removing from office anyone who dares to go against its instructions. Obedience to the church seems to be the highest virtue, demanded from all officials. Disobedience leads to removal from office and loss of all benefits such as income and property. Higher church offices were normally linked to luxury, which made this punishment even more severe and thus more effective. Even if a bishop had no problems with the work done by the Poor of Christ, allowing them in his dioceses would lead to the end of his career. To eradicate them, in this situation, was not a fight against heretics, but a matter of own survival.

Abuse of power – external

Points 2,5 and 6 specifically deal with demands that the church has on secular power. As discussed in Chapter two, the power struggle between church and rulers had been going on for a long time. Here the church makes use of its claim that it is the highest authority on earth, since it represents God and his kingdom. Since heresies are revolt against God, it is the duty of the secular powers to help to stamp it out. This abuse of power was used successfully by the church up to the 16th century Reformation. Reformers such as John Hus could be burnt on the stake despite their large following, because secular powers did not dare to object. When Martin Luther was put on trial, he was saved because secular rulers decided to go against the authority of the church and protect him. This broke the hold of the church over society in general and made the fast public spreading of the Reformation possible, as opposed to the Poor of Christ, who were driven into the deeper underground. Chapter five and VI deal with this and show how the Poor of Christ impacted in preparing for a better political climate for the 16th century Reformation.

Fear of hell and damnation

Points 4,7 and 12 build and expand on the fear that people had of eternal damnation. This had become a very powerful tool for the church. This fear could be used to force people to witness against perceived heretics, to stay away from anyone that might be a heretic, and even to take up arms against these, even when they were close friends or relatives.

It was in the interest of the church to grow and sustain this fear through preaching, teaching, and the public burning of people on the stake. For this reason, these public burnings were conducted as a church event, with prayers, singing, and a sermon to warn the people of what would happen if they stray. The community was obliged to attend and witness the execution. Lea (Gutenberg I: 392f) describes the development of process of pronouncing the verdict:

With time the ceremony grew in stateliness and impressiveness. Sunday became prescribed for it, and as no other sermons were allowed on that day in the city, it was forbidden to be held on Quadragesima or Advent Sunday, or any other of the principal feast-days. Notice was given in advance from all the pulpits summoning all the people to be present and obtain the indulgence of forty days." [Thus, the church used a combination of grace and fear: In order to grow the fear, everybody is expected to be present. At the same time, being present grants indulgence of forty days] "A staging was erected in the centre of the church, on which the "penitents" were placed, surrounded by the secular and clerical officials. The sermon was delivered by the inquisitor, after which the oath of obedience was administered to the representatives of the civil power, and a solemn decree of excommunication was fulminated against all who should in any manner impede the operations of the Holy Office. Then the notary commenced reading the confessions one by one in the vulgar tongue, and as each was finished the culprit was asked if he acknowledged it to be true—care being taken, however, only to do this when he was known to be truly penitent and not likely to create scandal by

a denial.” [Since the purpose of this public event was to intimidate the population and discourage open opposition, it had to be carefully orchestrated!] “On his replying in the affirmative he was asked whether he would repent, or lose body and soul by persevering in heresy; and on his expressing a desire to abjure, the form of abjuration was read and he repeated it, sentence by sentence. Then the inquisitor absolved him from the ipso facto excommunication which he had incurred by heresy, and promised him mercy if he behaved well under the sentence about to be imposed. The sentence followed, and thus the penitents were brought forward successively, commencing with the least guilty and proceeding with those incurring severer penalties.

Those who were to be “relaxed,” or abandoned to the secular arm, were reserved to the last, and for them the ceremony was adjourned to the public square, where a platform had been constructed for the purpose, in order that the holy precincts of the church might not be polluted by a sentence leading to blood.[This again was a clever move, having those condemned to death first appear in church on the Sunday, and then, almost with a “to be continued”, send everybody home, in order to attend the execution on the next day. This heightened the atmosphere of fear.] For the same reason it was not to be performed on a holy day. The execution, however, was not to take place on the same day, but on the following, so as to afford the convicts time for conversion, that their souls might not pass from temporal to eternal flame, and care was enjoined not to permit them to address the people, lest sympathy should be aroused by their assertions of innocence. [Again, the inquisitor made sure that only the church and its voice was heard, and not that of the heretic to be executed. That would have defeated the purpose of having it as a public event.]

For the inquisitors the number of people sent to the stake, became an important “score card” to measure the success of their Inquisition. One can sense their pride when reporting on the number of heretics that were executed.

This particular reaction of the church to the Poor of Christ, more than any other,

created a climate of fear, intimidation and helplessness amongst its members. It drove the Poor of Christ into deep underground. At the same time, once someone had received the gospel message, this fear lost its grip, so that the work of the Poor of Christ would continue, albeit in secret, by those liberated. Audisio writes (1999, 110) *“The Poor of Lyons were faced with a crucial decision: should they maintain the intensity of their movement or aim to survive? In other words, live their dissent to the full or live long?”* The combination of fear on the one hand, and being captured by the gospel on the other, lead to them moving underground for the centuries to follow.

When then the 16th century reformers spoke out in public, proclaiming the liberating gospel, those hiding in the underground could now openly respond, assisting in the rapid spread of that Reformation. Chapter six deals with this.

Promise salvation to those who defend the church

Point 7 refers to this. In a climate of fear and condemnation the church offered an opportunity of redemption to those who were willing to join the fight against heretics. Since Pope Urbanus II’s first call for a crusade, forgiveness and salvation were promised to those heeding the call. (Asbridge 201: 50f). This, of course, involved giving up everything for months or years, and going on a life-threatening journey to the Holy Land.

Now the same redemption could be received by “working from home”, looking out for heretics, reporting them and assisting in eradicating them. It had the additional benefit that one had a chance of sharing in the loot. Segl (de Lange 2006: 175) for example refers to a priest, Ulrich von Pottenstein, who during the time of the intense persecution of heretics by Peter Zwicker in his diocese Enns, significantly expanded his real estate, most likely due to his co-operation with the inquisitor.

This aspect inadvertently manoeuvred the church into an untenable situation, where scrupulous, evil people could become agents of the church and perform atrocities with the blessing of the church. The church developed an oppressive militant approach towards its own members, increasing the urgency of Reformation.

Severe punishment

Points 3,8 and 13 deal with the punishment that heretics can expect. What is even more important is the punishment given to those who protect heretics, or tolerate them. There were different levels of punishment: Level one is the punishment of the heretics. Level two is the punishment of those who are tolerant or supportive of heretics.

This decree then goes even one step further. In point 10 level three punishment is introduced for those who fail to shun those from level two.

The church thus was not satisfied with the harsh punishment of heretics alone – it punished even those who associated with those who only associated with heretics. This speaks to the desperation of the church, and also indicates the frustration that all these hard-handed matters did not achieve the desired results.

As a result of these shortcomings, the Inquisition became also an instrument for personal revenge, to get rid of opponents, to get access to someone's prime property or get one's financial debt written off. Lea (Gutenberg II: 336f) writes about the Inquisitor Conrad of Marburg being used like this:

At the outset he had fallen into the hands of a designing woman, a vagrant about twenty years old who had quarrelled with her relations, and who, coming by chance to Bingen, and observing what was going on, saw her opportunity of revenge. She pretended to be of the sect, that her husband had been burned, that she wished to perish likewise, but added that if the Master would believe her she would reveal the names of the guilty. Conrad eagerly swallowed the bait, and sent her with his assistants to Clavelt, whence she came, where she caused the burning of her kindred. Then there was a certain Amfrid, who finally confessed that he had led Conrad to condemn a number of innocent men.

It was only much later, during the council of Vienne, 1311-1312, decree 26, that measures were taken to act against the abuse of power by inquisitors by introducing at least some amount of double checking between local bishop and the inquisitor (<http://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum15.htm>):

The apostolic see has received many complaints that some inquisitors,

appointed by it to suppress heresy, have overstepped the limits of the power given to them. They occasionally so enlarge their authority that what has been wisely provided by the apostolic see for the growth of the faith, oppresses the innocent under pretext of piety and results in harm to the faithful. The work of the inquisition will be the more successful the more solemnly, diligently and cautiously its investigations are prosecuted. We decree therefore, for the glory of God and the increase of the faith that this work will be done by both diocesan bishops and by inquisitors appointed by the apostolic see. All worldly affection hatred and fear shall be put aside, as also any seeking of temporal advantage. ...The bishop, however, without the inquisitor, or the inquisitor without the diocesan bishop or his officer or the delegate of the chapter when the see is vacant, may not commit to harsh or close imprisonment, which seems more like punishment than custody, or subject anyone to torture or pronounce sentence on anyone, if they can have access to each other within eight days after seeking it; any contravention of this has no legal validity. ...

While it is a grave offence not to work for the extermination of heresy when this monstrous infection requires action, it is also a grave offence and deserving of severe punishment to impute maliciously such wickedness to the innocent. We therefore order bishops, inquisitors and their substitutes, in virtue of holy obedience and under threat of eternal damnation that they proceed discreetly and promptly against those suspected of heresy, while not imputing maliciously or deceitfully such a disgraceful crime to an innocent person, or accusing him of hindering them in the execution of their office. ...We wish of course, with the approval of the sacred council, that any other rulings made by our predecessors concerning the office of the inquisition and not in conflict with the above are to remain in full force.

Finally, for the Inquisition to succeed, the assistance of worldly power was essential, since the guilty verdict would normally lead to capital punishment, which was then meted out by the worldly authorities. Lack of co-operation would render the whole

process toothless. The Inquisition could therefore only be successful in regions where the authorities agreed to co-operate. This did create some pockets of safety for the Poor of Christ as pointed out in Chapter two pages 33 and 100.

c) Doctrinal reaction of the church to the Poor of Christ

Apart from asserting its authority through force, the church also chose to combat dissent by means of decrees and dogmas. These provide the basis for teaching and also ruling on who is a heretic and who is not. It is concerning to note how often these decrees do not have a theological reasoning behind them, but in fact are just a different form of asserting authority. This becomes clear in the introduction to the 3rd decree, where no effort is made to describe heresies by content, but rather stating: *“They have different faces indeed but their tails are tied together inasmuch as they are alike in their pride.”* As a result, a number of decrees were written to stop the heretics, without reflecting on the theological validity of such a decree. Once the decree is formulated and passed, contravening it then becomes another proof that one is a heretic. In today’s term it can be compared to a totalitarian state with laws that declare criticism of the state treason. No matter whether the criticism has merit – it remains treason.

Since the basic fault of the Poor of Christ was that they did not fully submit to church authority, all their other actions flowed out of this “treason” and needed to be declared illegal (page 105).

i. Decrees on the study and possession of scripture.

This was a core practise for the Poor of Christ. Audisio (2009: 151) states:

The holy scriptures and the New Testament in particular occupy the central place in the Brothers' books. We have already seen the fervour with which the Poor of Lyons read the bible, memorising passages so as to imitate the life of the apostles and so attain eternal salvation. There should be no doubting the fact that biblical extracts represented the most frequently encountered texts amongst the preachers, each one probably owning a copy.

Linked to this was teaching basic literacy to common people, so that they could copy and read texts and portions of the new Testament for themselves. Moneta of Cremona, in 1241, refers to the Poor of Christ as people carrying little bags with books. (Audisio 2009: 32). The study of scripture was their main guide and informed their life and action, and also their criticism against bad praxis in the church.

Again, the church did not enter into any discussion on this, nor did it accept the validity of criticism raised based on the study of scripture. Tragically, the church failed to recognize the value of the lay voices that would have helped her in the self-correction process. Instead, she reacted vehemently against them by forbidding lay people to possess Bibles or portions thereof, realising that it was this reading the Bible that had awakened the critical voices amongst laity.

This can be seen from a letter written in 1199 by Innocent III, writing to people of Metz, expressing his concern about “laity and women” reading and studying the Bible in their vernacular.

Sane significavit nobis venerabilis frater noster Metensis Episcopus per litteras suas, quod tam in diocesi quam urbe Metensi laicorum et mulierum multitudo non modica tracta quodammodo desiderio scripturarum, evangelii, epistolas Pauli, psalterium, moralia lob et plures alios libros sibi fecit in gallico sermone transferri, translationi huiusmodi adea libenter, utinam autem et prudenter, intendens, ut secretis conventionibus talia inter se laici et mulieres eructare praesumant, et sibi invicem praedicare cet (Hoffmann von Fallersleben 1965: 51). (Summary: It has been brought to our attention that there are men and women in Metz that have the gospels, Pauls letters, Psalms and other scriptures in French, which these lay people study in secret in their homes and then teach and preach to each other)

The letter gives a good indication as to how extensive the Bible was translated. In a follow up letter to the archbishop there, Innocent III requests him to find out

what is behind this translation and to ensure that the laity is not led astray. A year later he sends a delegation to Metz, who then burns these translations. (ibid 52). The Council of Toulouse 1229 in canon 14 also explicitly forbids lay people to possess any parts of the Bible, except for the Psalms.

We prohibit also that the laity should be permitted to have the books of the Old or the New Testament; unless anyone from motives of devotion should wish to have the Psalter of the Breviary for divine offices or the hours of the blessed Virgin; but we most strictly forbid their having any translation of these books. (Peters 1980: 195).

The possession of translations into the vernacular is more expressly forbidden. A similar decision is taken at the Synod of Tarragona, 1242⁷, in Canon 2,

No one may possess the books of the Old and New Testaments in the Romance language, and if anyone possesses them he must turn them over to the local bishop within eight days after promulgation of this decree, so that they may be burned lest, be he a cleric or a layman, he be suspected until he is cleared of all suspicion.

These decisions show that the church not only discouraged lay people from reading scripture, but actively tried to put a stop to it by confiscating and burning these Bibles. This again was “war with itself”, in that it made the people even more dependent on the clergy, who, in turn, were shown in this study not to be sufficiently equipped, nor motivated to provide that care.

Whereas the Poor of Christ were actively teaching and educating, the church, in an attempt to stop them, was actually de-educating its flock.

⁷ Various sources give different dates for this council, ranging from 1233 to 1242 Give examples of sources.

ii. Authority to do theology

For centuries the theological debate in the Roman church had happened exclusively in Latin. By the 13th century Latin was no longer an everyday language but used in academics and specifically in theology. It had become the sacred language of the church, and the Latin Vulgate the only permissible Bible translation. Not many people, including lower clergy, had a basic knowledge of Latin, and that was not sufficient to engage in theological discussion. This was reserved for those who had an excellent command of Latin. This excluded almost all ordinary clerics, and even a significant number of bishops and prelates.

The alternative was to do theology in the local vernacular. However, since all dogmas and decrees at this stage were only available in Latin, this would pose a huge risk. As stated in Chapter one, for the Roman Church these official doctrines had the same authority as scripture. Such vernacular theology could therefore easily overlook important teachings of the church and, from that perspective, would inevitably lead to heretic teachings. For that reason, numerous decrees were issued, forbidding any theological literature in local languages.

The authority to do theology thus not only belonged to the church – within the church it was restricted to a small group of qualified theologians. It was their task to clarify disputes, formulate doctrines and develop new dogmas, such as the dogmas on purgatory, transubstantiation, indulgences etc. The task of clergy, bishops and archbishops then was to implement these doctrines.

This system had no space whatsoever for lay theologians or preachers such as the Poor of Christ who made up their own minds, did their own research and came to independent conclusions, that deviated from church doctrine, but not from scripture.

Denying critical reflection came hand in hand with demanding obedience. It is only through obedience that this system can be upheld.

It also explains why at the Inquisition hearings both the accused and the witnesses first had to take the oath of loyalty and obedience to the church, before proceedings would continue. The whole structure depended on the loyal obedience of its members. Whoever questioned this authority or challenged a dogma was to be declared a heretic.

This answers the question posed in the beginning of this chapter, why the Franciscans were accepted and even honoured by the church. They took the oath of obedience and lived in obedience to the church in all aspects. Because of this loyal obedience they could even act as inquisitors: because their task was given to them by the church. They were not asked to establish whether the Poor of Christ were heretics, but told that they were, and therefore a danger to the church that needed to be acted against. Even though they were peace loving in their teaching, obedience to the church made them pronounce the death penalty on heretics without regarding it as contradiction to their values.

By reserving the right to theology for a few elect, the church closed all doors to any reformational thinking, unless it came from within the circle of recognized theologians. And when that happened, these theologians would be declared heretics and silenced, if need be by execution. The most well-known examples are the 15th century professors of theology, John Hus and Jerome of Prague who both died on the stake. Martin Luther was the first theologian to outlive the brutal silencing methods of the church. Chapter six will address the issue why this was the case, and why the Poor of Christ played an important role in making Martin Luther succeed.

iii. **Authority to preach**

Preaching was one of the key marks of the Poor of Christ, as Bernard Gui remarked (Audisio 1999: 12): “*Although they were ignorant and unlettered, these people, both men and women, went from village to village, going into people's homes and preaching in public squares and even in churches*”. But it was also regarded by the church as their ultimate vice. Selge (1967 I: 75) states:

In diesem Punkt und in ihm allein konkurriert das Amt der Waldenser mit dem Amt der Hierarchie; weil sie in diesem Punkt hartnäckig waren, sind sie 1184 von Papst Lucius III. anathematisiert worden". (Translation: It is on this point, and on this point only that the office of the Waldensens competed with the office of the hierarchy; because they were persistent on this point, pope Lucius III anathemised them in 1184)

Selge refers to the decree *Ad Abolendam* that was pronounced by Lucius III in 1184 after the Synod of Verona from which he quotes:

Quoniam nonnulli . . . auctoritatem sibi vendicant praedicandi, quum idem Apostolus dicat: Quomodo praedicabunt, nisi mittantur (Rom. 10, 15)? omnes, qui vel prohibiti vel non missi, praeter auctoritatem ab apostolica sede vel ab episcopo loci susceptam, publice vel privatim praedicare praesumpserint . . . vinculo perpetui anathematis innodamus.

Paul in this passage bemoans the fact that there are not enough preachers called to bring the good news to the people. The Poor of Christ would see this text as a confirmation of their being sent by Christ to preach. Lucius re-interprets "how shall they preach unless they are sent" as meaning that any one preaching, whether in public or private, without being commissioned by the holy see or a bishop, must be excommunicated. The content of the preaching was not discussed at all – the mere fact that it was unauthorised sufficed to have the preachers excommunicated.

Decree 3 of Lateran IV, 1215, quoted above (point 11) confirms this: any unauthorised preaching is not only forbidden, but doing it will lead to excommunication.

In decree 10 of the same council the necessity of preaching and nourishment of the soul is emphasised, and stated to be part of the bishop's duties. However, when a bishop cannot fulfil this task to satisfaction, he must appoint men as preachers. The qualities are listed as leading by good example, and "powerful in word and deed". In effect that decree "copies" the qualities of the preachers of the Poor of

Christ and makes them criteria for the preachers of the church. These are also to be mandated to hear confession – just like the wandering preachers are doing. Failing to do this can lead to punishment of the bishop. (Wolmuth 2000: 239)

As will be shown in Chapter six, this is an intentional step by the church to combat the preaching activities of the Poor of Christ by finding someone with similar qualities, but obedient to the church, to do the preaching. The neglect of parishioners was not new. It has been going on for decades and the church leadership knew it. But now action was needed, because this neglect had created fruitful ground for the Poor of Christ to flourish and this needed to be stopped. The church, in this war against itself and its own excommunicated authentic preachers and tried to replace them with instructed ones, to the detriment of the flock.

iv. **Separation of healing and counselling**

One of the much-appreciated ministries of the Poor of Christ was that of healing. (Chapter two: 96) Due to them taking the command of Jesus literally to not only preach, but also to heal, they fulfilled an important role in society as they journeyed along. Theirs was a holistic ministry, caring for body and soul, something that ordinary citizens hardly ever experienced. Audisio states (1999: 134):

The holy scriptures themselves urged caring for the sick and the infirm. Moreover, the Brothers doubtless felt that by acting in this way, they were conforming to the apostolic life they sought to live. They were 'healing the sick' as Jesus had ordered his disciples when sending them on their mission (Matthew 10: 8). The Brothers' mendicant order probably doubled in this way as a hospital order.

This became a contentious issue for the church. It was difficult to forbid "physicians" to do their work, whilst the physical needs were so visible and wide spread. Lateran IV took a decision to separate physical and spiritual care, compelling a physician to call a priest to do the counselling. Decree 22 (Chapter two: 63) speaks to this. Although the Poor of Christ are not mentioned in this context, the situation

described in the decree resembles that which Audisio mentions above on the work of the Poor of Christ, where physical care go hand in hand with counselling, provided by one and the same person. This now is strictly forbidden. So, if a Poor of Christ would work as a healer, he was strictly forbidden to do any counselling or spiritual care, but had to call a priest to do this. Failing to do this would expose him as heretic. The Council of Toulouse then went one step further, stating in Canon 15 (Peters 1980: 195):

We decree, also, that whosoever shall be considered as a heretic or be marked with suspicion shall not henceforth exercise the profession of a physician; and when any sick person shall have received the holy communion from the hand of his priest, let him be vigilantly looked after until his death or recovery; lest any heretic or person suspected of heresy should get access to him; for we have understood that wicked and abominable things have often occurred from the assess of such persons.

These decisions did not have the well-being of society at heart, but to prevent heretics to further gain support and admiration in society. The Poor of Christ followed a holistic ministry approach of caring for physical and spiritual needs. With the various decrees the church attempted to block this from every side – forbidding non-ordained to do spiritual care, forbidding any one being suspected of being a heretic to provide physical care. This is another sad example of the church at war with itself, moving further and further away from its core task.

v. **Purgatory**

This doctrine was developed over time and as such had nothing to do with the Poor of Christ. It was finalised by the 2nd Council of Lyon in 1274. It has to be mentioned, however, since it was rejected by the Poor of Christ and brought them into a most severe conflict with the Roman Church.

This doctrine played an increasingly important role in the church, especially as church ruling through fear. In its origin it was an attempt to explain passages like 1

Corinthians 3,13: “. *their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work*”. With time, however, it became part of the doctrinal construct of dealing with different kinds of sins as well as sins of the deceased. With the development of indulgence, it also was abused as a fund raiser. To the frightened flock it offered an opportunity for escape from or reduce punishment after death. By offering mass and paying penance on behalf of the deceased, they could be rescued or at least have their time in purgatory shortened. This practise became a major source of income for the church.

In the 14th century this matter inadvertently had become a way of identifying a member of the Poor of Christ. Based on their beliefs, they would not request a mass for a deceased relative, nor pay their way out of purgatory. Many inquisition reports list as part of the heretic beliefs the denial of purgatory (Lerner 1986: 242).

4. Conclusion

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the church, through its actions, manoeuvred itself into a situation that made a reformation unavoidable. Its unwillingness to self-correct could only build up internal pressure that had to lead to some eruption later on.

- i. Ignoring or eradicating all critical voices did not silence them, but forced them underground.
- ii. Forbidding laity to participate in a meaningful way, grew the alienation between church and the deep needs of people.
- iii. The distance between clergy and the non-ordained increased enormously.
- iv. The abuse of power by the church created space for and encouraged power hungry people in its ranks. They did not shy away from enriching themselves while suppressing all opposition. This led to a growing distance between secular authority and church hierarchy, which culminated in a significant number of rulers standing up to the church in defence of the 16th century Reformation.
- v. Its focus on, and exploitation of fear attracted sadists who became preachers, preaching the fear of hell and finding pleasure in extracting money from the

intimidated, fearful masses, creating a deep longing for good news of the gospel, that was withheld.

Synthesising all these points shows that the church was at war with itself, fighting dedicated lay people rather than engaging them, and sanctioning others that exploited the fear of the flock. This could only lead to a built up of pressure, resentment, anger towards the church and an increased longing for hope and good news – an ideal climate for the Reformation that inevitably had to come.

The next chapter will show the impact that the war of the church on its own had on the Poor of Christ. Rather than eradicating the movement, it resulted in greater resilience and more focus on the essentials of their calling.

Chapter 4 Recognized and Rejected – two branches of the Poor of Christ

Chapter three focused on the tension between the Roman Church and the Poor of Christ, and the impact that it had on the Roman Church. The historical contextual analysis and synthesis showed that the church was fighting a war against its own members, deliberately preventing them from studying scripture and making up their own minds and expressly forbidding lay people to preach and teach. Through this the church was moving more and more away from its flock and into a direction which made a reformation inevitable.

This chapter looks at how these actions of the Roman Church impacted on the Poor of Christ. Firstly, it led to a split in the movement, when the church tried to bring them into obedience to church authority. It led to the recognition of the *Poor Catholics* that were officially recognised as an order by the church. The literature research of papal letters shows that it was hoped that the majority of the *Poor of Christ* would join this order, where their safety and protection was ensured. This did not happen. The majority continued with their ministry in the cities and towns of the Holy Roman Empire, persecuted as heretics. Both of these groupings had an influence on the 16th century Reformation.

We first look at the *Poor Catholics*: How did they start, and what was the reasoning behind the church giving them permission. Primary literature, such as correspondence between pope and Durand of Huesca, the founder, and the bishops of Tarragona, the region where the *Poor Catholics* were active, is researched to show the strategy of the church with this move and also indicate that it was not yielding the results hoped for. The next important development studied in this chapter is their integration into the *Order of Hermits of St Augustine*⁸, the further development of that order in close parallel to the ministry of the Poor of Christ, and ultimately the role of that order in preparing the Reformation.

By researching correspondence and literature on the early period of that order, we will

⁸ For ease of reading the order will be referred to as *Augustinian Order* or *Augustinians*

show how the order was specifically instructed to do what the Poor of Christ did: to focus on preaching and taking confession. The intention of this instruction was to counter the ministry of the Poor of Christ. We will also look into the fascinating question: To what extent did the Augustinian Order by this instruction and its similarities with the Poor of Christ become a nurturing ground for independent thinking, inadvertently paving the way for the “Reformation thinkers”? Was this an “own goal” by the Church? The historical contextual analysis and synthesis will show that the church, while trying to silence critical voices, as shown in Chapter 3, instituted some counter measures which, ironically, gave birth to the same critical voices in a recognized institution of the church.. It looks at key role players and the likelihood of them being influenced by the thinking of the Poor of Christ. The outstanding figure is Johann von Staupitz and specific advice that he gave to Martin Luther, advice which had a very strong flavour of the Poor of Christ to it.

The Chapter also briefly touches on why, unlike the Franciscans and Dominicans, the Augustinian Order hardly ever provided inquisitors for the Inquisition.

The second part of this chapter focuses on the rest of the Poor of Christ who, although forbidden and rejected, continued in and with the church. For this section both literature review of mainly secondary sources and the historical contextual analysis is used.

The persecuted part of the movement can be divided into two groups. The Romanesque wing existed mainly in isolation in secluded valleys in the Alps. Due to their isolation they could survive as closed communities and were aware of their Waldensian identity. As the 16th century Reformation swept across Europe, they came into the open and were received by the Reformed Churches into their fold. Due to their isolation they did not have an impact on the church at large, and therefore are not further investigated in this study.

Of great interest for this research however is the Germanic wing, the “Poor of Christ” who continued with their ministry in the countries and cities of Europe, in the parishes and communities, sometimes openly, but most of the time in secret. The previous chapter showed how the Inquisition worked tirelessly to exterminate them. This chapter will show that the Inquisition did not succeed, and that the principles of the Poor of Christ were indeed passed on from generation to generation, and thus, in the underground, played an important role to prepare society to readily receive the thoughts of the 16th century

Reformation. Although this wing was present also in the far eastern parts of the Holy Roman Empire, the focus is on the German territories, which later were home to the 16th century Reformation.

1. Recognised: The *Poor Catholics*

a) Durand of Huesca

Very little is known about Durand of Huesca, who would become the leader of the *Poor Catholics*. The handbook for preachers, "*Liber Antiheresis*", that he wrote towards the end of the 12th century, shows that he was well versed in Latin, Old and New Testament and the Church Fathers, leading to the assumption that he was indeed a priest. (Frank 1999: 42) Selge (1967 I: 201) refers to a letter by Pope Innocent III from 1212, which refers to Durand as being an Acolyte. Biller states of him (Patschovsky 2011 XXV: 119):

"The critical apparatus of quotations, approximate references and allusions of the *Liber Manicheos*, however, betrays a breadth of education which passes far beyond the general knowledge of the clergy and permits us to include Durand in the first rank of the theologians of his time.

The *Liber Antiheresis* shows his total commitment to Valdes and Valdes' statement of faith. In the introduction to *Liber Antiheresis* Durand writes (Selge 1967 II: 8):

Set suum non ex toto deserens populum, videns prelatorum opera summi patris filius cupiditati, simonie, superbie, philargie, cenodoxie, castrimargie, pellicatuiei aliisque flagiciis intenta, et etiam divina misteria ob eomm pessima opera naucipendi, sicut in sue predicationis iinicio piscatores sine litteris, te, domne valdesi, eligens in apostolico aporismate, ut per te tuosque comites quod inposti [imposti] non poterant renitatur allegavit erroribus. (the Lord himself called Valdes, just as he did the apostles before, to work in his church, where the prelates, called to guard over faith, sacraments and the purity of the church have abandoned their task. They (the Poor of Christ) now had to do this work)

Durand, in this passage, calls Valdes “domne”, Lord, – a title reserved for important people in leadership positions.

Before the introduction to the book he cites the *Profession of Valdes* (Selge 1967 II: 3) and also refers to it for instance in the chapter “*De unitate ecclesie*” (ibid 40). - on the unity of the church. (We discussed the *Profession* on page 83ff of this study).

Durand shows commitment to Valdes and to the church. To him, loyalty to Valdes and loyalty to the church were not in conflict. In the chapter “*De statu ecclesie*” (ibid 93) in the *Liber Antiheresis* he points out that Valdes was true to the church, working in the same direction as the bishops and priests. Durand is at great pains to show how the movement is true to the church, unlike the Cathars, and that it is committed in countering the Cathar sect – therefore the name of the book.

At the same time, he readily acknowledges that the priests and bishops are often not leading by example. In *De statu ecclesie* (Selge 1967 II: 99, 128-138) he writes, answering to the (Cathar) accusation, that the Poor of Christ are supporting the wrongs of the priests:

Nos autem respondententes dicimus: Non fornicationem neque alia illicita manu tenemus neque prava sacerdotum vel aliorum opera excusamus, set potius redarguentes resistimus; qua de causa ab ipsis exosi multas patimur persecuciones. Set fidem dei et ecclesie sacramenta non solum contra vos, verum etiam contra iudeos, gentiles, et omnes sectas que illis detraunt usque ad mortem manu tenere et libere predicare, secundum gratiam nobis a deo collatam, nec pro aliquo vivente desistere decrevimus. Quod ad sui honorem et audiencium salutem nos agere faciat qui in trinitate perfecta vivit et regnat deus per infinita seculorum secula, amen.

In this passage Durand points out, that the Poor of Christ are not condoning the fornications and corrupt dealings of priests, but are speaking out against them. He explains that they are not defending these priests, but the sacraments of the church, and this tension - speaking against the wrongs in the church, whilst at the same time defending the church - puts them into a difficult situation, causing much suffering to

them. This tension that the Poor of Christ found themselves in, made Durand's decision to apply to become a recognized order a much easier one!

At the same this tension makes it even more amazing that, when Durand submitted to the authority of the Roman Church after losing in the disputation in Pamiers (see below) only a small portion of the Poor of Christ followed him into the recognised order of the *Poor Catholics*. This could be either because his influence was not as great, or, more likely, because the Poor of Christ did not have a strong hierarchical structure, as discussed on page 3 of this study, so that only those over whom Durand had a direct influence then went with him, even if many more made use of his handbook. Perhaps the insistence of the handbook that the wrongs of the church should not be tolerated also contributed to many not seeing themselves submitting to structured authority that was forbidding them to follow the highest authority, Christ.

Durand became the prior of the new order (Frank 1999: 41). Their centre was Milan and they also were working in parts of the Lombardy. About 100 people joined Durand in Milan. (Fischinger 1986: 47) Selge (1967 I: 216) points out that the correspondence from Pope Innocent III regarding the *Poor Catholics* as a rule is firstly addressed to the bishops of Tarragona and Narbonne, indicating that the group was most active in that area.

Selge points out that the lack of knowledge about the background, training and status of Durand in the Roman Church makes it difficult to understand why he submitted to the Roman authority in 1207 (Selge 1967 I: XXV). Was it because he was convinced by Diego and Dominicus? Was it because he was reminded of his priestly oaths – if indeed he was a priest? Or was it because he heavily depended on Valdes for leadership, and with the death of Valdes (the date is not known, but might have been as early as 1206) decided to accept the established church authority? Or was it purely because of the rules of the game which determined that the loser of a public debate had to submit to the ruling, which in this case, demanded obedience to the church? Molnár (1993: 64f) is of the opinion that Durand thought that Diego and Dominicus were actually having the same aim as the Poor of Christ, not realising that their aim was a different one: Not so much caring for the people but countering the work of the Poor of Christ (see below).

Selge also postulates that Diego might have told Durand that the time was opportune to seek the permission of the pope to continue with the preaching ministry – thus, continue the same work, but with the blessing of the church. Two years earlier Innocent III had tasked his legate, Raoul of Fontfroide, to find men that could convert heretics by their actions and words, men that were willing to imitate the poor of Christ and their humility “*qui paupertatem Christi pauperis imitando, in despecto habitu et ardenti spiritu non pertimescant accedere ad despectos*” (Selge 1967 I: 194).

We are of the opinion that Durand did see this as an opportunity to continue with the same ministry, rather than changing his allegiance. Correspondence from Innocence III discussed below confirms that he continued “as usual” after being recognized.

Durand followed the advice of Diego. However, this also forced him to recognize that only those explicitly approved and sent by the church, are allowed to preach. His emphasis therefore shifted from proclaiming the gospel to combatting heresies (ibid 199).

b) Establishing an Order

The Roman hierarchy had become worried about the rapid spread of heresies, despite the growing severity of their persecution. Dominicus Guzman and Bishop Diego of Osma were of the first clergy who realised that the strategy needed to be changed: Rather than fighting with force, they should use the same method as the wandering preachers of the Poor of Christ – going beggar-like from village to village, town to town, not with pomp and glory, but with humility. With that approach they soon won appreciation from the people.

When they challenged Durand to a debate in Pamiers in 1207 he was impressed by their appearance. Especially Bishop Diego’s humility reminded him of Valdes. The debate lasted for two days. Both parties had agreed to Arnold of Crampagna as referee. Dominicus and Osma were declared the winners (Selge 1967 I: 195). Durand promised allegiance to Rome. This was made easier for him because of the positive impression that Bishop Diego had made on him (Molnár 1993: 64f).

In order to be able to continue with his work, he applied for permission to establish a religious order within the Church. It had become fashionable to establish religious orders, mostly in the form of eremites, with small communities living in seclusion. The application from Durand came just in time, just before the establishment of new orders was forbidden. Innocent III with a bull on 18 Dec 1208, gave permission for their founding. We do not quote the full text, but only those most relevant for this study. [square brackets] indicate our own comments in the text. Our interpretation follows each section. (Wakefield 1991: 222f):

December 18, 1208

To the archbishop and suffragans of the Church of Tarragona. 'In imitation of Him who is the God, not of discord but of peace, who desires that all men shall be saved and come to the knowledge of truth, we received with fatherly kindness our beloved sons Durand of Huesca and his companions when they came to the Apostolic See and we have acquired full understanding of the matters which they charged themselves to explain to us on their own behalf as well as for their brethren. We know, therefore, from the things which they said to us about the articles of faith and the sacraments of the Church when they were carefully examined, that they are versed in the orthodox faith and that they build on Catholic truth. Moreover, for greater assurance, bringing forth the Gospels and placing the text of their confession thereon, we received this oath from them:...

Up to then the Poor of Christ were heretics, not to be entertained at all. Now the very same people could continue the very same ministry in the very same region – therefore this letter to the church authorities of that region was necessary to explain why the church now gave permission to the very same people that had been declared heretics till then. Innocence continues, now quoting Durand:

... I (it begins), Durand of Huesca, in your consecrated hands, Most High Pontiff, Lord Innocent, invoke God as my soul's witness that I absolutely and truly believe what is contained in this document in all things, and I will never believe the contrary; but I will resist with all my might those who do

believe contrary to this. To you, truly, as successor to the Blessed Apostle Peter, to archbishops, bishops, and other prelates in whose dioceses or parishes I may dwell, I tender obedience and reverence, as deserved as it is devout.

The formulations in this declaration of Durand place the emphasis on obedience and respect towards the authorities as well as the teachings of the church. What follows is similar to the Profession of Valdes, Chapter two: 83. However, some aspects were added, that refer directly to practices of the Poor of Christ that Durand had to reject. These we identified in italic print.

The text of the confession follows:

"Let it be known to all the faithful that I, Durand of Huesca, and J., and E., and B, and all our brethren, believe in heart, perceive through faith, confess in speech, and in unequivocal words affirm that the Father, ...
...Hence, we firmly believe and confess that no one, however worthy, religious, holy, and prudent he may be, can or ought to consecrate the Eucharist or perform the sacrifice of the altar unless he is a priest regularly ordained by a visible and tangible bishop. To this office there are, we believe, three things necessary: a certain person, the priest himself, duly established in that office by a bishop, as we have already said; those solemn words which are set forth by the Holy Fathers in the Canon; and the faithful purpose of him who offers them. And consequently, we firmly believe and confess that whosoever believes and expresses himself as qualified to perform the sacrament of the Eucharist without the preceding episcopal ordination, as we have said, is a heretic, a participant and partner in the damnation of Korah and his accomplices, and ought to be cut off from the whole Holy Roman Church ...

As shown on page 106 of this study, the Cathars rejected communion. When the Poor of Christ succeeded in winning them back, they would celebrate communion with them, even in the absence of a priest. This was especially common in the archdiocese of Tarragona, since the Cathar movement was very strong in this

region. Durand now distances himself from this practise.

We believe preaching to be necessary and most praiseworthy but we believe it is to be exercised by the authority or license of the highest pontiff or by permission of prelates. In all places, indeed, where manifest heretics abide, where they forsake and blaspheme God and the faith of the Holy Roman Church, we believe that we should confound them by disputation and exhortation in all ways according to God, as adversaries of Christ and the Church, and with bold countenance oppose them with the word of the Lord, even unto death.

The *Poor Catholics* with this commit themselves to continue their mission to convert the Cathars. The general reference to heretics can also be seen as including the Poor of Christ, since the pope was hoping that all of them would be brought back. Further below we quote a letter where he complains that this does not happen.

We humbly praise and faithfully venerate the ecclesiastical orders...
...*We believe that by the Lord's command clerics ought to receive tithes, first fruits, and oblations.* [end of profession, and continuation of the letter]

All religious orders were tasked to also collect funds for the church and contribute to the coffers of the church. The Poor of Christ did not collect money and lived by what they were given. Possession-less, they had nothing to contribute. With this, the *Poor Catholics* agree to be part of the income raising efforts of the church.

Verily, since not only true faith but good performance is requisite for salvation, for even as it is impossible to please God without faith, so faith without works is dead, we have caused a record to be made in these pages of the proposal for their way of life, the content of which follows.

[The following is the rule that the Poor Catholics have given themselves]

To the honor of God and His Catholic Church and for the salvation of our souls, we have resolved to believe in heart and confess in words the

Catholic faith, whole and inviolate in its entirety, maintaining ourselves under the direction and governance of the Roman pontiff. We have renounced the world; whatever we may come to have we shall bestow upon the poor according to the Lord's commandment. We have resolved to be poor in such fashion that we shall take no thought for the morrow, nor shall we accept gold or silver, or anything of that sort from anyone, beyond food and clothing sufficient for the day. Our resolve is to follow the precepts of the Gospel as commands, devoting ourselves to prayer according to the seven canonical hours, saying the Lord's Prayer fifteen times, followed by the Apostle's Creed, the Miserere, and other prayers. Inasmuch as most of us are clerics and almost all are educated, we are resolved to devote ourselves to study exhortation, teaching, and disputation against all sects of error. Disputations, however, are to be conducted by the more learned brethren, proved in the Catholic faith and instructed in the law of the Lord, so that enemies of the Catholic and apostolic faith are confounded. Through especially worthy persons, well versed in the law of the Lord and in the sentences of the Fathers, we propose to set forth the word of the Lord in our schools to our brethren and friends. With license from and due veneration for prelates, the qualified brethren, learned in the sacred page, who may be powerful in sound doctrine, will reprove sinful folk and by every means draw them to the faith and into the bosom of the Holy Roman Church. We are resolved that we will inviolably preserve unbroken virginity and chastity and will observe two Lents and the fasts instituted each year in accordance with ecclesiastical rule. We have elected to wear the modest religious garb to which we are accustomed, the shoes being cut away at the top and shaped in a special and distinct style, so that we will openly and clearly be recognized as separated in body as in heart from the Poor of Lyons⁹, now and forever more, unless they become reconciled to Catholic unity.

⁹ As explained on page 2 of this study, the movement was known by many names. "Poor of Lyons" refers to the Poor of Christ of this study

We will receive the Church's sacraments from bishops and priests in whose dioceses and parishes we reside, to whom we shall proffer due obedience and reverence. If, indeed, any laymen express a desire to accept our guidance, we shall take care that apart from those qualified to exhort and to dispute against heretics, they shall abide together religiously and in due order, disposing their affairs in justice and mercy, subsisting by the work of their hands, giving the tithes, first fruits, and oblations due to the Church [End of rules]

As will be seen from later communication, the *Poor Catholics* continued to associate with the *Poor of Christ* even if they refused to join their movement. Also the promise to change their footwear to be distinguished from the Poor of Christ was not adhered to sufficiently.

[letter of pope continues] We, therefore, having taken counsel with our brethren, order by apostolic letter that if you shall receive a similar vow from other brothers, you shall reconcile them to ecclesiastical unity by an oath like this, and you shall make it known by proclamation and in other ways that they are truly Catholic and rightly faithful, keeping them under God free from all scandal and infamy; and you shall mercifully aid them with testimonial letters and other assistance, for the sake of God.

Given at the Lateran, December 18, 1208, in the eleventh year of our pontificate.

This last instruction to the bishops makes it very clear that the intention is to rope in as many Poor of Christ as possible into the obedient *Poor Catholics* order. It is important to note that there is no theological colloquium of any nature required, only the vow of obedience.

At that stage it was still possible for the *Poor Catholics* to make their own rules. Unlike most orders, they did not live in seclusion, but continued with their work of preaching, teaching and helping people. Interestingly, their shoes are described as the visible distinction from the Poor of Christ (here called Poor of Lyons).

Again, there is a strong emphasis on obedience to the church and its institutions – the main complaint against the Poor of Christ.

Six months later, July 5 1209 (ibid 226f) Innocent III wrote a letter of complaint to the *Poor Catholics*. He complains that they are not honouring the excommunication and banishment of the Waldenses, and have brought them along to mass, which they then received. Also, their change in uniform (sandals) mentioned above, had not been implemented so that they are not outwardly distinguishable from the heretics. Innocent then instructs them to bring in some “well trained priests” into their midst to help them adjust according to what was agreed upon. This letter of complaints shows how very close the *Poor Catholics* were to the Poor of Christ in every way.

Another significant remark of the letter is one short sentence: “*And, above all, some of you assert that no secular authority can, without mortal sin, impose a judgment of blood*” (ibid 227). As discussed in Chapter two, the 3rd Decree of Lateran VI instructed that heretics found guilty, should be “*handed over to the secular authorities present*” (Chapter two: 56). This complaint precedes the decree by six years, but already indicates the firm intention to institute capital punishment for convicted heretics. It builds on the agreement reached between Pope Lucius III and emperor Frederick I (Barbarossa) in *Ad Abolendam* (Chapter one: 41). It was vital for Innocent III that those combatting heresies in the kind way, by preaching and teaching, must also support the harsh way of execution for those who resist to conform.

Furthermore, it is important to note the resistance, also of the *Poor Catholics* to capital punishment, based on Mt 5, 21f (discussed in Chapter three: 119). Although their agreement to the death penalty was forcefully extracted from them, the fact that Augustinians, into which order the *Poor Catholics* were later integrated, hardly ever participated as inquisitors can be explained by this deep resistance against murder in any form by any authority.

Not much is known about the literature of the *Poor Catholics*. Durand compiled the

“Distinctiones” – a help for preachers, based on the Alphabetum by Cardinal Peter of Capua. (Rouse 2002: 86ff) This work, written by Durand after the establishing of the *Poor Catholics*, is dedicated to various bishops and cardinals, which indicates the need to win the favour of the hierarchy (ibid: 93f), whom he had criticised so harshly when writing *Liber Antiheresis*. (See above, page 144).

In about 1220 Durand rewrote the handbook “*Liber Antiheresis*” and called it “*Liber contra Manicheos*”. By now 12 years had lapsed since the recognition of his order, and a clearer distinction has become visible. This, most likely, also made a revision of the handbook for preachers a necessity, since it contained some issues that he surely could no longer support. The matters that he changed, give an insight into his changed approach. Selge (1967 I: 196ff) compares the editions and gives the following summary:

Durand replaces the introduction which refers to the miserable state of the church due to the prelates neglecting their task and the subsequent calling of Valdes by God, with the image of Noah’s ark. “*Et fide in ipsis etiam pastoribus ossillata, de archa Noe iterum egressus est corvus, qui fuligine tetre opinionis infectus, puteum abyssi nisus est aperire, unde fumum emitens teterrimum quo obscuratus sol et aer, pessimavit plurimos impiando*” (ibid 197). Valdes is the crow coming after the flood, but it gets infected. Various Old Testament illustrations are brought into a confusing picture. The intention is to show that something that started off good with Valdes, ended up in heresy.

The prologue ends with Durand naming the heresies that are to be fought. Neither Valdes, nor the Poor of Christ by any of their names are mentioned, only the Runchayroli, a group that, although linked by the church to the group around Valdes, in fact was in conflict with the Poor of Christ. Selge (ibid 198) concludes that Durand never rejected the Poor of Christ as such, but only groupings that the church confused with them, but that were not linked to the Poor of Christ. Since the church made no effort to enter into theological dialogue, it grouped all disobedient lay preachers together, as shown in decree three of Lateran IV on page 55 of this study.

Another important change that Selge points out (ibid 218) is the way that Durand speaks about the apostles and their sending:

Wo Durandus in diesem Werk von den Aposteln und ihrer Sendung spricht, meint er immer ausschließlich die von Jesus zu Lebzeiten und vor der Himmelfahrt ausgesandten Apostel; der für den Liber Antiheresis charakteristische Wechsel von Präsens und Präteritum, die unmittelbare Anwendung des apostolischen Auftrags und Lebens auf Auftrag und Leben der Prediger der Gegenwart findet sich im Liber contra Manichaeos nicht mehr. (Summary: The *Liber Antiheresis* discussed the Apostles and their sending in present tense, the Poor of Christ being part of this sending. In the *Liber contra Manichaeos* he uses past tense, now only referring to Jesus and the disciples sent out prior to the Ascension)

Selge (ibid 222) further points out the shift from the rejection of “predestination to damnation” in the *Liber Antiheresis* to the acceptance of predestination for salvation in *Liber contra Manichaeos*. The driving force for the preachers of the Poor of Christ was to bring the words of salvation to all, by teaching them to believe and observe the words of Christ. If, however, one believes that some are destined for damnation and others for salvation, then this preaching to repentance and faith becomes a futile exercise. The focus of preaching then shifts to combat heresies.

The *Poor Catholics* continued working in Milan, in a school that had been established by the Poor of Christ before that. The history of this school highlights what difference it made that they were now recognized as an order. According to Fischinger (1986: 47) the school had existed as a school of the Poor of Christ since before 1196, established on a property given to them by the community. Despite the banning of the movement they continued to operate from there. However, it was demolished in 1205 as part of the campaign of the church against them. In 1208 however, Pope Innocent III ordered its re-building so that it could become the main centre for the *Poor Catholics*.

This shows that for the Pope the recognition of the *Poor Catholics* was a strategic move to win back the allegiance of the whole movement. Even the name that he gave them, “*Poor Catholics*” made it clear that it in essence was the same movement, but within the obedience to the church (Wakefield 1991: 220). Selge (1967 I: 203) states: “*Die Kontinuität in der waldensischen Lebensweise ist vollkommen*” – The continuity in the waldensian way of life is perfect - the only difference being the acceptance that preaching is only allowed by permission of the pope, and that communion cannot be celebrated by laity, not even in time of need.

Thus, through the *Poor Catholics* the same ministry, by the same people, continued in obedience to and with the blessing of the pope. Those who did not submit together with Durand continued, branded and persecuted as heretics.

(Molnár 1993, 80): Die Zähigkeit, mit der Innozenz III darauf drängte, dass sich in den lombardischen Städten Bruderschaften der Katholischen Armen konstituierten, bringt zum Ausdruck, wie notwendig es ihm erschien, der Welle der Lombardischen Armen¹⁰ entgegenzutreten. In dieser Hinsicht war der Papst unermüdlich. (The tenacity with which Innocent III insisted on establishing the Poor Catholics in Lombard cities shows how important it was to him to counter the wave of Poor Lombards. In this regard he was tireless)

This was a determined effort by the pope to counter the Poor of Christ with the almost identical ministry done by the *Poor Catholics*. Thus, Innocent III had a double strategy – that of force, as used against the Cathars (Chapter two: 49), and that of “fighting the same with the same” as in this approach. Again, this highlights the irony that the church perceived the Poor of Christ as dangerous, purely for their regarding Christ as the ultimate authority, not for the content of their preaching.

¹⁰ “Poor Lombards” was yet another term used for the Poor of Christ.

Gregor Baum, a dedicated Roman Catholic Church Historian, in his discussion on itinerant preachers, acknowledges that the Poor of Christ most probably were not heretic in their teaching, and that the resultant Order of the *Poor Catholics* should be regarded as the first Itinerant Order of the Roman Church. (Baum, 1952: 74). Selge takes it further and points out that the *Poor Catholics* actually deserve a place of honour in the Catholic Church because of their significant role in combatting the Cathar heresy through teaching, rather than the hard-line, violent persecution and eradication generally sanctioned by the pope. (Selge 1967 Bd. 2: XI)

c) Integration of the *Poor Catholics* into the Order of Hermits of St Augustine.

As mentioned above, the 13th century saw the rise of many religious orders. Church Authority became reluctant to grant permission for the establishing of new orders. St Francis of Assisi still got that permission in 1210, but shortly afterwards, Lateran IV in 1215 in constitution 13 put a stop to this. Any new order had to follow the rules of an existing order. Thus, the Order of St Francis, and shortly before it, the *Poor Catholics* of Durand of Huesca, where the last orders established with the liberty to have designed their own rules. The first one affected by this was Dominicus Gutzman, who received permission to establish the Dominican Order in 1216 only because he based it on the rules of St Augustin (Jordan 1993: 23). The rules of St Augustine appealed to many a new order and were adopted by them, without claiming a direct connection to the original order.

When eventually the Pope decided to join smaller orders into one larger one, the name "Order of Hermits of St Augustine" and the rules of St Augustine were chosen for this new large order. This combining happened in two stages: in 1244 the hermit communities of Tuscany unified into the Order of the Tuscan Hermits of St Augustine. As a next step, Pope Alexander IV, in 1256 added other orders by the Decree "Licet Ecclesiae" (14 August 1256). These were not hermit communities, but rather mendicant orders, with the result that the Augustinians now also started living and working in urban areas. Pope Alexander IV wanted this order to also

combat heresies, and therefore instructed them to move into cities rather than live in seclusion. There they should preach and take confession – in direct competition with the Poor of Christ. (Kunzelmann 1969: 28f)

Just like the Poor of Christ, the *Poor Catholics*, focused on contact with the community. They had various houses in Lombardy, and their centre in Milan was a school where the general population received tuition. They had already accepted the Augustinian rules in 1238, prior to the attempt to unite all smaller orders. However, under their then leader, Prior Nicolaus of Milan, they became part of the big union in 1256. The Milan group was instructed to relocate from their school to the St Mark monastery in order to facilitate their quick integration. Their subordination did not last long. In the same year they moved back into their school in Milan, refusing to assimilate. It is not clear what the reason for their resistance was. Only in 1272, sixteen years later, where they forcibly re-integrated into the order (Gutiérrez 1985: 45; Kunzelmann 1969: 32).

The 2nd Council of Lyon, 1274, decreed that all religious orders established after Lateran IV, should be dissolved. Only the Franciscans and Dominicans could continue. This would have been the end of the Augustinian Order. The Augustinian representatives therefore claimed that their order was not established in 1256, but by St Augustine himself. This explanation was not accepted, but in order to investigate the claim, the decision to close them, was put on hold.

Gutiérrez (1985: Vorwort) lists the sources and historians for the early history of the Augustinian Order, most of which are pre-17th century and points out that many of these early historians see the 13th century Augustinian Order as a direct continuation of the original order founded by St Augustine. Current research has shown that the original 4th century Augustinian Order completely died out, and that the 13th century order is a new one, merely established on the original rules (Gutiérrez 1985: 20ff).

Knowing that their continued existence was at stake, from now on the leaders of the order made every attempt to prove themselves as loyal and obedient subjects

of the church, and seek the favour of the popes. This had the desired result, so that in 1298 Bonifacius VIII, in the bull *Sacer ordo vester*, guaranteed their continued existence, even though their direct link to St Augustine had not been verified. Since then, loyalty to the pope remained an important aspect of the order. (Günther 2018: 26f) This, to some extent, then curbed the critical thinking, at least towards the papal institution, a critical thinking which otherwise is fuelled by the intense study of scripture.

This episode explains why the name “Order of Hermits of St Augustine” had to be retained, even when there were not hermits left in the order. The name was the vital historical link to the original order.

Kunzelmann (1969: 247ff) points out that the main purpose of this re-established Augustinian Order, according to Pope Alexander IV, was to combat heresies in the cities of Europe. In this he followed the same strategy as Innocent III with the *Poor Catholics*, discussed above. He gave them permission, even instruction, to preach and take confession. Preaching was an important part of the ministry of the Poor of Christ (Chapter two: 95f). To counter this, the Augustinians had to also do this ministry, since the priests tended to neglect it (Chapter two: 61). In order to do this properly and with substance, the order had to focus on the teaching of preachers. A large portion of those who were forcibly joined into the order, however, were lay hermits. They had joined their original order not because they wanted to preach to people, but rather because they wanted to live in seclusion, away from people. They understandably resisted this new task. The authorities were lenient towards them and allowed them to continue their hermit existence. Those who agreed to adapt, often had very little education. Now the focus had to shift to education (Kunzelmann 1969: 247ff).

It is interesting to observe that Posset, in his overview of the Augustinian Order (2003: 13) makes no reference of this, but states: “*The purpose of the Order of St Augustine from 1256 was to produce biblical preachers equal to the Dominicans and the Franciscans.*” The combatting of heresies such as the Poor of Christ as prime task is not mentioned by him. The same applies to the detailed history given

on the web page of the Augustinian Order (www.augnet.org, accessed on 13.04.2020) which does not at all mention the *Poor Catholics* or the task of combatting heresies, although referring to the work of Roth, quoted in this chapter. Both of these are an indication that this connection is being overlooked, and therefore the influence of the Poor of Christ on this order is not seen at all, as pointed out in chapter one of this study.

The focus on education was of great importance for the Augustinian Order. The Poor of Christ, even though lay people, were well versed in scripture and were passing this knowledge on to the general population (see account of Anonymous of Passau referred to below, page 168). Through the ministry of the Poor of Christ ordinary Christians were often better educated than their priests. In order to counter this, the Augustinians had to be better educated than the Poor of Christ.

F Roth, a Roman Catholic historian and member of the current Augustinian Order, sums it up superbly. I translate from German and summarize:

The church needed to summons all its powers to counter the heretical wandering preachers with their secretive teaching circles. Had it not been for this newly formed mendicant order, the 13th century church would have suffered as much damage as it did in the 16th century. (Roth 1950: 114).

In mid-14th century Germany the Augustinian Monasteries were assigned regions for which they were responsible. Each designated Augustinian preacher then received a territory where he on a regular basis visited the towns and cities to preach, teach and counsel. (Bultman et al. 2007: 46) This was exactly the same method than the one the Poor of Christ had developed for themselves, where each master had a territory to care for (See page 171). What distinguished the Augustinians from the preachers of the Poor of Christ, is that they also had to collect money for the church (See also page 152, last part of rules also of the *Poor Catholics*). This, inadvertently, worked against them, especially in areas where the people were critical of the lavish life style of priest and bishops.

One of the first actions of Prior Lafranc, the first prior of the newly established Augustinian Order, was to send students to Paris for studies. The 5-year course had, as a large portion, the study and reflection of scripture, as well as cursory reading biblical texts (Kunzelmann 1969: 250). This strong emphasis on and systematic development of sound biblical-theological training became the trade mark of the Augustinian Order (ibid: 253). Again, the similarity to the approach of the Poor of Christ is striking – one of their strong points was their intense study and knowledge of the Bible. The difference was that they did it in the local vernacular, whereas the Augustinians were trained in Latin. This again gave the Poor of Christ an advantage in their dealings with large parts of the population, especially ordinary people who did not understand Latin.

As was pointed out in Chapter three, page 16, Lay people were not allowed to possess, read or study the Bible, and even priests were not allowed to possess a Bible. Gutiérrez (1985: 69), in comparing the rules of the various religious orders of that time, notes that all of them contain the strict prohibition to read or study scriptures. The prohibition varies in intensity: some rules strictly forbid it for all those who cannot read well or accurately, whereas others forbid it completely, regardless of the literal ability of the members. The Augustinian rules however state that studying scripture is compulsory, and the wish to study scripture, and study it well, should already be instilled with novices. This is significant to note.

In the Augustinian Order, the study of scripture played a central role and was a prescribed activity. Was this an influence of the *Poor Catholics*? Does the fact that both the prior of the *Poor Catholics* and of the newly founded Augustinian Order lived and worked in Milan play a role in Lafranc's decision? So far history is silent on this question, but we do regard it as possible that the proximity of Lafranc to the *Poor Catholics* might have influenced him towards this decision.

The Poor of Christ placed a strong emphasis on studying scripture (Chapter two: 90). It was the study of scripture that made Valdes critical of wrongs in the church, and ultimately made him disregard the authority of the church when it came to conflict between the two (Chapter one: 26). This intense study of scripture might

explain why the Augustinian Order is noticeably absent in Inquisition processes, because any person with good knowledge of the New Testament would know that the Inquisition and its brutal methods cannot be justified from the teachings of Jesus.

The Augustinian Order consisted mainly of clergy and religious, but also had up to 25% lay people amongst them, who fully participated, and apart from the head dress, were treated as equals. (Gutiérrez 1985: 73) – this again brought them closer to the lay movement of the Poor of Christ. Gutiérrez describes Nicolaus of Tolentino, one of the first-generation Augustinian friars, who had studied extensively and was known for his good preaching and wise counselling during confession. (Gutiérrez 1985: 174f) – all these are attributes that the Poor of Christ also were known for. Thus, with the establishing of the Augustinian Order the church, at least in part, continued to compete with, and counter act, the ministry of the Poor of Christ in a peaceful way.

Although the research on the integration of the major smaller orders into the Augustinian Order is extensive, only very little is reported on the *Poor Catholics*. The most detailed discussions are by 15th to 17th century historians such as Jordan of Saxony, or Hippolyt Helyots who dedicates 11 pages to them (Helyots 1754: 25-36).

In summary it can however be stated that, at least indirectly through the *Poor Catholics*, the Poor of Christ had a significant influence on the Augustinian Order. As mentioned above, the order's main task was to combat heresies, and for that it copied the most important methods of the "Waldensian heresy": study of scripture, preaching, teaching and counselling.

It is, therefore, not surprising that key critical thinkers in the 16th century Reformation, such as Martin Luther and Johann von Staupitz, were Augustinian friars, and that the study of scripture played a vital role in them developing their reformational thoughts, as can be seen in the following section.

Another important ministry of the Augustinians, as with the Poor of Christ, was counselling. Whereas priests would generally hear confession, prescribe penance and then forgive, the Poor of Christ would interact, counsel and guide towards a different life. This also became an important ministry of the Augustinian Order, where they became known for their wise counsel during confession (see Nicolaus of Tolentino mentioned above).

Another interesting similarity between the Augustinian Order and the Poor of Christ is that of the value attached to books. Each convent was encouraged to have its own library and have a full-time scribe to copy books. Also, friars were known to copy books for their own private libraries (Gutiérrez 1985: 190ff). Because of this, the Augustinian Order had the privilege of each generation being able to build and expand on the written knowledge of the previous one. The Poor of Christ, also known for their little books, however, had to hide their books or memorize them, since, when found, they would be burnt, and often the owner with them (See Chapter one: 19 and Chapter two: 90).

In Part II of his studies Gutiérrez point out that as from about 1350 the Augustinian Order saw a decline in moral values, theological training and general commitment (Gutiérrez 1981: 41ff, 151ff). Günther (2018: 43ff) ascribes this, amongst others, to the fact that through their academic studies and excellence some Augustinian friars rose in status and opening them up for the temptations associated with power and fortune. With this, the order gradually started losing its closeness to the ordinary people, which in turn, gave more space again to the Poor of Christ and their ministry. As pointed out above, the leadership of the order also had to seek the favour of the church hierarchy to ensure their continuation (page 159). This must also have contributed to their losing the moral compass.

d) Johann von Staupitz and his advice to Martin Luther – Key advice based on the teachings of the Poor of Christ?

Johann von Staupitz became one of the key role players in Luther's life. Staupitz,

born 1470 at Motterwitz, Leisnig, only joined the Augustinian Order in his mid-twenties after having already achieved his Magister atrium in Cologne and Leipzig. The reasons for his joining are not known. (Günther 2018: 282) He quickly rose in the ranks and became the Vicar of the German Union in 1503, aged 33. An important part of his leadership was that he demanded better education and further studies for the friars. He also gave the instruction that, during meals, all readings should be only from the Bible (Günther 2018: 285).

Wriedt (Bultmann et al. 2007: 34) points out that it is difficult to summarize the teachings of Staupitz in order to define his theological position. He describes him as typically eclectic, rather than unique. What does, however, stand out in view of this research, is his regarding scripture as central authority.

Leppin, (2016: 15) in citing Staupitz, shows how Staupitz gives the central role to Christ in his preaching. Luther refers to Staupitz as the Father of doctrine (ibid: 13): *“Staupicius hat die doctrinam angefangen”*.

Posset (2003: 15) writes:

We shall see that focusing on the cross of Christ in preaching was not a uniquely post-1517, Protestant preaching prerogative, ... That such cross-centered preaching took place on the eve of the ‘Reformation’ can be observed in particular in Staupitz’ s Lenten sermons of 1512, in the last of which he quoted 1 Cor 1:23: ‘We preach Christ, and him crucified’.

Both are thus in agreement that the focus on Christ and the cross preceded Martin Luther. Posset goes one step further, stating (2017: 175):

Is Staupitz the Reformation? The answer is yes, because Staupitz represents a form of reformatio at a time – up to the 1520s – when there was no formal distinction between the Catholic Reformation and the Protestant Reformation.

In his last letter to Martin Luther in 1524 (Dohna 2018: 273ff), Staupitz on the one hand praises Luther for the good things that came through him, on the other challenges him for over-reacting in others and condemning things that could very

well exist in a Christ-serving life. In this letter Staupitz clearly states that the actions of Christians should be Christ centred, that is: faith should be lived out. In living out faith there are many Roman practises that do not need to be discarded, since they are “wertneutral” – value-neutral. Scripture neither promotes nor forbids them, they do not hinder a Christ-serving life. This is an advice based on the principles of the Poor of Christ, who only rejected matters that were against scripture, not matters on which scripture is silent. (See discussion on the Profession of Valdes, Chapter two: 83f)

Furthermore, he highlights the value of scripture, and Christ-centred proclamation. He also rejects the schismatic tendencies of some Reformers including Luther, that are condemning practises that are not per se bad, but only badly implemented.

These values of Staupitz too, are very much in line with those of the Poor of Christ, who managed to stay true to these values for 350 years, despite all persecution. They were passed on from generation to generation, either through wandering teachers or through parents that taught their children at home. Molnár (1993: 175) states that as from 1400 the nature of the Poor of Christ changed, *“derzufolge sich die Treue zum Evangelium schrittweise in eine Familientradition umwandelte, die in den Randgebieten über Generationen gehütet und bewahrt wurde.”* – the value of faithfulness to the Gospel gradually became a family tradition that was passed from generation to generation.

Although some of these values can be found purely from studying scripture, the one that stands out as unique to Valdes and the Poor of Christ is that of the supremacy of scripture over dogmas and decrees of the church with regards to faithfulness to the Gospel and to Christ. As pointed out in Chapter 1 (page 26), scripture itself does not reflect on this – it was a conclusion that Valdes came to, and passed on to all that he taught. This was then also passed on within the Poor of Christ as they spread all over Europe.

The fact that Staupitz grew up in an area that, during the 15th century had a good presence of the Poor of Christ, makes it very likely that, in his upbringing he was exposed to these values. This also applies to Frederick the Wise, who grew up with

Staupitz, and who went to school together in Grimma (Posset 2003: 32f). (See also Chapter six)

As can be seen below (page 174), the “bishop” of the Poor of Christ, Friedrich Reiser frequented that region. The birthplace of Staupitz lies on the most likely route that someone would walk between Prague, Saaz and Engelsdorf (near Leipzig), places that Reiser frequented when visiting Poor of Christ (de Lange 2006: 82).

The next aspect where Staupitz was in line with the thinking of the Poor of Christ is the loyalty to the (Roman) church, even if that church is corrupt and hostile. Posset (2017: 174) states: *“In terms of ecclesiastical-organizational reforms, and with respect to the issue of ecclesiastical authority (the papacy), Staupitz retained his critical loyalty to the universal Church until his death.”* As pointed out in this thesis, this value of critical loyalty to the church, was passed on from generation to generation, despite all persecution. This, together with the absolute loyalty to Christ as the Lord of the Church and having scripture as normative guide line, were also the values of Staupitz, most probably transferred through the Augustinian Order, and possibly through his upbringing as child.

This loyalty to the one church was still visible during the synod of Chanforan, 1532. (Frank 1999: 84ff) The discussion whether to join the Reformation was intensely discussed, despite the strong arguments of Guillaume Farrell and Antoine Saunier, who had been invited to address the synod on the theme. The resistance came from the barbes from Germany, who still held on to the idea of one church, whereas the representatives from the secluded communities in the Alps were in favour of joining the Reformation (split), since they for more than a century already had lived in isolation from the Roman Church.

When asking about the influence of the Poor of Christ on the 16th century Reformation, the obvious focus is on the Protestant movement. This particular point however highlights the influence that they had on those who did not want to separate, not because they disagreed on the core teachings, but because of their undivided loyalty to the one Church of Christ, a strong value of the Poor of Christ

as discussed in chapter three, page 98 of this study. Their influence on the Reformation therefore can also be found on those Reformation thinkers who did not join the Reformation!

2. The rejected and persecuted Poor of Christ

a) Spread of the movement after 1207

Stephen of Bourbon writes after 1249 about the Poor of Christ (Vedder 1900: 469ff gives a fairly detailed translation and summary of this). He calls them *Waldensens* or *Poor of Lyons*. He got his information through personal knowledge of people who knew Valdes, and through his own work as inquisitor. Although his writing is intended to discredit and ridicule the Poor of Christ, it is precisely this which also highlights other important, and to the Roman Church, dangerous, aspects of the Poor of Christ: Men and women alike became wandering preachers, and in turn called and trained others to do the same. They preached in public spaces and even in churches (which could not happen without permission from local clerics).

Pope Gregory IX reacted in 1228 by forbidding lay people to preach (Kammerer 2008: 78). After this prohibition it was clear to the inquisitors: These preachers are not ordained, act against the order of the pope and therefore cannot preach and in that be driven by the Holy Spirit, as they themselves claimed. Thus, regardless of the content and truthfulness of their message, the mere act of preaching disqualified them. Stephen calls them “*the most pestilent heretics, the most corrupt and dangerous, running everywhere and feigning a likeness of holiness and faith, but not having the reality — the most dangerous because hidden, changing their appearance by various dresses and trades.*” (Vedder 1900: 472).

This last comment shows that the Poor of Christ did not regard themselves as a religious order with uniform, but that they were “normal” lay people who had ordinary trades. In the very beginning the Poor of Christ also gave up their professions, but after an altercation with the Italian Lombards (the Italian branch of the Poor of Christ) accepted that preachers could earn a living through a trade.

They lacked a strong hierarchy, which also meant that the Inquisition could not target and eradicate the leadership structure, since there was none. As a result, the movement could spread much faster, but also was in danger of becoming very diverse. For that reason, the strong commitment to Scripture and especially the Sermon on the Mount (see Chapter two: 80) played an important role to keep them together theologically and in their values. Most denominations develop, and keep on developing doctrines, rules and regulations, with the purpose to define themselves. Ironically, the growing number of doctrines then also leads to a growing spectrum of opinion. The Poor of Christ, however, did not follow this route, but stuck to the foundation, which meant that wherever they were operating, and in which ever language, once the New Testament was translated, their core guidelines were available there too. (See also Chapter one: 25, on the development of doctrine in the church). Throughout the centuries the issue of not taking an oath (Mt 5, 33-37), refusing violence or retaliation (Mt 6, 21-25, 38-44) made them stand out from the rest of society.

Anonymous of Passau (Patschovsky&Selge 1973:71ff) gives a vivid account of how he observes the Poor of Christ. The account dated around 1260 describes the heretics as learning and teaching incessantly, day and night. Although written to express concern and dismay about the spread of the movement, it does give valuable pointers as to how the movement did spread. According to him, the teaching and learning happens without books – which confirms that the Poor of Christ had to memorise since their scriptures continually were confiscated and burnt – often together with the person on whom the books were found. He describes how people are encouraged to learn, even if it is only a verse a day. Furthermore, he indicates that during the day they apply their trades, and at night study, teach and learn.

An interesting point, mentioned on the side, is that they even teach in the leper houses. Since the Poor of Christ saw as part of their calling to heal the sick, they did put in a special effort to go to the sick, which made them to be even more appreciated by the community. A similar observation is made one and a half

centuries later. Lea (Gutenberg II: 396) quotes an inquisitor from 1392:

Thus laboring quietly and peacefully, preaching by night in cellars, mills, stables, and other retired places, they gained numerous converts among the peasants and artisans, who saw in the sanctity of their lives, as sadly admitted by the so-called Peter of Pillichdorf,¹¹ the strongest contrast with the scandalous license of the clergy. Thus they multiplied in secret until all Germany was full of them...

Another factor contributing to their fast spreading is that new converts soon, after basic instruction, become preachers and teachers as well. Anonymous also describes the zeal with which they do their preaching and teaching, even to the extent of crossing cold rivers at night to reach, preach to and teach people (Patschovsky 2011 XXV: 131).

Lerner gives a brief summary of how the preachers in later centuries were trained. Starting already at age 14 they would accompany an experienced master and learn from them, memorise as much of the gospels and letters as possible, many ending up knowing the whole New Testament off by heart. This training lasted for 10-12 years. An examination by a group of masters would then decide whether the trainee could continue independently as a master, serving a specific territory (Lerner 1986: 243). Tourn, when describing the training of barbes, describes in short what is covered in the training (1983: 74): *“Er macht sich vertraut mit den Orten, die zu besuchen sind. Er erlernt die Sprachen, studiert die heiligen Texte und besucht die geheimen scholae.”*

Anonymous, as do various other accounts, also states that the heretics fully participate in the church life of the community. He does, however, interpret it as a ploy of the heretics to fool the church, as pretence, so that they will not be

¹¹ Biller (2000: 237-269) has since argued that the author is not Peter of Pillichdorf, but Peter Zwicker in *The Anti-Waldensian Treatise Cum dormirent homines of 1395 and its author*.

discovered (Patschovsky 2011 XXV: 133f). Selge rightly points out that the Poor of Christ had no ambition to become martyrs – not that they were afraid of dying, but because they saw as their main calling to spread the gospel, invite people to repentance and lead them to a life following Christ. For that reason, they did try to be as inconspicuous as possible, in order to fulfil their task undisturbed. (Selge 1967 I: 304f)

Another significant reason for their fast spreading was the way that cities developed in that period. They became centres of trading, wealth, but also of corruption and immorality. The priests and clergy often fully participated in the vices of the city, leaving the population without spiritual care. This meant that the religious orders became an important instrument of the church to care for the neglected (Günther 2018: 27). But it also meant that there was ample space for the Poor of Christ to do their much-needed ministry, and for them to be highly appreciated due to their more critical stance towards the wrongs in society and church.

Due to the wide spreading of the Poor of Christ as well as the severe persecution, it gradually developed into two groups which hardly had any contact with each other: The Romanesque and the German wings. The Romanesque wing, with time, withdrew into the inaccessible parts of the Italian and French Alps, forming isolated communities. (Utz Tremp 2010: 102) Audisio (1999: 123ff) in discussing the habits and practises of the *Poor of Lyons* (he uses this term for the movement) also refers to this separate development. From the examples that he lists it becomes clear that the Romanesque developed into a distinguishable community with specific rites of entrance (first confession to a barbe). He refers to a father refusing to give his daughter into marriage unless the bridegroom “becomes a Waldensian”. “*Then a barbe came to his house asking him if he would confess to him and he heard his confession and received him in the Waldensian sect*” (ibid 123). The German wing was acting within the church, without the people “joining” the movement formally.

“Contact between the two geographical divisions diminished as time went by,

becoming rare occurrences in the fifteenth and sixteenth century.” (ibid 124) Audisio goes on to explain that there is very little information about the developments in the German wing, with the Inquisition records being the main source. This is perhaps a main reason why the influence of the Poor of Christ on the 16th century has been overlooked so far. Fortunately, interest in this group is growing, and with it, discovery of more material. Noteworthy in this regard is the collection of essays published as “Friedrich Reiser und die “waldensisch-hussitische Internationale” (de Lange 2006).

For this study we focus on the German wing, showing that it had a much bigger influence on the 16th century Reformation than the Romanesque wing, and a quite significant one as well. In the German region, the roaming preachers, also called masters or brethren – *Meister, Meisterinnen, Brüder, Schwestern* (Chapter two: 44) played an important role. Audisio (1999: 125) states: *“It would appear that the eastern Brothers also developed a network of missionary rounds, training for their preachers and houses to receive them and organised annual meetings”*.

Not only did they preach, but they also took confession. This confession was much more than just confessing sins. It was an important instrument of teaching, directing the followers towards a Bible-centred life. This ministry not only ensured the continuation from generation to generation, it also helped the movement to retain a common identity. Although deep underground, the visits of the roaming preachers made the followers aware of the wide spread of the movement, and of brothers and sisters all over the country with whom they were united in their common thinking (Molnár 1993: 217ff). The wandering preachers met annually to re-assign responsibilities for the regions (Biller in Patschovsky 2011 XXV: 124).

The similarity between the methods of the roaming preachers of the Poor of Christ and the preachers of the Augustinian Order is striking. These also were tasked to “service” a region, visiting the various places and towns on a regular basis (page 160). The big difference however was that the Augustinians did not have to do it secretly.

Molnár (1993: 147) points out that there was a strong awareness of the universality

of the movement, and despite the lack of central leadership and common literature there are key issues which all of the various communities adhered to: They were scripture bound, rejected oath taking, and rejected violence. They would not even agree to be weapon carriers for others.

Rejecting oath taking and refusing violence resulted in many of them becoming victims of the Inquisition. Every Inquisition hearing was started with the requirement to swear allegiance to the Church (Chapter two: 72 of this study). A true Poor of Christ would not take such an oath, even though being loyal to the Church.

Rejecting violence, and especially killing, meant that the Poor of Christ were soft targets, who would not fight force with force, but submit to the violent actions against them. This made them very vulnerable. The war against the Poor of Christ was a very one sided one, and many communities and villages were destroyed by the



3Ruins of Church at St Crépin (Mont Dauphin) destroyed in the fight against heresies, 14th century

Photo: H Müller

Church. This is especially true in the Kingdom of France where the co-operation between Emperor and Church was much closer than in Europe and therefore the support from secular authorities greater.



4Ruins of St Christophe, near Avignon, destroyed in the 14th century during the fight of the church against heretic communities
Photo: H Müller

As stated in Chapter one: 13, the sites of this destruction are still visible at various places. They are, however, not officially linked to the persecution of the Poor of Christ. Often, as in St Christophe, there are no indications on site of the story behind the ruins. At St Crépin the fight against heretics is mentioned, but not specified which ones. (Photos from visit on site, June 2016)

b) Known followers of the Poor of Christ

Because of the severe persecution, most known followers are those who were brought before the Inquisition, found guilty and executed. Although some are of

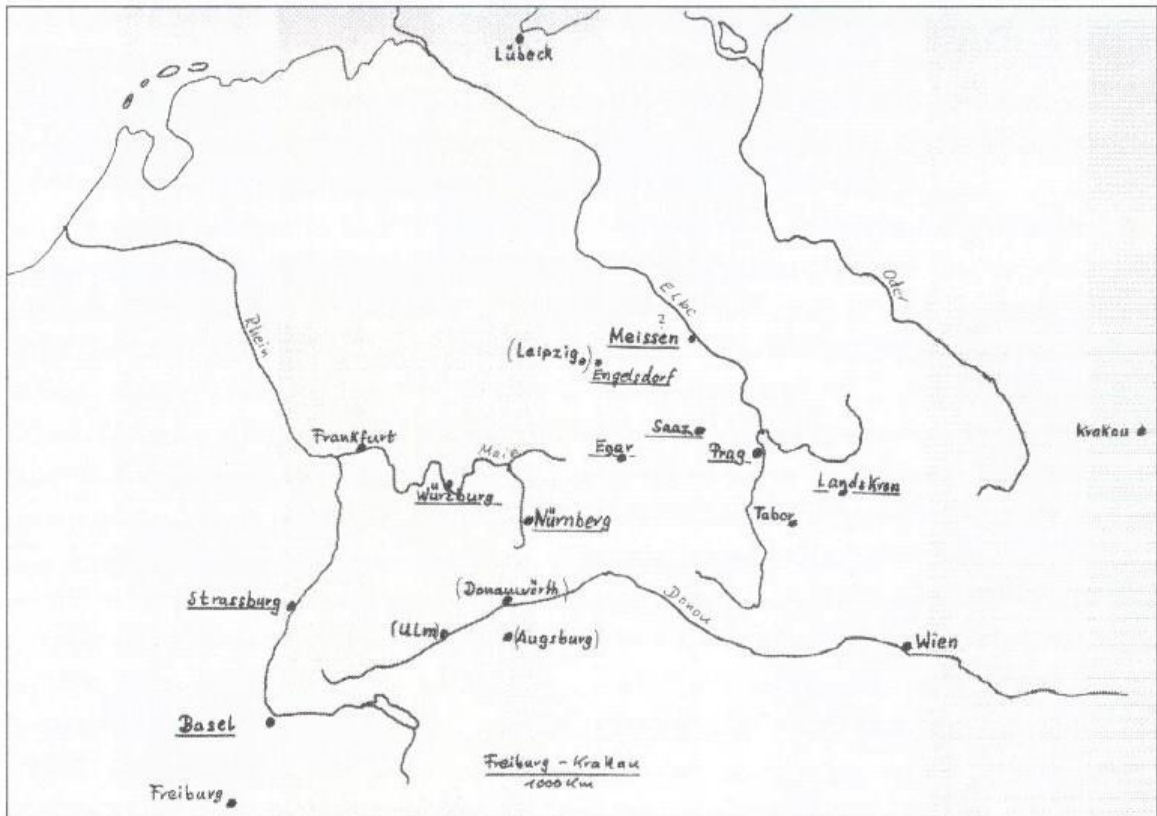
the opinion that the movement was small and insignificant, others believe that it was much more wide spread. Also a common opinion is that it was mainly a movement amongst the lower and lowest classes, but Lerner (1986: 244) points out that, due to the societal structures in Germany in the 14th and 15th century, the contrary is more likely – whole communities, from top to bottom, from the magistrate to the lowest member, could be part of the movement, especially in rural areas in Eastern Europe. But also, in German cities their “ranks ran from the top of the societal and economic scale to the bottom”. (Lerner 1986: 244) However, due to the severe persecution, their important masters had to remain secret in order to survive.

The absence of names does not mean the absence of important followers. It is because of those who remained unknown, that the movement could survive the severe persecution and extermination. Schneider (de Lange 2006: 77) mentions the severe persecution in the Augsburg and Donauwörth region at the end of the 14th century, during which a significant number of members of the movement were executed, men and women alike. This forced the others to be even more careful and secretive.

Perhaps the most known *Meister* is **Friedrich Reiser**, who was executed by fire on 10 March 1458 in Strasbourg (Schneider 2006: 75). His journeys and activities are quite well documented. The map of Schneider (ibid 82) gives an overview of the reach of his ministry from Krakau to Freiburg. Reiser already grew up in a home of Poor of Christ, and then became an apprentice tradesman with Johann von Plauen in Nuremberg, who himself was also an important teacher in the movement (Schneider 2006: 78). Molnár (1993: 269) states:

Reiser wurde bald der bedeutendse Mann der Deutschen Waldenser Diaspora des 15. Jahrhunderts und zum Pionier aller Bestrebungen um eine hussitisch-waldensische Vereinigung, welche die verstreuten Waldenser mit neuem Lebenswillen ausstatteten, ja in vielen Fällen direkt vor dem Untergang bewahren sollte, soweit sie vom geistigen Verfall oder der Ausrottung bedroht waren.

This sentence sums up some important developments concerning the Poor of Christ in the 15th century: The Bohemian reformational developments that were not curbed by the execution of Hus, the attempt of Hussites to reach out to the Waldensian diaspora in Germany, the intense work of the Inquisition to root out the Poor of Christ and prevent the Hussite Revolution spreading to Germany and the danger of the Poor of Christ losing their spiritual compass.



Known Places where Reiser stayed. Long or multiple stays are underlined. (de Lange 2006: 82)

As can be seen from the map above, Reiser (the name means *Traveller*) did indeed travel intensely, visiting the Poor of Christ, not only in Germany but also in Austria and even making contact with the Romanesque part of the movement (ibid). Reiser eventually came into contact with the Taborites, a radical Hussite movement, where he was ordained as priest in 1431 (Schneider 2006: 83). This was not in line with the classical approach of the Poor of Christ, who did induct their masters but did not call them priest. At a later stage – date and place unclear – Peter Payne, linked to the Hussite Movement, inducted him as bishop of “*treuen Brüder*” and he again focused on serving the movement in Germany, but this time

with the idea of bringing it together with the Hussite/Taborites movement in Bohemia (ibid, 84).

For this research it is important to note that the Poor of Christ never had a bishop, and that he was consecrated as bishop not by the Poor of Christ, nor is there any indication that the movement had requested it. The fact that, at his trial, he confessed to being a bishop, has led to the assumption that the movement by this time had separated from the Roman Church. This, however, is not the case. In Bohemia and in the Alps, they had formed communities and parishes with priests, but in Germany they continued in secret, being part of the Roman parishes where they lived. For that reason, their influence in the general population was less obvious, but still significant. In this regard, the essay of Patschovsky "*Waldenserverfolgung in Schweidnitz*" (Patschovsky 2011: 139ff) gives numerous accounts of ordinary citizens admitting, when asked by the Inquisitor, that the "heretics" have been living in their midst for many years, and that they were regarded as honourable citizens, since their life style was exemplary and they were trustworthy people (ibid 158f).

What is important in view of this study is the historical contextual analysis, which shows both geographical and chronological proximity of the journeys and ministry of Reiser with important role players of the 16th century Reformation such as Staupitz (born 1460) and Frederick the Wise (born 1463) who were schooled in Grimma, close to Engelsdorf, indicated on the map above. Reiser lived during the life time of the parents of these and frequently visited the region where they lived. Considering the fact that the ministry of the Poor of Christ was low-key but wide spread, as described above, it is virtually unthinkable that staff of the noble, and perhaps even the noble themselves, were not influenced by these teachings and values, especially since the teachings themselves were not heretical, nor the values that they adhered to: Reliability, integrity, knowledge of the Bible and adherence to the teachings of Jesus. Thus, they could very well exist and live out these values in their communities and pass them on to others.

Chapter five builds on this argument.

c) Occupation of the followers and geographical location of their presence

Due to the name “Poor of Christ” one could assume that followers were poor. This, however, was not the case. In some regions such as Strasbourg and Austria they had a strong appeal amongst the educated higher society. Although some preachers, especially the wandering ones, remained possession-less, most followers were working citizens, living in the cities and towns of Europe. They very often were Artisans, trades people or farm workers. (Molnár 1993: 179, 189) This can be derived from the Inquisition reports that often list the occupation and status of heretics. In Bohemia these were mostly German middle-class families. (Patschovsky 2011 III: 161)

The story of Friedrich Reiser above also shows the continued combining of being a preacher or master and a trader, as already mentioned in Chapter two page 43.

The maps on page 187 and 189 show that, although very much present in rural areas, in the Holy Roman Empire their presence very often also was in the cities, especially free imperial cities.

3. Conclusion

In this chapter the historical contextual analysis and synthesis showed how the actions of the church towards the Poor of Christ had two important results that would later impact on the 16th century Reformation.

- i. It resulted in the formation of the Order of the *Poor Catholics*, who in essence were almost identical with the persecuted Poor of Christ from which they came, and who continued with almost the same ministry, yet with the blessing of the Church. It showed how, especially Pope Innocence III attempted to fight the Poor of Christ by sending out people with the same ministry, into the same areas. He encouraged the formation of such orders and also gave permission to the establishment of the Franciscan and Dominican Orders for this purpose. The literature review of papal correspondence also showed that this did not yield the desired results.

After the passing of Pope Innocence III, Lateran IV forbade the formation of new orders, and subsequently all orders established in that period, including the Poor of Christ, had to be combined into the Augustinian Order, except the Franciscans and Dominicans, who were allowed to continue separately. The chapter then highlighted the role that the *Poor Catholics* as well as the fight against heresies, played in how the Augustinian Order developed. It showed how, in the run up to the 16th century Reformation the Augustinian Order regained much of its likeness to the Poor of Christ, especially regarding the importance of studying scripture. This connection to the Poor of Christ and their methods is an aspect that is ignored by historians, but is of great importance for this study, since the Augustinian order became a major provider of Reformation theology and theologians.

We showed how Johann von Staupitz was instrumental in re-introducing matters into the Augustinian Order that were also values of the Poor of Christ, namely the central role of scripture and the focus on Christ as highest authority. We also highlighted his absolute loyalty to the one Church, whilst at the same time criticising the wrongs – all being values of the Poor of Christ.

- ii. Regarding the persecuted German wing of the Poor of Christ the chapter showed how the persecution forced the movement to the deep underground, rather than eradicating it. Especially in Germany they continued to operate and impact on the communities with their values and life style. The extensive journeys of Friedrich Reiser show how wide spread they were, and more importantly, that they were active in the area of Grimma, where both Frederick the Wise and Johann von Staupitz, to major influencers of the 16th century Reformation, grew up and had their basic schooling.

The link between Valdes in the 12th century and the 16th century Reformation is gradually becoming clearer. This link becomes visible through the historical contextual analysis and synthesis, since it is made up of various parts. Chapter five will further clarify this link by showing on a map the spread of the Poor of Christ in the German empire. It will then then look at the political landscape of semi-independent cities,

counts and territories that accommodated the Poor of Christ, and again, on a comparative map show how the two overlap: areas where the Poor of Christ were active, and the protesting *Reichstände* (territories) and Free *imperial cities* that were first in protesting against church and emperor in favour of the 16th century Reformers. It will also highlight the fact that some of these were not influenced by the Reformers, but brought their own flavour of reformational thinking into the deliberations.

Chapter 5 Poor of Christ: Scattered sparks of the stamped out fire

The German part of the Holy Roman Empire was the “home soil” of the 16th century Reformation. To show the impact that the Poor of Christ had on this reformation, the chapter focuses on the spread of the persecuted German wing of the Poor of Christ. This wing operated in the same geographical area and communities that became home to the 16th century Reformation. As seen in the previous chapter, the persecution was wide spread and intense. We will show that the Poor of Christ in Germany survived the Inquisition, that the fire was not stomped out completely. Reformation historians have just overlooked this. This speaks to the research objective to bring the Poor of Christ back into mainstream Church history teaching.

In order to show their presence and ministry, the literature review had to look into Inquisition documentation and secondary literature on the movement to establish where, when and over what period the Poor of Christ were found in this region.

Audisio (1999: 93ff) argues that the Poor of Christ by the beginning of the 16th century had almost completely assimilated with the Roman Catholic population. They would take an oath where needed, which was against one of the deepest principles of the Poor of Christ (Chapter three: 125, decree 14). His study of wills in the Provence indicate that the Poor of Christ gave instructions for the readings of masses for the deceased, a practice linked directly to the belief in the existence of purgatory, all matters that the Poor of Christ had vehemently opposed. It must be pointed out that Audisio, in this research, focused on the Romanesque wing of the movement, for which this, in part, did indeed become the reality. Due to the little information that he had on the German wing (ibid 125) he did not focus on their development. The German wing did not assimilate as the Romanesque did. Lerner (1986: 242) points out that the movement was particularly resilient in Germany, which is confirmed by our literature research.

The Inquisition records show how effective the underground movement had become. In quite a few places where they were found, executed and thought to be eradicated, a

subsequent Inquisition, 50 years later (two generations!) again found many followers. This is firstly, because everybody had not been discovered as was pointed out in the previous chapter, and secondly, due to the system of teaching used: Parents taught their children, and the families were then visited on a regular basis by the wandering master responsible for their region. (Molnár 1993: 147f)

Unlike the Cathars, who ceased to exist in the 13th century, the Poor of Christ were persecuted for 300 years. Lea (Gutenberg II: 254f) remarks:

The simple and earnest faith of the Waldenses, on the other hand, inculcated helpfulness and hopefulness, patience under tribulation, and an abiding trust in the watchful care of the Heavenly Father. The arduous toil of the artisan or husbandman was blessed in the consciousness of the performance of a duty. The virtues which form the basis of all Christian society—industry, {255} charity, self-abnegation, sobriety, chastity, thrift—were stimulated and cultivated, and man was taught that his fate, here and hereafter, depended on himself, and not on the ministrations or mediation of his fellow-creatures, alive or dead. It was a faith which fitted man for the environment in which he had been placed by his Creator, and it was capable of adaptation to the infinite vicissitudes of human progress. Accordingly, it had proportionate vitality. Rooted out in one place, it grew in another. It responded too nearly to the needs and aspirations of multitudes ever to be wholly blotted out. There was always a propitious soil for its scattered seeds, and its resistance of inertia in the end proved too much for even the persistent energy of its destroyers.

This shows that the message continued to be passed on over many generations. Even if the persecutors thought they had eradicated the movement, they did not succeed in doing so. They thought that they had stamped out the fire but overlooked the sparks still glowing, ready to flame up again.

This chapter deals with the “silence before the storm”. The Poor of Christ did survive the Inquisition. The flames might have been repeatedly stomped out – but the sparks were there, ready to flame up again. To show this, the historical contextual analysis is used to

look at the socio-political developments, and how these impacted on the Poor of Christ. Due to co-operation between secular authorities and the inquisition, in some strongholds, especially in Austria, the movement was almost completely eradicated, which is confirmed by inquisition reports and the fact that these regions did not feature as reformation hot spots later on.

On the other hand, we will show how some *Free imperial cities* and some semi-independent territories in the German part of Holy Roman Empire played a crucial role in the Reformation, and, using the historical contextual analysis, show how they overlap with the areas of activity of the Poor of Christ. We will show on maps where Poor of Christ were tried by the Inquisition in the last decades of the 15th century, and where the 16th century Reformation quickly took roots flared up.

The overlap of these regions will highlight the fact that the quick spread of the 16th century Reformation in its early phase was not because of the novelty of the message, but rather, because of the soil prepared by the Poor of Christ, the “sparks” that were glowing and ready to catch flame. It will show that in some areas of the Holy Roman Empire the Reformation message was not a new message, but that through the ministry of the Poor of Christ it had permeated into society over many generations. Now people had the courage to openly stand up for what they had believed long before Luther and his fellow Reformers had discovered it. The map work will also show that areas with no documented presence of the Poor of Christ took longer to react, since to those living there it was a novel teaching. Some of those areas also totally rejected the Reformation.

We will show that the *free imperial cities*, played particularly important role in driving the Reformation, linking up with the observation in Chapter two, page 99 of this study, that the growing autonomy of the cities not only opened doors for trade, but also created space for independent thinkers such as the Poor of Christ. On the other hand, such cities could also decide to not allow any heretics within their boundaries. K Utz Tresp (Frank 1999: 79) mentions Freiburg as such an example, where up to the mid-15th century the movement was strongly represented, but then systematically driven away or executed, with the result that it became a catholic stronghold against Protestantism in the 16th century.

1. Why did the Inquisition fail to eradicate the Poor of Christ?

The inquisitor Peter Zwicker complains in 1395, after almost 200 years of persecution, that there is hardly any part of Germany that is “Waldensian-Free” (Molnár 1993: 157ff)

Anonymous of Passau, who had first-hand encounters with the Germanic wing of the Poor of Christ, in the mid-14th century, states (Patschovsky 1973: 73): *“Inter quas omnes sectas, que sunt vel fuerunt, non est perniciosior ecclesie dei quam Leonistarum¹²”*

Selge (1967 I: 289) quotes from “Anonymous of Passau”, translated by us into English, stating:

In the past there were more than seventy heretical sects. All of them have been destroyed, except for the Manichaeos and Patarines in the Lombardian regions, and the Ordliber, Runcarier and Leonists, that have infected Germany.

The Passau Anonymous asks the question why the Poor of Christ are so successful in Germany, and gives the following reason (Peters 1980: 152f):

First, because it is older. Some say that it existed from the time of [Pope] Sylvester; others say that it existed from the time of the apostles. Second, because it is more widespread. For there is hardly a place in which this sect does not slither. Third, because when other sects generate horror in their audience by the awfulness of their blasphemies about God, these Lyonists have a great appearance of holiness - before men they live justly and believe properly everything concerning God and all articles that are in the creed - they blaspheme only the Roman Church and clergy, which it is easy to make laypeople to believe.

¹² „Leonists” was yet another name used for the Poor of Christ (Selge 1967 I: 289).

(Patschovsky (2011: 150) commends Passau Anonymous for seeing the link between the poor state of the church and the clergy and the success of the Poor of Christ. The Poor of Christ are doing what the clergy are neglecting to do.

Tourn (1983: 74) points out that the Inquisition only managed to find a small portion of the Poor of Christ due to their well-organized structures. Their teachers, the *Meister and Meisterinnen*, were well organized and had a detailed travel plan which was strictly and punctually followed so that those visited could be ready and waiting without drawing unnecessary attention.

2. The Political climate in the 15th and 16th century.

An important aspect to keep in mind when dealing with this part of the research is not to think along the lines of the current political map of Europe. The maps, Chapter two, page 35 show the political developments over six centuries. At the beginning of the 16th century The Holy Roman empire was divided into a multitude of autonomous or semi-autonomous small kingdoms, counties, free imperial cities and principalities.

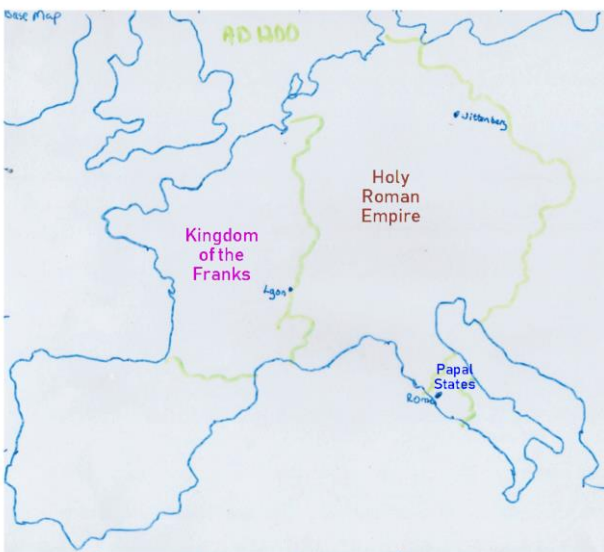
The small semi-independent regions and sometimes fully autonomous free imperial cities, had a significant influence on the spread or eradication of the Poor of Christ. Regions varied in their degrees of liberty, affiliation, submission or opposition to the Church and the emperor. This explains why the Poor of Christ were wide spread in some regions, and almost non-existent in others. Austria is a good example of this.

Schneider (1981: 98ff) describes the impact of the Inquisition, but also the tenacity of the people. In the period 1259 to 1266 the Inquisition discovered 40 places in the diocese of Passau. Steyr had a few schools of the movement. However, the Inquisition did at that stage not manage to stamp out the Poor of Christ in Austria, but rather drove them underground. By the end of the 14th century Austria was one of the most important centres for the Poor of Christ. One heretic, before being burnt on the stake, said: If we had 15 more years, we would have been strong enough to work in public and defend our faith! (ibid, 99).

Segl, in his essay “Die Waldenser in Österreich um 1400: Lehren, Organisationsform, Verbreitung und Bekämpfung” (de Lange 2006: 161ff) describes the second period of persecution in that area. He shows how the area from Vienna to Styria was stronghold of the Poor of Christ during the 14th and beginning of 15th century. However, Duke Albert III then invited the Inquisitor Peter Zwicker into his territory with the instruction to eradicate the heretics in his duchy. His successors, Albert IV and William, continued the support of Zwicker. This resulted in an intense Inquisition campaign, lasting from 1395 to 1404, which caused immense damage to the Poor of Christ. Without this secular support that region would have remained a stronghold of the Poor of Christ. However, when the 16th century Reformation swept across Europe, this area was firmly in the fold of the Roman Catholic Church.

In summary one can say that the stronger the loyalty of the local secular authority to the church, the more likely subjects would betray the Poor of Christ in their midst to protect themselves. Areas with strong local authority meant weaker the authority of the emperor, and with that sometimes lesser the influence and authority of the church, resulting in more freedom for the Poor of Christ to work and do their ministry.

When comparing the maps of Europe from 1300 and 1600, shown again below, it is clear that this development had a much greater Influence on the Holy Roman Empire than on the Kingdom of the Franks.



Whereas the Kingdom of the Franks remained fairly unchanged, and even consolidated its power, the Holy Roman Empire moved from an empire with a strong emperor to a patchwork of Duchies with a much weakened emperor. It is noticeable that the spread of the Poor of Christ in the Kingdom of the Franks was fairly successfully curbed and the movement driven out, whereas in the Holy Roman Empire it continued to spread.

Even more important than split into a patchwork of kingdoms, duchies and counties was the growth of the independent free imperial cities, *Die freien Reichsstädte*. (See also Chapter two: 44). In the period between the start of the Poor of Christ to the 16th century Reformation, the free imperial cities had grown in influence and independence. Wenz (1996: 386) states that although their political influence was starting to decline in the 16th century, they did play a crucial role in the early phase of the 16th century Reformation. He quotes K Blaschke in B Moeller *Stadt und Kirche* (ibid):

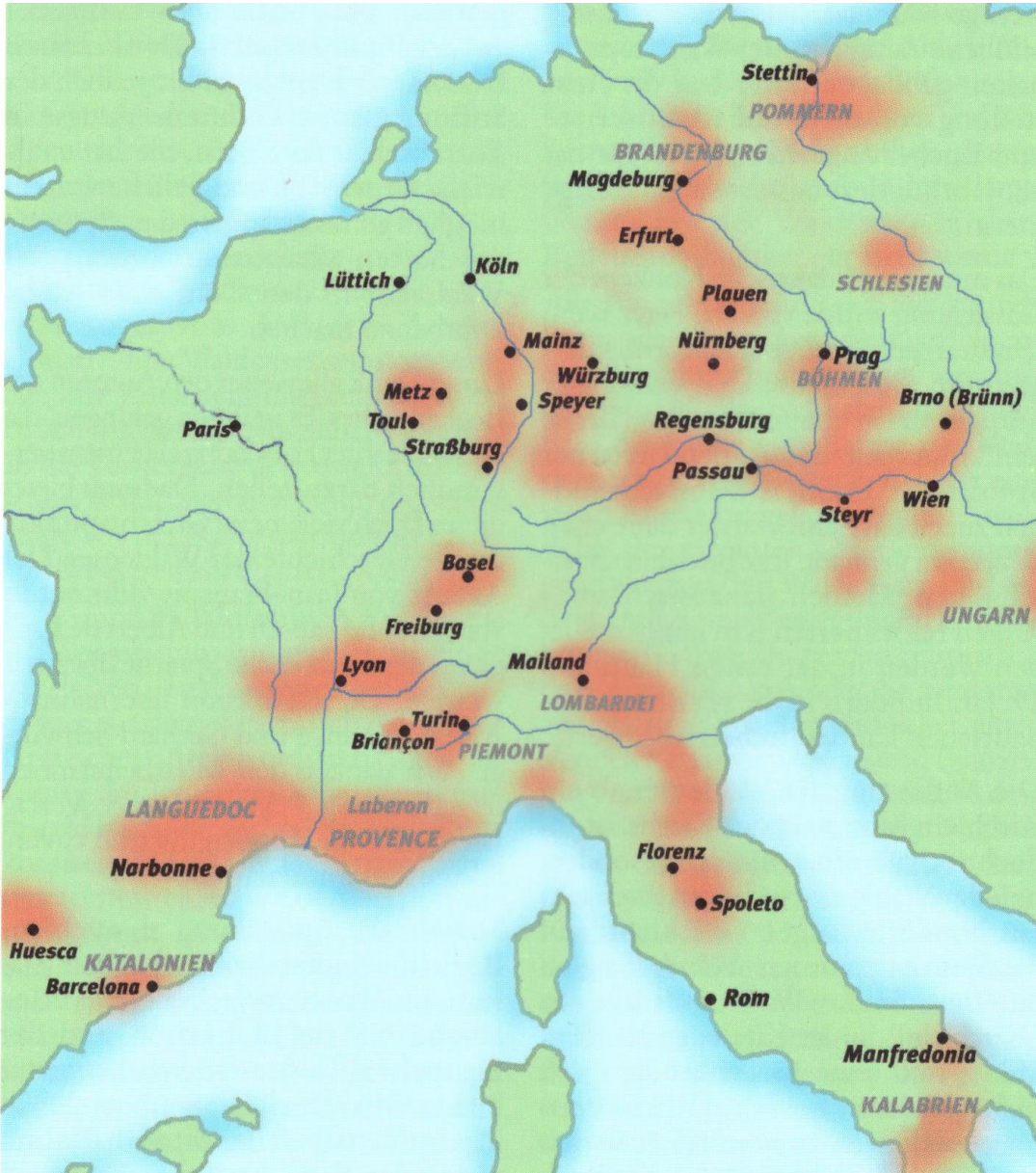
...daß auch im ernestinischen Sachsen, dem Prototyp des protestantischen Fürstenstaates, die Reformationsbewegung von den Städten ausgegangen sei und hier ständig ihre intensivste populäre Verwurzelung gehabt habe.(Even in the Ernestine Saxony, the prototype of the Protestant Princely State the Reformation movement started in the cities and continued to have its deepest popular roots there)

This underlines our argument of the influence that the Poor of Christ had on the Reformation, which only becomes clear by connecting these cities with their long-term presence.

3. Documented presence of the Poor of Christ in the Holy Roman Empire

As stated in Chapter one (page 7), the main sources on the Poor of Christ in the Holy Roman Empire are the Inquisition reports. The drawback of this is that there are no records, and therefore currently no proof, of the presence nor absence of the movement in areas that are not mentioned in these reports. Nor does one know anything about those areas where the reports have been destroyed by the population (Chapter two: 65).

The map shown below is one of various ones. Most of them roughly correspond to each other. In all of them the information is based on the references to places of persecution in the Inquisition documents, and to some extent incorporating the places where the persecuted came from. The severe persecution resulted in many Poor of Christ fleeing to areas where they hoped to be safe. Schneider (1981: 117) mentions the example of a Bohemian Village *Velky Bednárec*, where almost the entire population were Poor of Christ from Germany.



Known Places of Persecution and testimony to the presence of the Poor of Christ in Europe 1776-1532.

Map by Bernhard Kutscherauer in Frank, (1999: 12)

Also important in this regard is the statement by Selge referred to above (page 170) that not martyrdom but leading people to a life following Christ, was their ambition.

Added to this is the fact that they regarded themselves as being part of the Roman Church, and participated in their parishes (Chapter four: 143). If no one complained against them, they could survive unnoticed, sometimes for decades, until persecuted. Again, there is no record of those who were not discovered. Their teachings were also passed on within families from generation to generation (Chapter four, 165), this too cannot be captured on these maps. They thus indicate the minimum known, and not the maximum likely presence of the Poor of Christ.

One such example is that of **Schweidnitz** (now Poland) from the Inquisition in 1315 & 1318 (Patschovsky 2011 III: 138ff). Indications are that the Poor of Christ had been living there for a few decades before the Inquisition found them. This indicates that they were well integrated into the society. The witnesses testify to their reliability and being respected. They were of German nationality and fairly well off. (Patschovsky 2011 III: 159f)

4. The geographical overlap of presence of the Poor of Christ, and the early support for the 16th century Reformation.

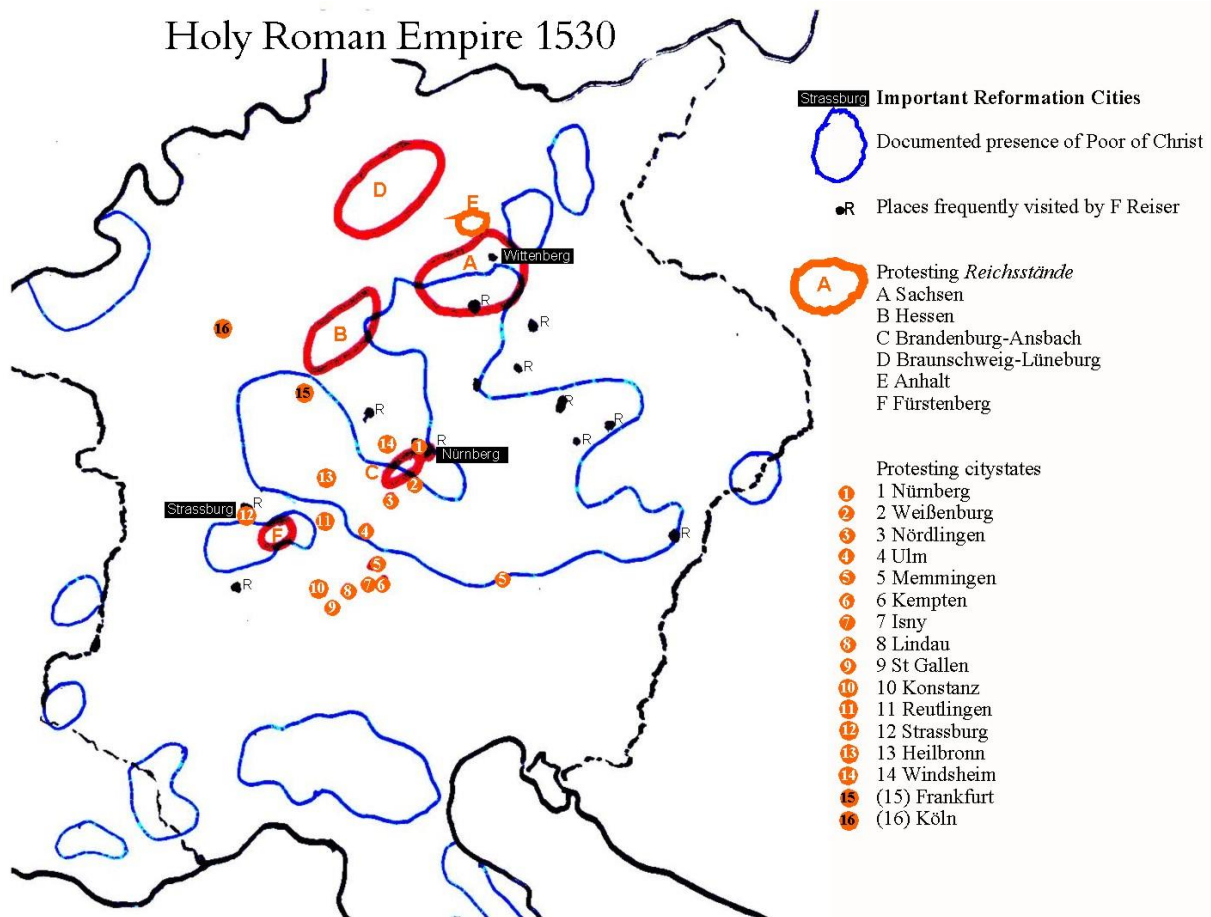
When, at the beginning of the 15th century Jan Hus was summonsed to appear before the Council in Constance, he had widespread support in Bohemia. His colleague, Jerome of Prague, also came to support him. Lea (Gutenberg II: 427-504) gives an extensive report of the trials, leading up to the execution. From these it is clear that a major opposition against Hus, and the demand for his execution, came from the German Theologians. His execution followed shortly after the extensive persecution of the Poor of Christ in Austria, described above.

However, just over a hundred years later, the situation had changed drastically. At the Diet of Speyer in 1529 the major support for the Reformation came from Germany.

a) Diet of Speyer, 1529

The following “*Reichsstände*” and free imperial cities, supported the Reformers in Speyer:

Reichsstände: (indicated on the map by the Alphabetical Letters): A=Kurfürst Johann der Beständige von Sachsen; B=Landgraf Philipp von Hessen, C=Markgraf Georg von Brandenburg-Ansbach; D=Herzog Ernst von Braunschweig-Lüneburg and Herzog Franz von Braunschweig-Lüneburg, E=Fürst Wolfgang von Anhalt, F=Graf Wilhelm von Fürstenberg.



This map combines the following information from other maps: *The Journeys of Friedrich Reiser* (page 175) and the spread of the Waldensian Movement (Tourn 1983: 75) with the location of the Protesters of the Diet of Speyer 1529

Free imperial cities, (indicated on the map by numbers): 1=Nürnberg, 2=Weißenburg, 3=Nördlingen, 4=Ulm, 5=Memmingen, 6=Kempten, 7=Isny, 8=Lindau, 9=St. Gallen, 10=Konstanz, 11=Reutlingen, 12=Strassburg, 13=Heilbronn, 14=Windsheim,

(15=Frankfurt, and 16=Cologne initially supported the protesters, but then withdrew their signatures¹³)

The overlay of the maps into the map above show that with the exception of D – Braunschweig Lüneburg, and the free imperial cities 5-10, all around Lake Constance, are from areas with documented presence of the Poor of Christ.

Furthermore, two of the free imperial cities, Nürnberg (1) and Strassburg (12) were also cities visited on various occasions by Friedrich Reiser. The one, however, that stands out is Nürnberg, and with it Margrave George of Brandenburg (C). Nürnberg had become one of the biggest and most powerful free imperial cities in the empire, and the reformational movement and thinking was widespread amongst its citizens (Wenz 1996: 385). The fact that Nürnberg refused permission for Martin Luther to stay in the city during the Diet of Augsburg (ibid:384) a year later, is a clear indication that they did not see themselves as followers of Luther, but that their reformational thinking was independent of him.

To show the impact of the Poor of Christ, it is necessary to also briefly focus on the Diet of Augsburg, happening one year later in June 1530.

b) Diet of Augsburg, 1530

The following attended in support of the Reformation (ibid 369ff): *Reichsstände*: A=Kurfürst Johann von Sachsen; B=Landgraf Philipp von Hessen; C=Markgraf Georg von Brandenburg-Ansbach.

As well as the following free imperial cities, which need to be divided into the following groups:

Those signing the Confessio Augustana (CA): 1=Nürnberg, 2=Weißenburg, 6=Kempten, 11=Reutlingen, 13=Heilbron, 14=Windsheim.

¹³ This requires more research. We could not establish whether the withdrawal was for theological or political reasons.

Nürnberg did sign the CA, but as stated above, it is important to note that the city was not willing to grant Luther protection in the run-up to the Diet. It also did not purely accept the documents presented by the Wittenberg delegation, but participated in the drafting and re-drafting. Wenz (ibid 471ff) describes this process and relates how the drafts of the CA were couriered by the Nürnberg delegation to the mayor and council of Nürnberg for their comments and approval. Posset (2017: 179f) discusses especially three members of the “Nuremberg Elite” that were strong supporters of Staupitz and then also early on of Luther, but withdrew the support in the early 1520’s. This might explain why, on the one hand Nuremberg was strongly supporting the protestant movement, whilst at the same time being critical of Luther. The effort to courier the draft (almost 140 km!) is an indication that they had come prepared, and wanted to ensure that their views were indeed captured in the CA.

Also very important in this regard is the fact that Markgraf Georg (C=) came prepared. He had requested the clergy from his territory to present their views on the necessity of the Reformation, and whether secular authorities can institute reform measures. He received 50 submissions spanning more than 2000 pages (ibid 378). This shows that the reformational thinking happened in other regions as well.

The map showing the overlap (page 189) shows the geographical closeness of 1=Nürnberg and C=Brandenburg-Ansbach. Both of them stand out for their independent reformational thinking that was linked up to the CA by negotiations and not purely by adoption.

Those who did not sign the CA: Memmingen (5), Lindau (8) and Konstanz (10) did not sign the CA, but presented a modified *Confessio Tetrapolitana*. Straßburg (12), although not supporting CA X (on the Lord’s Supper) eventually signed both documents. (ibid 383)

This too is significant in the light of this study. CA X states¹⁴: “*Of the Supper of the Lord they teach that the Body and Blood of Christ are truly present, and are distributed to those who eat the Supper of the Lord; and they reject those that teach otherwise.*” The inclusion

¹⁴ Citations from the Confessio Augustana from <http://bookofconcord.org/augsburgconfession.php> accessed on 18.05.2020.

of rejection of part of the believers because of a disagreement on doctrine is not a trait of the Poor of Christ.

Ulm (4), although supporting the protestant movement, did not sign any of the confessions, since it wanted to remain neutral. (ibid 384)

Zwingli's "*Fidei Ratio ad Carolum Impertorem*" was also presented (ibid 383), but did not get any support, due to its polemical, anti-Lutheran and anti-Catholic stance (Hillerbrand 2007: 164). Pillay& McMillan (2019:2) give a brief overview of the historic context of Zwingli. Although for him it was also important to go back to the sources (scripture) this did not come from contact with the Poor of Christ, but rather from the influence of Erasmian humanism.

It is noticeable that the group that signed confessions in Augsburg is significantly smaller than the group that protested a year earlier in Speyer. This clearly shows the splitting up of the Protestant movement. Whereas Speyer was a general support for the Protestant Movement, Augsburg already was marred by inner-protestant conflict on dogmas, which becomes clear in the formulations of the Augsburg Confession, which do not only state what the (Lutheran) Protestants believe, but also what, and especially whom they reject.

CA I rejects *other interpretations*, XVII rejects *notions*, XXIV rejects *the practice*, XXV rejects *the notion*, whereas X (Lord's supper) reject *those that teach otherwise*.

5. The synod of Chanforan 1533

The relevance of this synod for this research lies in the fact that it was the last "global gathering" of the Poor of Christ, drawing representatives not only from the Romanesque wing, but also *Meister* from the European diaspora (Tourn 1983: 86f).¹⁵

¹⁵ We could not trace a list of participant of that synod to analyse the representation from the various regions and establish the presence of *Meisterinnen*

As the 16th century Reformation started gaining ground, the discussion within the Movement was whether to join the Reformation, specifically the Reformed wing. This discussion was of particular importance to the Romanesque wing, since it comprised of defined communities that had existed in isolation, and had not been part of the Reformation discussions till then. The discussion was intense, since not everybody was in agreement. Some wanted to continue the system of wandering *Meister* caring for communities within the (Roman and Protestant) church, others wanted official affiliation with the Reformation. Ultimately the decision was to join the Reformed wing, due to the pressure of the Swiss Reformers Morel and Farrell, and the strength of the Romanesque wing. This was the formal start of the Waldensian Church as a recognized entity. The church, until today, is part of the Reformed family of churches. The synod also marked the end of the Poor of Christ in the German wing, as a lay movement with their roaming *Meister* and *Meisterinnen*.

6. Conclusion

Despite severe persecution and the eradication of the Poor of Christ in some regions, notably in Austria, their continued presence is documented in other parts of the Holy Roman Empire, especially in the German parts. The maps indicating their presence rely mainly on the analysis of Inquisition reports and events. They thus indicate the definite presence due to the places connected with those found guilty in trials.

However, further study is needed to establish which Reformation areas that do not overlap with the documented presence of the Poor of Christ might also have had them in their midst, but that the Inquisition was not aware of them. Since the maps rely on those that were discovered, further studies will have to investigate contents of contributions from those areas to the Reformation debate, to find contributions that are not dependent on Wittenberg or the Swiss reformers, but show an independent reformation thinking linked to the values and teachings of the Poor of Christ. Such a study should also focus on such possible influence on Philip Melancthon, who for decades after 1517 still attempted to reconcile the Lutheran wing with the Roman Church. He was one of the strongest Lutheran Theologians, and at the same time the Lutheran who consistently attempted to

keep the church together, displaying a strong loyalty to the one Church of Christ, a mark of the Poor of Christ.

This study focused on the documented areas of their presence. We then focused on the regions and cities in the Holy Roman Empire that were on the forefront of defending the Reformation thinking before church and emperor. The Diet of Speyer in 1529 was significant, in that the *Protestierende Reichstände* gave the Protestants their designation. They stood up when it was not yet clear whether they would succeed.

Some of them were clearly influenced by the Swiss and Wittenberg Reformers, but not all of them. It is clear that some of those protesting brought into the protestant debate their own formulations and thinking. The overlap of maps show that these came from areas that had documented presence of the Poor of Christ.

We saw that the representatives from these places were not theologians only, but also lay people who actively participated in the debate. We argue that this is due to their upbringing over many generations in the teachings and values of the Poor of Christ.

In Chapter six this will then be brought together and further expanded on, in order to show that the Poor of Christ did not only survive centuries of persecution, but in various ways contributed to a climate that allowed the 16th Century Reformation to succeed. We will show that their influence has been quite significant.

Chapter 6 The significant influence of the Poor of Christ on the 16th Century Reformation

To answer the question: *What impact did the Poor of Christ have on the Roman Church, creating the climate for the 16th Century Reformation?* primary literature sources such as documents of the Poor of Christ, Decrees of the Roman Church, Inquisition Reports and Papal Letters have been studied, and relevant passages from these discussed. Church Historians have been consulted on their interpretation of the role that the Poor of Christ played. This study of general church history literature shows that the Poor of Christ, most commonly referred to as *Waldensians*, hardly feature in many. One objective of this study is to bring this movement into main stream church history teaching, a place that it does deserve. It shows that the Poor of Christ were not an early, failed reformation movement, but that they persevered over 350 years and in that process helped prepare the 16th century Reformation and impacted on it.

An important research method used in this regard is the historical contextual analysis and synthesis, investigating the Poor of Christ in their socio-economical, church, as well as political environment. It is the coming together of these aspects that then ultimately shows the significant influence that this movement had. If one just looks at each of these separately, this does not become clear, but when combining these various contexts, a strong argument emerges that the Poor of Christ did have a significant impact. The flowchart on page 24 of this study puts it in a visible form.

To answer this, we established which doctrines and decrees were issued by the Roman Church in reaction to the Poor of Christ, steering the church into a direction which made the Reformation inevitable. We focused on the unique teachings of the Poor of Christ that were carried through to the 16th century Reformation, and influenced the 16th century Reformers. The claim is not that they already covered all of the Reformation teachings, but key ones. Their focus on being Christ centred and guided by scripture crystallised in the formulations: *Solus Christus* and *Sola scriptura* and became key aspects of

Reformation doctrine.

One research objective was to show the important role that laity played in all of this. It was highlighted that the Poor of Christ was a lay movement, and that its strength did not lie in a few highly qualified theologians, but in strong teaching at grass root level, by lay people well versed in scripture and able to communicate in the language of the people, passing on the teachings and values from generation to generation. Thus their impact on the 16th century Reformation was “from below”, from the ordinary people already firm in reformational thinking prior to the Reformation Theologians discovering it.

On the socio-economic and political side, we showed how the Poor of Christ benefited from the windows of opportunity created by the growing trade, where they could work as merchants and move from city to city, not only selling their merchandise, but mainly to proclaim their Christ centred message. We also saw that the *Free Imperial Cities* in some cases became safe spaces where the influence of the Poor of Christ could become wide spread. It was shown that these *Free Imperial Cities* with documented presence of the Poor of Christ played a key role in the early Protestant church formation.

This chapter summarises the findings of the research on each of these areas and brings them together to show that the Poor of Christ indeed played an important role in preparing the soil for the 16th century Reformation.

Previous historians, especially from the 17th and 18th century, (Illyricus, Leger, Lennard, Waldenser Chronick) and then again in the 19th century (Comba, Keller) listed in the Bibliography of this study, assumed a direct line from Valdes to Luther. For instance, Bradley&Muller (2016:24f) state: “The great Protestant chronicle, the *Magdeburg Chronicles*, scanned the Middle Ages for a few faithful forerunners of reform.” One of the strong proponents of this theory, Ludwig Keller, is discussed by Dietrich Fischinger (de Lange 2003: 103-126). Keller’s assumption was that Valdes was part of an uninterrupted line of *altevangelische Gemeinden*, congregations that existed from the time of the apostles, and of which the Waldensians became part, eventually giving birth to the Reformation.

This study does not claim a direct line from Valdes to Luther, but rather shows how the movement impacted on the Roman Church on the one hand, and on communities on the

other, contributing to a change in climate in Europe, especially the Holy Roman Empire which then created space for theologians such as Luther, Zwingli and Calvin to be heard, eventually resulting in the *Reformation explosion* (researcher's term).

The historical contextual analysis and synthesis provide the bigger picture showing this influence.

This method is also followed regarding the maps in Chapter five, where the combined map (page 189) synthesises the known places where the Poor of Christ were active, the frequently visited places by Friedrich Reiser and the areas that were at the forefront in protesting for the Reformation at the Diet of Speyer in 1529. This acts as visual illustration of the impact that the Poor of Christ had.

Martin Luther was not the first reformer – there were many before him, such as Wycliffe and Hus. Leppin (2016, especially from page 16ff), points out that quite a few Reformation core values already feature “before the Reformation”. He focuses on the role of Mysticism in the run up to the Reformation. This study shows the role of the Poor of Christ in this by highlighting the most significant aspects of the teachings of the Poor of Christ which then feature in the 16th century Reformation and showing how many of the core values and teachings continued into the Reformation movement.

In the process possible further research areas will be mentioned but the task of this research is to show that the Poor of Christ played a role so significant, that they should become part of main stream Church History teaching, not only for Reformation History, but also general church history, due to the impact that they had on the *Roman Church* that refused to engage with them in a meaningful way.

It will highlight the role of laity in preparing for the 16th Century Reformation, an aspect deserving much greater attention, since the focus is normally on the theologians. This will then further be expanded on in the final chapter of this study.

A further aspect that will be shown is that of the problematic role that church authorities played in the run-up to the 16th century Reformation. This part will then be further unpacked in the last chapter, showing how such problematic behaviour is repeated across denominations and into our present time.

We will highlight how the importance given by the Poor of Christ to study and live out New Testament teachings impacted on important Reformation doctrines and values. Because of the ministry of the Poor of Christ, these were already part of much wider, but underground, thinking before they were made public by Luther and his co-reformers. It is not a matter of the Reformation theologians first discovering them. For them they might have been new and revolutionary, but for some of the population they were part of their history and upbringing. The 16th century Reformers also discovered them and entered them into the public theological debate within the official church. Due to the printing press the distribution of these doctrines and values was no longer limited to secret, oral transmission, but available to all who could read. Now, finally, the Poor of Christ who had to work in secret could also openly confess what they had been passing on from generation to generation.

Various images can be used for the influence of the Poor of Christ. Opponents of the Reformation movement such as Roth (Chapter four: 160) might want to use the now (in the year 2020) so relevant example of a deadly (COVID 19) virus, and describe the movement as a dangerous virus that caused immense damage to the church. This study however, does not view it as such, but sees it as a crucial voice that the church ignored for too long. The final chapter then will also show which aspects of this voice again need to be heard in present times.

With this positive view in mind, other comparisons are for instance, by Molnár (1993: 330ff), who speaks of the sour dough of the Poor of Christ.

One could also speak of the fertilizer-effect that the Poor of Christ had in in preparing Reformation soil.

A relevant image, preferred for this study, is that of *Climate Change*. With climate change, many factors play a role. Combustion engines, meat consumption, concrete cities – each of these have an influence, and often that influence cannot be shown directly. Brining the various factors together, however, then show the impact on climate change.

To determine the influence that the Poor of Christ had on the 16th century Reformation, a number of factors over a long span of time need to be considered, as was done in the first five Chapters. Together they show how the movement contributed towards the climate

change (impact) that led to the *Reformation explosion*.

In order to show the impact of the POC and their underlining contributions to the Reformation which is one of the key objectives of this research, I shall now bring together what was covered in the previous chapters.

1. Summary of the most important points of Chapters I-V

a) The Political Climate

The political climate between 1150 and 1500 was in many ways ideal, creating a window of opportunity for a movement such as the Poor of Christ to spread and survive. The synthesis of these points created the opportune political climate for the Poor of Christ:

i. The specific political situation of Lyon.

It was the seat for the bishop of the Archdiocese Lyon. The archbishop Guichard had significant political power in the region and was kindly disposed towards Valdes. This gave enough time for the ministry to spread from there into various towns and gain momentum. The Archdiocese was bordering both the Frankish Empire and the Holy Roman Empire, and on a major trade route, resulting in the rapid spread of the Poor of Christ to the North, South and East. (Chapter two: 76f)

ii. Rise of the independent cities.

(Chapter two: 44) As the peasantry could develop itself, the cities became stronger and could develop their own leadership structures. They gradually became a force to reckon with, and, being centres of wealth, were courted by both church and kings. In many cases this created a “safe space” for the work and ministry of the Poor of Christ. They could establish schools, guest houses and even hospitals in these cities, giving them important exposure to larger portions of the population. As shown in Chapter five: 186ff, the *Free Imperial Cities* played a crucial role in the 16th century Reformation.

iii. **Growth of trade routes and general trading.**

(Chapter two: 43) With the rise of the cities and growing wealth amongst ordinary citizens, trade also increased. It became possible for the Poor of Christ to travel from city to city as merchants selling their stock, whilst at the same time continuing with their ministry. As their persecution increased, this “secular trade” became even more important for their survival, since as merchants they could continue their Europe wide ministry, especially in the Holy Roman Empire.

iv. **The general struggle for power**

The power struggle between church and secular authority, pope and emperor, archbishops and kings, bishops and nobility sometimes resulted in regions becoming “open” for the ministry of the Poor of Christ, especially when the secular authority in that region was in conflict with the church. At the same time other regions would become totally inaccessible for the Poor of Christ, when secular authority and church authority had forged an agreement of co-operation. The map showing the spread of the Poor of Christ during the middle ages highlights this. Austria, in the 13th and 14th century was a major stronghold for the poor of Christ, but they almost completely disappeared from there in the 15th century. Germany, on the other hand saw a steady rise of their presence in the 15th century, and at the same time a steady decrease in successful Inquisition hearings.

The Poor of Christ in their early phase had no impact on the political climate, but benefitted from it. However, as the movement expanded, it also started to impact on the political climate – either by bringing secular and church authority together in the fight against heretics, as in Austria, or by influencing the independent thinking in areas where they were tolerated or could operate in secret. In those areas they impacted on the general population with their teaching, and especially their values. This again highlights the importance of laity living their faith. The two main points to be synthesised in this regard are:

v. **The impact of the Poor of Christ on *Free Imperial Cities***

Both Straßburg and Nürnberg were places with strong, continued presence of the

Poor of Christ over long periods up to the 16th century. These imperial cities were major early role players in furthering the protestant movement during its infancy. In this regard further research is needed on what those imperial city delegations brought to the theological discussion at the diet of Augsburg in 1530, in order to show to what extent their contributions were based on the teachings and values of the Poor of Christ and thus preceded the work of the Reformation theologians.

vi. **The impact of the Poor of Christ on political leaders**

The influence of the Poor of Christ on political leaders such as Frederick the Wise (Chapter five, 166) at the moment is circumstantial, but warrants further investigation. The same applies to Georg of Brandenburg-Ansbach and other regents who grew up in areas with known presence of the Poor of Christ. Although for some the main driving force might have been political considerations, for others it was a matter of faith and principle. It still needs to be established whether they were won over by the reformers, or whether the reformational thinking was already part of their upbringing – formally through school masters, and informally through nannies and court staff. To establish this, one would have to research exactly where these and their parents grew up, and the likelihood of close or intimate contact with the Poor of Christ.

b) Church Climate

It might be that Valdes was not the first lay person to possess a Bible in the mother tongue, who was captured by the gospel message and became dedicated to serve Christ, even though being prohibited to do so by his own church. Others before him might have done the same, but remain unknown in history because they failed to survive. The fact that Valdes started off in in the Archdiocese Lyon at the end of the 12th century did give him various advantages, so that he survived and the movement that he started, could grow and spread. Some important points show this very clearly in this research:

i. **The relationship between Pope Alexander III and Archbishop Guichard.**

Valdes had a *good relationship* and understanding with Archbishop Guichard of

Lyon, who in turn had a good relationship with Pope Alexander III. The support of Archbishop Guichard was important for the pope in exile, and might have influenced his attitude towards Valdes of Lyon, when the latter came to see him in Rome (Chapter two: 41).

ii. **The dismal moral state of the church.**

(Chapter two: 51). The primary literature research of the decrees of ecumenical councils in this study showed that it was common cause that priests, bishops and archbishops alike were often heaping up wealth, living a lavish life style, were part of corrupt deals, and were abusing their spiritual position to get money out of the people. Despite council after council condemning this, it continued. In this climate a movement like the Poor of Christ was a fresh breeze, instilling hope amongst Christians.

iii. **Lack of contact between church and its members.**

Due to the moral state of the church and the focus on raising money for cathedrals and personal gain of clergy, there was *very little grass roots contact between church and people*. The 12th century saw the rise of various religious orders, but these were often places of withdrawal and seeking own salvation – creating an even greater gap between the ordinary Christians and the religious people. The Poor of Christ, however, did not establish an order, but were members of the church, living amongst the people to whom they ministered, making them welcome in most societies (e.g. Chapter four: 169).

iv. **Insufficient Theological Training of clergy.**

(Chapter two: 63). The lay Poor of Christ very often were better trained and better equipped to preach and to answer questions. In the early phase they were allowed to preach in churches. When this was forbidden, they continued their preaching and teaching in secret. This provided them the opportunity to impact their context allowing for influence and growth. The knowledge and teaching was passed on from generation to generation, and thus became engrained in communities, who otherwise did not receive teaching from the church.

c) The Impact of the Poor of Christ on the Roman Church

In Chapter three (page 102ff) it was stated that the reaction of the church to the Poor of Christ steered the church into a direction that made the 16th century Reformation a necessity. The church, instead of listening to valid criticism and self-correction took various steps to silence these uncomfortable voices – by bringing them under church authority (*Poor Catholics*), by attempting to compete and out-do them with similar methods of ministry (Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians), by restricting their rights through laws and decrees (various ecumenical and regional councils), by declaring them heretics even though their message was not heretical, and finally by using brutal force to eradicate the movement. Although all of this had an immense influence on the Poor of Christ, the self-inflicted damage this caused to the church itself was much greater. Through its reaction the church became its own worst enemy. The research of decrees and papal correspondence has clearly shown this in the following:

i. Decrees and steps taken by the church in reaction to the Poor of Christ

- 1) Initially the **Bible** was still allowed, but as lay preacher training and preaching spread, lay people were *forbidden* to read, even less possess, a Bible. Bibles in local vernacular were totally forbidden (Chapter two: 134). Experience in South Africa has shown that when an authoritarian state or a corrupt official bans a book, it becomes a “must read”. Thus the forbidden Bibles of the Poor of Christ must have been even more fascinating, capturing the interest of those people in society critical of the church.
- 2) **Restricting the role of women** (Chapter two: 94). This tendency had started long before the Poor of Christ. When the movement started and men and women equally became wandering preachers and teachers, the woman preachers especially caught the attention, since it was not practised in the Roman Church. To have women preachers then became a mark of the heretics and the church became more stringent in banning women from public preaching and teaching roles. This

inadvertently made the church even more male dominated than it already was, and further increased the distance to the general population.

- 3) **Restricting the role of laity in general** (Chapter four: 167). This was done to counter heretical movements where lay people often had leading roles. The Poor of Christ, although also attracting clergy, was predominantly a lay movement. Restricting the role of laity in the church did not prevent these lay people to continue their ministry in secret. These restrictions however, were detrimental to the church itself, since now, even more than before, the lay people of the Poor of Christ were better trained and educated than the average population (Chapter four: 160), and in many cases also better trained than the clergy. Thus, these restrictions did not only hold back the laity in the church, it increased the advantage that the well trained laity of the Poor of Christ had over the general population.
- 4) Tasking the **Augustinian Order** to combat the Poor of Christ. As indicated in this study (page 159) this is something that is generally overlooked by historians. Two matters are of particular relevance for this study:

4.1 The inclusion of the *Poor Catholics*, the officially recognised branch of the Poor of Christ, into the Augustinian Order. Recognising this branch did not yield the intended result, that the rest of the Poor of Christ would follow this much easier route of obedience to the church and therefore not being persecuted. Integrating it into the Augustinian Order also meant that a group, very close to the Poor of Christ and continuing the same ministry with the same approach (Chapter four: 153ff) could now also influence the order from within.

4.2 The instruction to the order was to combat heretics, using their same methods of preaching, teaching and taking confession. The most important one, based on the focus on the Poor of Christ, was the instruction of intense studying of scripture. This was forbidden in other religious orders (Chapter four: 161). It was precisely the study of scripture that made the Poor of Christ aware of the wrongs of the church and lead them to their non-negotiable loyalty to Christ as Head of

the Church. With this instruction to the Augustinian Order, the church had established and promoted an order that would later become a main contributor to the Reformation, informed by the intense study of scripture.

ii. **The Inquisition**

Regarding the Poor of Christ, the Inquisition had only one purpose: To rid church and society from these heretics. If all else failed, the God-sanctioned violence was regarded as an appropriate, even necessary measure. Over the period of this research, many thousand people were imprisoned or executed. Although the Inquisition succeeded to eradicate the Poor of Christ in some areas, ironically it achieved the opposite in others.

The reaction of the church to the Poor of Christ, especially through the Inquisition, did not endear the church to the general population, but rather increased the distance. The fact that the Poor of Christ could not be eradicated – apart from in some areas, where a policy of total destruction was followed (Chapter four: 136, 145) shows that they were much more part of society than the church could imagine.

Furthermore, this reaction resulted in growing resilience of the Poor of Christ, and forced the movement to become more efficient in staying and operating underground and thus surviving.

- 1) The Inquisition forced the movement into the underground. It also prevented the development of strong hierarchical structures and dependence on a few individuals. The original strength of the movement – teachers training new teachers – was continued. Even when one leader was silenced, there were many more that continued the work.
- 2) For research purposes the Inquisition became the major source of information. Much of the things known about the Poor of Christ is because of what was written and documented by Inquisitors. Thus, not only did it not eradicate the movement, it made it possible for studies like this to bring them into the lime light.

- 3) The Inquisition Reports are a valuable tool to establish the spread of the movement as well as the longevity they had in a region. Through these the influence of the Poor of Christ can be better determined and emphasised.

Thus, ironically, the church's weapon of destruction and eradication of the Poor of Christ turned out to achieve exactly the opposite: Its endurance and preserving its memory!

d) Valdes of Lyon

Although very little is known about Valdes of Lyon, and although he did not become a figure such as St Francis to the Franciscan Order, he not only started the movement, but also had a lasting effect on it. Important insights and values that he introduced, were passed on over many generations and eventually helped to shape the 16th century Reformation. These are:

i. Christ as highest Authority

Despite his loyalty to the Roman Church, bishops and the pope, he regarded Christ as the highest Authority to be obeyed and honoured. In cases of conflict he did not see it as his right, but rather as his obligation to obey God rather than men. Thus, his already was a Christ-focused approach, which three centuries later developed into the core Reformation principle of *solus Christus*. As is shown in page 164 of this study, this was a guiding principle for Johann von Staupitz, Luther's mentor and confessor, long before Luther discovered it for himself.

ii. Scripture as guiding Authority

After receiving his own copy of the New Testament in his mother tongue and studying it, he came to the conclusion that the authority of scripture is above the authority of decrees and dogmas of the church. As pointed out in Chapter one (page 26) placing authority of scripture higher than dogmas and decrees of the church was a novel approach and contrary to church dogma. It also meant that he would ultimately question those dogmas and traditions that were contradicting the

New Testament, whilst at the same time accepting those that were not contradicting the New Testament (Chapter one: 26, Chapter two: 114f). Johan von Staupitz echoed these very same thoughts in his last letter to Luther (page 164 of this study). This criterion became an important part of the development of protestant dogma, which should be measured against scripture and was summed up in the words *Sola Scriptura*.

One of the clearest formulations of the principle is found in the Epitome to the Formula of Concord, compiled in 1577 in an attempt to bring together dissenting groups within the young Lutheran Church (<http://bookofconcord.org/fc-ep.php>, accessed 9.05.2020)

Epitome of the Formula of Concord

Comprehensive Summary, Rule and Norm According to which all dogmas should be judged, and the erroneous teachings [controversies] that have occurred should be decided and explained in a Christian way.

1. We believe, teach, and confess that the sole rule and standard according to which all dogmas together with [all] teachers should be estimated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and of the New Testament alone, as it is written Ps. 119:105: Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. And St. Paul: Though an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you, let him be accursed, Gal. 1:8.
2. Other writings, however, of ancient or modern teachers, whatever name they bear, must not be regarded as equal to the Holy Scriptures, but all of them together be subjected to them, and should not be received otherwise or further than as witnesses, [which are to show] in what manner after the time of the apostles, and at what places, this [pure] doctrine of the prophets and apostles was preserved.

iii. A life shaped by the teachings of Christ

Valdes however, did not only emphasise the importance of studying the scriptures. Living by them was integral part of the obedience to Christ. This aspect can be seen in the teachings of both the Reformed and Lutheran Wings of the Protestant Church.

The Heidelberg Catechism states (<http://www.heidelberg-catechism.com/en/lords-days/32.html>, accessed 10.05.2020):

86.Q. Since we have been delivered from our misery by grace alone through Christ, without any merit of our own, why must we yet do good works?

A.

Because Christ, having redeemed us by his blood, also renews us by his Holy Spirit to be his image, so that with our whole life we may show ourselves thankful to God for his benefits, and he may be praised by us.

Further, that we ourselves may be assured of our faith by its fruits, and that by our godly walk of life we may win our neighbours for Christ.

It also features strongly in Luther's Small Catechism, where, in the section on the commandments after explaining what the commandment forbids us to do, follows a "but", stating what a Christian should do. The Fifth Commandment¹⁶ is cited as example: (<http://bookofconcord.org/smallcatechism.php>, accessed 10.05.2020)

The Fifth Commandment.

Thou shalt not kill.

What does this mean?

Answer: We should fear and love God that we may not hurt nor harm our neighbour in his body, but help and befriend him in every bodily need.

¹⁶ Luther introduced a different counting of the commandments. He regarded the second commandment as obsolete, since Christ had become God in visible form. Commandments 3-10 became 2-9, with the last commandment being divided into two, to again have 10 commandments.

iv. **Lay preacher and teacher**

Valdes was a lay person, who could read, teach and preach. As ordinary lay person he was not well versed in dogmatic issues of the Church. This is important for this study, because it meant that he read his mother tongue Bible without the lens of a thousand years of dogmas. Because of this, his preaching and teaching had a fresh New Testament flavour and no doctrinal emphasis. It also meant that, as others were taught and trained to become preachers and teachers, their main handbook remained the Bible, especially the New Testament, resulting in them staying with the core teachings of Jesus for the next 350 years. Although the reformation had a high regard for the ministry of lay people, it did not fully embrace this aspect. The disputes amongst reformation theologians soon led to the breaking up of the protestant movement into factions fiercely fighting each other.

v. **Conviction-driven**

Valdes was driven by the deep conviction: "I must go and proclaim, I must follow Christ" as stated in the gospels, without possessions, living off the mercy of those who receive me (Chapter two: 80). Unlike other mendicant preachers, he chose poverty for the sake of the gospel, not for poverty's sake. It was a matter of following Christ's calling, and in order to do so, get rid of all other issues that can distract him. This approach too contributed towards the Christ-centeredness of the 16th century Reformation.

vi. **Non-judgemental**

Valdes was non-judgemental of others. Unlike the Cathars who saw themselves as the true believers, the enlightened ones, he was very much aware of his own shortcomings, and ministered from a position of humility rather than spiritual superiority. (Murray 2017: 25) This included his attitude towards corrupt clergy, whom he did not condemn outright for their vices, but focused on what Christ calls his followers to do (Chapter two: 81). Although some of the reformers, such as Phillip Melanchthon, displayed a similar attitude, eventually the "hardliners" such as Martin Luther and John Calvin dominated the developments, resulting in mutual condemnation and even damnation. Ultimately the 16th century Reformation failed

dismally in this regard, with condemnation of those who disagreed becoming part of confessional documents, such as CA X, discussed in Chapter five: 192 of this study.

vii. **Loyalty to the Church**

Valdes was loyal to the Church. To him there was only one Church, and he saw himself as fully part of it, respecting its structures and authorities, despite all their shortcomings. He only refused obedience when the church was in opposition to Christ's teachings. For that reason, he sought permission from the pope for himself and his fellow preachers to preach. Even when ultimately he was declared a heretic, he did not separate from the church (Chapter one: 11). This became an important aspect of the movement in the centuries of persecution, where they remained members of the church and participated in as much as their conscience and conviction allowed them to.

For this study it is important to highlight the stance of Johann von Staupitz (Chapter four, 163f) who continued to support Luther, and at the same time remained loyal to the church, aware of all its shortcomings. We have already mentioned the need to also investigate Melancthon in this regard.

Similarly, other early supporters of the Reformation did not support the split of the church. Posset (2017: 182f) mentions as "prominent persons" that sympathised with Luther, but stayed loyal to the church Kaspar Amman, the superior of the Augustinian monastery in Lauingen on the Danube, and Kaspar Haslach, preacher in Dillingen, city of residence of the bishops of Augsburg. These, and many others, are examples of persons whose reformational thinking preceded Luther and the Swiss reformers. A separate study is needed to show who these contemporaries of Luther, Zwingli and Calvin were, but who actually preceded them, and then to establish which of those can be linked to the ministry of the Poor of Christ.

e) Methods of the Poor of Christ

Part of the reason why the Poor of Christ survived is due to the methods of ministry that they employed. The information on these methods was gained in the previous chapters mainly through researching inquisition reports, decrees, papal letters and tracts by opponents. Some of these originated with Valdes, others were developed over time. These are mentioned, because the historical contextual analysis shows that not only did they help the movement survive, but they also played a role in the climate change, creating the window of opportunity for the 16th century Reformation. The following methods of ministry, when synthesised, give an indication of the significant impact:

i. Authenticity - to preach the gospel as a life-transforming message.

Whereas the church to a large extent relied on a message of fear of hell, and offered absolution in exchange for religious exercise or money, which had no direct link to the sin committed, the Poor of Christ called for a life of following Christ and living out especially the Sermon on the Mount. Taking confession was an important part of their ministry, but based in this approach, it was part of a counselling process where guidance was given, rather than linking it to an act of atonement (Chapter two: 91f). This life-transforming emphasis of the ministry had an impact on the larger society in which these authentic transformed lives were lived and appreciated.

ii. Teaching

Teaching was a core activity of the Poor of Christ (Chapter two: 90). Since repentance needed to lead to a new life, Christians needed to know what Jesus had taught, so that they could then live accordingly. The central role of especially the New Testament meant that people were encouraged to learn to read and write (to copy their own version), and, failing that, to at least learn off by heart. Although this teaching was aimed at faith and living out faith, in a society where illiteracy was the norm, those taught by the Poor of Christ would also benefit from these literacy skills in everyday life. This can also become a new study topic, not dealt with in this study: Which learned citizens received their basic skills through the ministry of the Poor of Christ?

Teaching also became a crucial aspect of the protestant movement where very soon catechisms (Luther's *Small Catechism* 1529, *Large Catechism* 1529, Calvin's *Genève Catechism* 1542 and the *Heidelberg Catechism* 1563) were compiled, printed and spread widely. Their intention was to bring the learning into the homes, often with the senior in the house being the teacher, making use of these catechisms.

iii. **Scripture in the local vernacular**

(Chapter two: 88). As the Movement spread, so did parts of Scripture in that region's vernacular appear. Thus the core document of the Church – the Bible – was in the hands of the people, who could then, like Valdes before them, make up their own minds on the practises of their priests, their bishops and what was lacking. The Reformation in all its branches gave a central role to scripture (*Sola scriptura*), and translations into the local vernacular became the norm. Luther highlighted this in his *Vorrede* to the 1539 edition of his works. I cite a portion in German, and then give an English summary. Luther writes¹⁷:

Gern hette ichs gesehen, das meine Buecher allesampt weren dahinden blieben und untergangen. Und ist unter andern ursachen eine, Das mir grawet fur dem Exempel, Denn ich wol sehe, was nutztes in der Kirchen geschafft ist, da man hat ausser und neben der heiligen Schriffte angefangen viel Buecher und grosse Bibliotheken zu samlen, sonderlich on alle unterscheid allerley Veter, Concilia und Lerer auffzuraffen. Damit nicht allein die edle zeit und studieren in der Schriffte verseumet, sondern auch die reine erkenntnis Goettliches worts endlich [2. Kön. 22, 8] verloren ist, bis die Biblia (wie dem fuenfften buch Mosi geschach, zur zeit der Koenige Juda) unter der banck im staube vergessen ist.

Und wiewol es nuetzlich und notig ist, das etlicher Veter und Concilien schriffte

¹⁷ http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:luther-us&rft_dat=xri:luther:ft:werke:Z300015269

blieben sind als Zeugen und Historien, So dencke ich doch: Est modus in rebus und sey nicht schade, das vieler Veter und Concilien buecher durch Gottes Gnade sind untergangen. Denn wo sie alle hetten sollen bleiben, solte wol niemand weder ein noch ausgehen koennen fur den Buechern, und wuerdens doch nicht besser gamacht haben, denn mans in der heiligen Schrifft findet.

Auch ist das unser meinung gewest, da wir die Biblia selbs zu verdeutschen anfiengen, das wir hofften, Es solt des schreibens weniger und des studirens und lesens in der Schrifft mehr werden. Denn auch alles ander schreiben in und zu der Schrifft, wie Johannes zu Christo, weisen sol, wie [Joh. 3, 30] er spricht: 'Jch mus abnemen, Dieser mus zunemen.' Da mit ein jglicher selbs moechte aus der frischen quelle trincken, wie alle Veter, so etwas guts haben wollen machen, haben thun müssen.

(Summary: Luther would have preferred that his own writings would soon be forgotten and left behind. He emphasises the need for people to read Scripture rather than focussing on the many doctrines, decrees and theological writings including his own, many of which are best forgotten, since they distract from scripture. It is useful to read them, but not at the cost of neglecting the study of Scripture.)

Ironically, despite this strong emphasis on scripture, the protestant churches very quickly developed and built on their own sets of doctrines, repeating the pattern that, with time, these doctrines obtained equal, and in reality a higher status than scripture itself. This can be seen where „others“ are condemned if they do not share the own interpretation of a matter. Here again CA, Article X serves as example.

iv. **Focus on the cities**

(Chapter two: 97). Unlike other religious and hermit movements that tended to withdraw from society, the Poor of Christ focused on the cities of Europe. Here it was more difficult for the church to enforce its dominion. But the cities were also the centres of development and thinking, meaning the the ministry of the Poor of

Christ and the values conveyed by it, could also impact on these. As seen in Chapter five, some imperial cities played an important role in defending the cause of the Reformation against pope and emperor at the Diet of Speyer (1529) and Augsburg (1530), and also were leading in implementing reformational changes. Even when persecution forced the Poor of Christ into rural areas as well, the movement survived in some of the *Free Imperial Cities* (see travels of Reiser, Chapter five: 137).

v. **A holistic ministry**

(Chapter two: 96). Their combination of preaching, teaching, counselling and healing was unique, and it was shown that the church attempted to put a halt to this by enforcing the separation of spiritual counselling and physical healing practise (Chapter three:138) The *Meister* and *Meisterinnen* were people that you could go to with any need that you had, be it spiritual or physical. They would not only hear confession, but give counselling to help the people on a road to life. They did not only proclaim a heavenly message or give spiritual counselling, but also attend physical needs. Their ministry made a difference here and now.

The 16th century Reformers similarly had a holistic approach, not only focussing on theological issues and disputes with the church, but also on social matters such as poverty and education. We agree with Pillay (2017:1): *“Thus, the 16th-century Protestant Reformation was an attempt to reform and transform both church and society” “In the minds of the reformers, the church was not standing up to the realities of its time in confronting financial corruption, sexual immorality and political power.”*

After the Reformation however, the various new protestant churches invested too much of their energy in formulating, teaching and defending their dogmas, to a large extent losing sight of the holistic approach that church should have. In almost all of them, however, the focus on schooling for all remained. So, for example, Pillay (ibid: 4) refers to Calvin and Farrell *“establishing free public education for both sexes.”* and Luther took similar actions in Wittenberg.

vi. **The equal treatment of male and female**

(Chapter two: 94). The *Meisterinnen* were not less qualified, less trained. This was a movement where both genders played an equally important role in the holistic ministry. This gave the Poor of Christ a huge advantage over all clergy and religious orders, where men only interacted with the general population as preachers, teachers and confessors. Although there were also female religious orders, there was a strict division between the two. With the Poor of Christ, however, there are documented cases (Chapter two: 94) where male and female travelled together and shared in the ministry.

Male dominated historiography has largely overlooked the role of women in the Reformation. We agree with Bradley&Muller (2016:32) who state that the “emergence of the study of women in history was undoubtedly the most important feature of the historiography of these years” (since 1950s) Now more and more scholars such as K I Stjerna (2009), U Koch (2015) and R Moore (2015) devote their attention to these very important role players. Stjerna (2009:49ff) calls the main portion of her book: “*Women as Models, Teachers and Leaders of the Reformation*”. In it she shares the story of Argula von Grumbach (ibid, 71ff) who said of herself: ““I am called a follower of Luther, but I am not. I was baptized in the name of Christ; it is him I confess and not Luther. But I confess that Martin, too, as a faithful Christian, confesses him.” Argula, at the age of ten, received a German Bible from her father, which she read and studied all her live (ibid 73). Two things are important in view of this study: she started reading the Bible in German in about 1503, long before Luther’s conversion and his translation of the Bible. Secondly, the Bible she used was the *Koberger Bibel*, printed by Anton Koberger in Nuremberg, which, as shown in the previous chapter of this study, was a city with documented presence of the Poor of Christ and part of the early Reformation movement not linked to Luther.

Houston (2017) mentions as example Marie Dentière, an Augustinian abbess: “*She insisted on the liberating power of the Word, especially for women, and believed that the priesthood of all believers applied equally to women and men. She would*

seem a model Reformer”, who, however did not receive the recognition she deserved from her male colleagues. Houston (ibid) correctly observes: “*The doctrine of the priesthood of all the baptised was implemented with unmistakable gender bias and later generations are still grappling with some of the implications.*” This does not only impact on the role of women in church today, but also on the study of role of women in the Reformation.

As more material becomes available, a worthwhile further study will be to establish the influence of the *Meisterinnen*, as well as mothers and nannies taught by them, on the upbringing of important role players in the Reformation, such as Staupitz, Frederick the Wise and George of Brandenburg. Such a study should then also include all prominent women lay theologians of the Reformation and their possible link to the Poor of Christ.

vii. **The lack of a strong hierarchy**

(Chapter one: 2). Unlike other movements, Valdes, although the founder, was not the central authority. As result of the intensive teaching and learning the message of the movement could spread quickly. As trainers taught trainees, who then again trained the next trainee, the growth of the movement was exponential. Even more important was the fact that it did not depend on strong central figures or authorities. Because Valdes taught others, and they in turn became teachers, it was not possible to extinguish the movement by capturing its leaders. This is also evident from the fact that when one of the known leaders, Durand of Huesca, formed the “*Poor Catholics*”, only a fairly small group went with him (Chapter four: 146). The rest of the movement continued, led by a to a large extend unknown band of teachers and preachers. It was only decades after its start, that the movement was named after the founder, Valdes, “Waldensians”. This, however, was not their own choice, but a name given to them by the church, in order to identify them.

When the 16th century Reformation started to identify itself with specific leading theologians such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, Huldrych Zwingli, it also started

breaking up into separate movements, that chose to identify themselves by the name of their central authorities. This contributed even further to the breaking up. Furthermore, it is noticeable that leading lay people, such as George of Brandenburg and lay delegates from the imperial cities were not seen as such leaders, although they played a leading role, not only as political figures, but as contributors in the theological debate and the theological implementation of the Reformation in their territories.

It is ironic that the protestant movement with its strong emphasis on the ministry of all believers has so far failed to give the lay reformation theologians the attention that they deserve. This topic warrants further thorough research, and in view of this study, it would be important to establish the link that some of these lay theologians had with the Poor of Christ.

viii. **The non-negotiable loyalty to Christ as head of the Church**

(Chapter two: 86). For the Poor of Christ, it meant that, although they were fully part of the church, in matters of conflict their ultimate loyalty was towards Christ and his teachings. Again, this is in line with the reformational principle *Solus Christus*, which, as Leppin (2016: 19f) points out, was not Luther's creation, but preceded him through Staupitz and other scholars.

It seems that the Poor of Christ never came to the conclusion that the church was no longer the Church of Christ, unlike other movements such as the Cathars discussed in Chapter two of this study. The Poor of Christ therefore operated in this tension of serving Christ and at the same time being persecuted by the authorities within the Church of Christ. Despite this tension, they did not break away. As mentioned previously this also was the case with Staupitz, who stayed in the Roman Church. Another important Reformation Theologian in this regard was Philip Melancthon, who, even long after the split had already happened, still tried to reconcile the Lutheran and Roman Catholic Churches.

Had the Poor of Christ broken away and formed an independent movement, they would no longer have had an influence on their communities and parishes, and would have had no real impact on the 16th century Reformation at all. It is difficult to fathom how the 16th Century Reformation then would have turned out, whether Luther would have escaped execution, and whether the Reformation would only have happened at a much later stage.

2. Conclusion

The historical contextual analysis and synthesis shows the impact of the Poor of Christ on the 16th century Reformation as threefold:

1. Their influence on the political system, especially the *Free Imperial Cities* and political regions that supported the 16th century Reformation during its infancy. This support was not due to the work of Luther, but based on what already was part of the teaching and values within the population before the Reformation.
2. The influence on the Roman Church. Had the church heeded their voice, it would have self-corrected. However, the church chose not to engage theologically, but rather chose to suppress and eradicate the movement. Because of this, the church moved even further away from its core task and values, increasing the necessity of reformation.
3. Their teaching and values of teaching and studying scripture as highest norm and living a life in obedience to Christ's teachings and Christ as highest authority were passed on from generation to generation. When the Reformation Theologians reformulated these and built on them, they already had many supporters who recognised their own longstanding teachings and values in these.

Swanson (Pettegree 2000:9) quotes P Blicke:

I do not know what motives drove people from the Roman Church and to the reformers, nor does anyone else know it. Why did people around 1515 want to see the Body of Christ in the Eucharist, but around 1525 demand

to hear the Word of God? No one has produced a plausible answer to this question, much less an adequate one. On this point I admit to being as ignorant as anyone else.

We believe that this study does give a plausible answer to the question. It is not that the people underwent a massive change in the period between 1515 and 1525. Rather, the people had long before already studied and heard the Word of God – but now had the courage to confess to this in the open.

We believe that it is correct to say that the 16th Century Reformation did not start in 1517 nor with the theologian Martin Luther, but rather in 1174 with a lay person about whom we know almost nothing, Valdes of Lyon, contemporary of the well-known St Francis of Assisi and St Dominic of Osma.

The next chapter asks the question what the church today can learn from the Poor of Christ. It will highlight important values of the Poor of Christ that can be of immense value for church in the 21st century and help the church deal with current challenges. It will also challenge the church leaders about their ongoing resistance to listen to criticism and to use authority to silence critical voices, rather than engaging in theological debate. It will point out where church and secular authority are in problematic relationships, to the detriment of all people. It will look at the important role of laity in today's church and society and the role that the clergy should fulfil to develop laity. It touches on the still existing resistance in many churches to give equal status and opportunity to women.

Chapter 7 The Poor of Christ: Example for the Church today

The study answers the question: What impact did the Poor of Christ have on setting the scene for the 16th Century Reformation? Part of the answer is found by looking at the impact that the movement had on the church. We established through literature research which doctrines and decrees were issued by the Roman Church in reaction to the Poor of Christ. The historical-contextual analysis showed how this steered the church into a direction which made the Reformation inevitable. We also established which of the teachings unique to the Poor of Christ were carried through to the 16th century and influenced the general population so that they were not only open for the message of the 16th century Reformers, but in some areas had been living according to it long before the Reformation.

The study investigated how the movement, started by a wealthy businessman who gave up his wealth in order to become a possession-less wandering preacher survived for more than 300 years despite the most severe persecution. It was shown that the founder, Valdes, did not play an authoritative, leading role. The secret was his multiplicatory approach. He taught others, who, in turn became teachers as well. Because the movement was not depend on him it could spread.

The historical contextual analysis showed that some of the methods of the Poor of Christ gave them extraordinary resilience and ensured their continuity. The focus here is on the central role of the New Testament in the local vernacular for their teaching. This same “handbook” was thus used from generation to generation, with very little additional material. It provided the normative guide for everyday life of the Poor of Christ. The desire to live according to the teachings of Jesus, especially the Sermon on the Mount, set them apart from many of their fellow citizens in matters such as honesty, humility and general integrity.

These values were passed on from generation to generation, permeating into society at large in those regions where they could minister more openly. As discussed in Chapter

six, the movement in this way contributed to the political climate change, especially in the Holy Roman Empire, the birthplace of the 16th century Reformation. The Poor of Christ, through their ministry, created an atmosphere conducive to the explosion of the 16th century Reformation. The synthesis in the overlay map in Chapter five: 189 shows the strong correlation between the regions and cities where the Poor of Christ were active, and regions and cities that were at the forefront of implementing and defending the Reformation movement in the 16th century.

The study then also pointed out that the *Solus Christus* and the *Sola Scriptura*, which became marks of the Protestant Reformation, were in essence already enshrined in the teachings and values of the Poor of Christ, right from the beginning in 1174 and can be regarded as their most important theological influence on the Reformation. Through historical-contextual analysis it became clear that Valdes was the first to differentiate between the authority of scripture and the authority of dogma and then to give scripture the higher authority, which later led to the formulation of *Sola Scriptura* by the 16th century Reformers. He also, whilst accepting the authority structures within the Roman Church, regarded Christ as the highest authority to be obeyed more than the pope. This Christ-centered approach became visible when church authority forbade him to follow his calling and he refused to heed. The literary research of decrees of the ecumenical councils and of writings against the Poor of Christ showed that this disobedience was the major accusation against the Poor of Christ.

The study shows how this Christ-centeredness features in theologians such as Staupitz, who grew up in areas with documented presence of the Poor of Christ, and brought this approach into their teaching before Luther, and influencing Luther.

Another important aspect that contributed significantly to the impact that the Poor of Christ had on the Reformation was their loyalty to the Roman Church as their only church. Unlike other “heresies” such as the Cathars, who saw themselves as the true church, and the Roman Church as totally wrong, the Poor of Christ remained loyal to the church despite the severest persecution they experienced there. They distinguished between the Church with Christ at its head, and the ordained people in authority, including the pope, who might abuse and misuse their position. They criticised these abuses, but they did not turn their back on the church and establish an own movement. Because of this, their influence

remained within the church, and could then surface within the church at the beginning of the 16th century.

In synthesising all these points, it becomes clear that the Poor of Christ had a much bigger influence on the 16th century Reformation than traditionally seen, and that they deserve to become part of the main stream teaching in this regard, which is one objective of this research.

The Poor of Christ did not survive the 16th century Reformation as a movement within the church. The Romanesque wing became the Waldensian Church, and joined the Reformed wing of the Reformation. The Poor of Christ in the Holy Roman Empire assimilated with the protestant churches in the territories where they lived.

We therefore do not assume an unbroken influence from 1174 till today. The final objective of this research rather is to highlight the lessons that church today can learn from the Poor of Christ. A critical analysis of our current context will show which of their strengths and values have been lost and should be nurtured again.

Chapters two and three dealt with the objective of this study to highlight the problematic role that church authorities have played. We need to ask to what extend post-reformation churches drifted back into problematical church behaviour and are in danger of becoming Church's own greatest enemy? What are we repeating? How can the example of the Poor of Christ help to correct that? What can the church today learn from the example of the Poor of Christ to help it to positively influence the climate of our time in church and society?

The task of history is not only to study the past, but to understand the present and shape the future. By critically looking into our current context and then bringing into it, synthesising the lessons learnt, we aim to fulfil the final research objective which is to make the research findings relevant for our time.

We will focus on the following questions in order to see what the church today can learn from the example of the Poor of Christ:

1. Where can church get resilience from? It seems that the mainline churches in the traditionally Christian Western World are accepting that they are declining. The Term "Post Christian" is used by more and more church historians to describe our times. Tusting

(2004) calls her study: “*Congregational Studies in the UK: Christianity in a Post-Christian Context*” and Granberg-Michaelson (2013) names his book “*From Times Square to Timbuktu: the post-Christian West meets the non-western church*”

On the other hand, Christianity in Africa seems to be on the increase, and the term: *Post Christian* in many African Countries would be incorrect. Maluleke (Ross 2018: South Africa) shows an annual growth rate of Christianity in South Africa in the period 1975 to 2015 of 2.15%, whereas the total population grew by 1.98% annually. The largest growth is recorded in the Pentecostal (4,08%) and Independent churches (3,52%). Although the “traditional” churches – Roman Catholics, Anglicans and Protestants (he groups them together) all show an increase of between one and two percent, their percentage as part of the total population has been declining, with the Protestant group showing the largest decline from a share of 28.7% in 1975 to 19.25 in 2015, and a total growth of only 1.8% pa, the lowest of all groups listed. This is significant in view of this study. Simply to assume that times have changed, and ascribe decline to that, analysing the context in the light of results of the previous chapters in this study we need to ask: Are mistakes of the past being repeated? This will be dealt with as the second question.

However, if one looks at the greater region of the Sub Saharan Africa, a different picture emerges. Nyomi, in discussing Protestants in the region (Ross 2018: Major Christian Traditions) shows the growth of Protestants as portion of the total population rising from 9.3% to 16.6%, with the strongest growth in Eastern Africa (7% to 18.7%)

In the Lutheran context, during the last 20 years the growth in Eastern Africa has been substantial, so that the region now has the biggest Lutheran Churches globally: The *Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus* with 8,7million members, and the *Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania* with 7,6 million members.

(Source: <https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/member-churches>; accessed 11.05.2020)

Is the growth in one area and the decline in another purely because of external influences? This study looked at values and methods that gave the Poor of Christ resilience. Are some churches purposefully or inadvertently following similar principles as the Poor of Christ, leading to growth and expansion, whilst others are lacking some or most of these values

and methods, which then might be the real reason for their decline?

2. Which mistakes is church repeating? The third research objective was to show the problematic role of church authorities. Part of the reasons for the success and survival of the Poor of Christ lay in the mistakes that the church made and failed or refused to correct. The Literature research in chapters two and three pointed out that time and again councils issued decrees and constitutions against heretics simultaneously with decrees addressing corruption and moral decline amongst its clergy. They did not make the connection that movements such as the Poor of Christ would blossom as long as the church remained corrupt. The historical contextual analysis showed that, although these councils did point out the mistakes, there was no real effort made in dealing with them. This was in stark contrast with the zeal of the church to implement the other decrees, aimed at silencing the critical voices of the so-called heretics.

Asking which mistakes the church is repeating, in the South African context this chapter focuses on two matters, firstly on the relationship between secular and church authority. It was shown in chapters two and three of this study that unhealthy relationships between church and secular authorities, either in the form of a power struggle, or in the form of an unholy compromise and co-operation removed the church from its grass roots, and from its calling. In this chapter we will look at the relationship between church and state during Apartheid, and then again in the time after the democratically elected government. In both cases the examples of unhealthy relationships and positive counter actions will be shown.

The second matter is that of clerical authority and abuse of such authority, addressed especially in chapter two of this study. Learning from past mistakes, this study challenges those in authority to investigate their leadership style and compare it to the example set by the Poor of Christ, that of humble, serving, equipping leadership.

3. What positive impact can church have on society? The historical contextual analysis showed that the holistic ministry of the Poor of Christ always had an impact on the society where they operated. The inquisition reports show that, despite the severe persecution, their faith and calling was not aimed at themselves and their own preservation, but on living out and sharing the message of Christ, often by exemplary life style underpinned by teaching in private homes and in secret. They did not have to reach

out to people, but rather people felt drawn to them because of how they were.

The study pointed out in Chapter two that the Poor of Christ had a holistic ministry, with the healing ministry being an important aspect of their work, and often the first reason why people came to see them. They did not distinguish between spiritual care and physical care – it was all part of the one command of Jesus to go out and preach, teach and heal. Diaconia is not a tool to fulfil the calling of the church, but part of the calling itself. We can learn from their example how church can and should impact on society.

Another important aspect that this chapter will touch on, is ecumenism. The Poor of Christ operated within the one and only church they knew and that they believed to be the Church of Christ, to which they were loyal to the end. Christianity today exists in a hugely divided context. What does loyalty to the church mean in this day and time? To which church, or which part of the greater church should I be loyal? Maluleke (Ross 2018: South Africa) lists eight subdivisions of Christians in his overview of Christianity in South Africa: Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Independents, Protestants, Anglicans, Pentecostals and Evangelicals. Of these only the Roman Catholics are operating as one church. All the others are divided into countless denominations, many of them not in altar and pulpit fellowship and in fierce competition with each other. An outsider who asks: “What does the church believe?”, will get a thousand different answers, since each denomination will give its own particular explanation, often including condemnation of others in that response.

Such a divided church uses enormous energies to fight fellow Christians, energy that is lost and no longer available to impact on society. Therefore, following the example of the Poor of Christ, loyalty to the one Church of Christ transcends denominational divisions and recognises the Church of Christ in the others, despite all differences in dogma and interpretations. The study will offer the focused approach rather than the fenced approach as the one that will assist denominations to work together, and Christians to accept those from other denominations as brothers and sisters in Christ.

In chapter one it was stated that “church”, whilst referring to the (Western) Roman Church as opposed to the (Eastern) Orthodox Church, is not referring to the Roman Catholic denomination. In the understanding of the Poor of Christ there was only this one church

of Christ, and they were part of it. Similarly, when in this chapter the term “church” is used, it does not refer to a specific denomination, unless stipulated as such, but to the Church of Christ in its multiple expressions and denominational divisions. The lessons learnt are not aimed specifically at the researcher’s denomination (Lutheran), but are believed to be valuable lessons for any church denomination or grouping and can assist the Church of Christ to be “*salt of the earth*” and “*light of the world*” (Matthew 5, 13-16)

1. Where can church get resilience from?

The New Testament book of Acts 5, 35-39 relates the discussion in the Jewish Sanhedrin, on how to deal with the followers of Jesus and the movement that was starting to develop. One of the leaders, Gamaliel, offers this advice:

“Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”

With this advice Gamaliel challenges his fellows to consider the possibility that the followers of Jesus of Nazareth might actually not be rebels, but people following God’s call. He points out two issues: If it is not from God, it will come to an end by itself. If it is from God, and we end it, we have acted against God! To put it in different words: If a faith movement is authentic, it cannot be stopped.

The history of the Poor of Christ is a practical example of the truth of these words. Despite a long drawn out struggle by the church to eradicate them, it did not succeed. A core reason is the authenticity of the movement.

a) Authenticity

When Valdes started his lay ministry he was not copying what others were doing. Although there were other religious orders taking a vow of poverty, in his case he chose that route not because he regarded poverty to be a virtue in itself, but for the sake of becoming a wandering preacher, proclaiming the message of Christ. He came to this conclusion because of his encounter with the New Testament message of Christ which transformed his life. For him it was a calling by Christ himself, that he could not ignore, but had to act on, even if it cost him all of his significant possessions.

When challenged by the church, he attempted to obtain permission to work within the legal frame work of the Roman Church. When this was not granted, he came to the conclusion that the authority of Christ supersedes that of church leadership, and that, first and foremost, he had to obey Christ as revealed to him in scripture. The historical-contextual analysis showed that this conclusion of Valdes was unique, since the New Testament itself does not yet deal with the issue of its own authority versus the authority of church leaders. It only knows the tension between the Apostles and Jewish leadership, already referred to above. In the case of Valdes, however, the opposition did not come from outside, but from his Christian leaders, his own church authority, who believed to be representing Christ.

His conviction was that Christ was calling him, and what he heard it was backed by the gospels. His resultant actions were in line with the gospels and the instructions of Jesus. This brought him to the conclusion that he had to obey the highest authority, which is not the pope and church hierarchy, but Christ.

If one now applies the advice of Gamaliel: *"...if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God"* we argue that indeed their calling was from God and authentic, since it could not be stopped, not even by the harshest of measures taken against them.

Christianity in many former Christian strongholds in the Western world is on the decline. The German Protestant churches –stronghold of the initial Reformation explosion, had a study done on why the church (both Protestant and Roman Catholic) is so drastically declining. *Kirche im Umbruch* it is called. The Web page of the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD) states:

“Kirche im Umbruch - Reformprozesse anstoßen – Neues wagen“

Wie kann die evangelische Kirche auch in Zukunft Menschen von sich überzeugen? Sie muss vorhandene Strukturen kritisch prüfen, neue Angebote - vor allem für junge Erwachsene - entwickeln und frische Impulse setzen.¹⁸

A main focus is on the question: What needs to be done differently? Where do we need to change our approach? They see the answer in re-looking structures and finding new things to offer, especially for young adults, giving fresh impulses. Many traditional declining churches globally are asking similar questions, seeking the solutions in similar approaches.

Based on what we learn from the Poor of Christ we believe what is lacking in this German study is the focus on the core of the problem: Loss of authenticity. What makes church to be Church? It is the life-transforming message of Christ that encompasses all aspects of life: Spiritual matters and daily encounter in the community and workplace. When this life-transforming message is either taken for granted (and ignored) or no longer passed on from generation to generation, church can only decline. Merely offering new impulses and changing structures does not create authenticity. Developing programmes to attract people cannot replace authenticity.

The Poor of Christ did not survive because they had a strong central head office

¹⁸ <https://www.ekd.de/kirche-im-umbruch-projektion-2060-45516.htm> Accessed 15 April 2020).

that developed strategies and programmes in order to ensure their continuation over centuries, structures that are today often thought to be essential. Their methods, discussed in chapter six of this study show, that they survived and spread, because the people passed on the message from generation to generation. The *laos*, the people of God are the essential carriers of God's Word, not out of tradition, but from conviction. Due to the severe persecution they could not afford to merely stick to tradition. Living their faith and values was extremely dangerous, and needed conviction that it was the right and only thing to do. Their network of *Meister* and *Meisterinnen* were no overseers policing the members, to keep them in line, but trainers, teachers and supporters to the local families and communities, strengthening their resolve to live their faith. Their confession-sessions were no religious obligation, but life-supporting sessions providing counselling, mentoring and spiritual guidance in extremely difficult circumstances.

When the Roman Church attempted to counter the Poor of Christ by copying their methods, discussed in chapter four, they did not succeed, because they lacked authenticity, and had a different purpose in mind.

We can learn from the Poor of Christ and their history to ask the right questions: Are we as church still busy with our core function – to proclaim the life-transforming message of Christ, and to assist Christians to live out this faith?

Can this life-transforming message be heard clearly in our proclamation?

Do we equip our people, the *laos*, laity, to stand on their own feet, answer to their faith, and pass it on to their own children?

Do we equip parents to teach their children?

Do we as leaders allow the message of Christ to challenge us and our leadership?

In this regard Christianity in Ethiopia can provide a positive example. Eshete (Ross 2018, 156ff) discusses the development of Christianity in that country. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) not only is the oldest church in Africa, it is amongst the oldest in the World, tracing its roots to New Testament times. As the Ethiopian empire expanded, the emperor ensured that the EOC expanded with it. In real numbers it grew. However, in relation to the total population, it remained at

a constant 39%. The Protestants, Pentecostals and Evangelicals together however, were a mere 6% of the population in 1975, but in 2015 42% of the members belonged to them (ibid, 158).

Eshete gives as one reason that Emperor Haile Selassie wanted to modernise the EOC, but *“both the lower-level priests and its upper-echelon hierarchy, was resistant to change”* (ibid). He then points out:

Above all, a radical move made by the Emperor was the instrumental role he played in the publication in 1961 of the Bible in Amharic, the local language. This had huge unintended consequences, as it shifted the knowledge centre of the source of the Christian faith from a special priestly elite to the ordinary people – a factor that inadvertently undermined the historic church. The availability of the translation of the message into the national language is one of the crucial factors that facilitated the spread of the Evangelical faith in Ethiopia.

It is fascinating to see a pattern from this study being repeated in this event: The people get access to the Bible in their mother tongue and start living their faith based on their interaction with scripture. The established church resists reform, however, due to the existence of many denominations, the people then join where they are allowed to live their faith.

Similar observations can be made regarding the growth and spread of Christianity in Tanzania. Gitau (Ross 2018:121ff) describes the development there. Tanzania did not have ancient churches. Most of the existing ones, including the Roman Catholic Church, arrived in the middle to end of the 19th century. All of them have experienced significant growth in the period between 1975 and 2015. Gitau mentions as important aspects in the growth the translation of scripture into local vernacular and the emphasis on teaching.

The supply of the printed Scriptures, first-time writing of grammars, liturgies and catechism excited inland communities so that evangelism progressed quickly during the colonial decades. (ibid: 122)

As with the Poor of Christ, the availability of scripture in their own language and equipping the *laos* to read and understand the message meant that the Christian faith could become a lived faith, leading to its rapid spread in all denominations, since they all promoted it. Faith then was no tradition, but a way of life.

b) Focused, rather than Fenced theology and dogma

The terms „*focused*” and “*fenced*” *theology and dogma* are created by the researcher, based on the observations of this study.

Fenced theology refers to the approach where a church defines what is “inside” and permissible, and what is “outside” the fence, and therefore to be rejected. The purpose of *fenced theology and dogma* is to state in as much detail as possible what the denomination believes, leaving little room for interpretation, and no room for contradiction.

In Chapter two we saw how the Roman church over centuries developed doctrines to define itself and to define who heretics were. The decrees and dogmas issued by the Roman Church in view of the Poor of Christ served to erect fences in order to clearly state who is inside, and who is not.

Focused theology is that theology that has a focal point which is non-negotiable. In the case of the Poor of Christ this focal point was Jesus Christ. When that focus is maintained, there is room for different interpretations on almost every matter. *Solus Christus* is the key approach in focused theology and means that only Christ defines Church, and therefore Church is, where Christ is the focal point. If that focus is lost, one literally “misses the point” and church loses its core function.

Although the 16th century Reformation in its early phase was focused – best summed up in the “*sola scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia, solus Christus*” explaining the core of its faith, it soon moved into the “fenced mode”. The Augsburg Confession of 1530 already shows this shift happening (Chapter six:192). Although it clearly states what Protestants believe (focus), it starts erecting fences to indicate what is not acceptable. CA X (Chapter VI:191 in this study)

then takes it one step further by condemning those who have a differing view of communion, resulting in the protestant split into the Reformed and Lutheran churches. The Lutheran Orthodoxy continued this process of clearly defining who is part of the church and who is not, not by focusing on the four “sola”, but through erecting the fences and defining in more detail as to who is in and who is out, resulting in the splitting up into Lutheran Churches that have no pulpit and altar fellowship with each other.

When fenced theology dominates, members of that denomination can comfortably exist within the fences without having any focus on Christ at all. Preachers can be ordained, examined on what is within the fenced dogmas, without them having Christ as their focal point. We believe that this is a major reason why Christianity in the first world is on the decline. The confessional writings are examined and taught, but all too often the focus on Christ, taken for granted, is ignored.

The resilience of the Poor of Christ can also be ascribed to this focused approach. In the beginning it was a conscious decision by Valdes and the early preachers and teachers to focus on Christ and his message. Due to the growing, severe persecution, the movement could never develop an extensive system of dogmas and theology. They had to rely on what they could memorise or secretly copy: the New Testament and its core message. This is what was then also taught to each new generation. Thus the persecution, in a way, forced them to stay focused on their centre, and this ensured the continuation of the movement with its core message for more than three hundred years.

As this study is being completed, South Africa, as well as many parts of the world, is in lockdown due to the COVID 19 Virus. People are not permitted to leave their homes, except for buying food or emergency issues. Almost all businesses had to close their doors, factories stopped producing, in short, the economy is coming to an almost complete standstill. As a result of this, many day labourers are without an income, and large portions of the population are facing a severe hunger. In this crisis situation, many churches fortunately adopt

the “focused” approach, and based on the common belief in Christ, join hands to reach out to these people in need. Just one of many examples is quoted here, reported in the Mercury Newspaper on 14 April 2020 (<https://www.iol.co.za/mercury/news/kzn-churches-pledge-r1-million-to-assist-with-covid-19-relief-efforts-46679262>, accessed on 13 May 2020):

Durban - Churches, Christian associations, ecumenical networks and ministers' fraternals have banded together to pledge R1 million towards Covid-19 relief efforts in KwaZulu-Natal. ... Chairperson of the KwaZulu Natal Church Leaders Group and Chairperson of the KZN Inter Religious Council, Cardinal Wilfrid Napier, said they affirmed the generous and commendable example set by Ramaphosa, the Cabinet and the Premiers who pledged a third of their salary to the Solidarity Fund.

This is a powerful gesture of inestimable symbolic value. We gladly notify you that the Churches across the KwaZulu Natal province, are pledging R1 million to the relief emergency in our province. ...

Other elements of their provincial plan include: communications and awareness; pastoral care and advocacy around social and economic vulnerability. All of this is undergirded by an inter-denominational space for prayer and reflections on the life-affirming theology of care in the face of the pandemic," he said.

The last sentence quoted is of particular significance for this study, since it illustrates that the crisis also brings together people from different denominations in prayer. Suddenly the fences come down.

Another example to this from the COVID 19 Crisis is that of families celebrating divine services together in their homes, since all religious gatherings are prohibited. Of particular relevance are the “mixed families”, where, within one household the people belong to different denominations, and normally would each attend at their own church, but now worship together. In the researchers' own denomination, there are two strands of Lutherans who do not have altar or pulpit fellowship, the division going through families. Again it is observed that during this crisis in many

cases the fences came down, and the combined focus on Christ as head of the church was sufficient for these to celebrate together. Prior to the crisis the fences would have prevented it. We believe that difficult times force believers to distinguish between what really matters, and what matters less, resulting in cooperation rather than maintaining fences and in that increasing the resilience of church.

We believe that denominations will immensely benefit if they can also stay focused in ordinary times. For that to happen, church leadership needs to ensure that the core message is known, taught and valued. It must be stated clearly that their focus and core message is shared by the large body of churches, and not only by their denomination.

A focused theology does not exclude specific doctrinal developments. Even when focused on Christ and scripture, there is a huge scope for differing interpretations and resulting doctrines. The church doctrines must be seen as what they are: Interpretations of scripture, and acknowledging that differing interpretations exist as well, and that it is good to be aware of them and interact in discussion. The key question should always be: Do we agree on the core, and not: Do we agree on the many interpretations. Such a focused approach will result in much more diversity within the church, since the interpretations do not act as fences which may not be passed, but as pointers to the centre. In a focused approach, the diversity is not weakening, but rather strengthening the resilience of church since diversity encourages critical self- reflection and mutual learning. Especially in chapter two we saw how detrimental, even self-destructive it is for church not to allow for that.

Another matter that needs to receive ongoing attention is that of past condemnations amongst Christian churches. This study has shown in chapter three, how the church, through its condemnation and excommunication has often silenced voices that it desperately needed to hear. The condemnations issued during the 16th and subsequent centuries need to be revoked and replaced by the focused statement of what we believe, rather than what we do not believe and reject. The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ), first signed by Lutheran and the Roman Catholic Churches in 1999 is an important step in this

direction. Martin Junge, the current General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, writes about this declaration (Junge 2019:253):

First, the declaration sought to overcome one of the most – some would say the most – contentious issues at the time of the Reformation that led to mutual condemnations being pronounced against each other by Catholics and Lutherans. It stated that there is now a consensus in "basic truths" between Catholics and Lutherans concerning the doctrine of justification. We know that other factors contributed to the division as well. Political, economic, and social interests played an influential role, and took advantage of the theological dispute for their own benefit. However, the theological question of how human beings receive salvation was the trigger and catalyst of the conflict.

Second, the Joint Declaration used a new method, which allowed us not only to describe this common ground on the basic truths of faith, but also to express our differences without questioning the consensus that we had identified. It is the method of "differentiated consensus," or "differentiating consensus."

Junge highlights two issues that are of importance for this study: The agreement focuses on the core subject of salvation. The 16th Century mutual condemnations effectively declared the other as non-Christian and non-Church. He then continues to describe the "new method" used, which is very much in line with what this study has suggested: It is not about agreeing on all matters, but rather about agreeing on the core and acknowledging differences. This "differentiating consensus" has opened up further discussions also with other denominations. Since the original signing by the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation on behalf of all its member churches in 1999 (ibid:252) other protestant denominations have added their signatures: The World Methodist Council in 2006 (ibid: 255), and the World Communion of Reformed Churches in 2017 (ibid: 262). The Anglican communion "*affirmed the substance*" of the JDDJ in 2016 (ibid).

A special point to mention in the light of this study is that the Waldensian Church, which grew out of the Romanesque wing of the Poor of Christ, is part of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. Therefore, when this document was signed in 2017, it means that more than 800 years since their being declared heretic, they and the Roman Catholic Church agreed on a core aspect that gave rise to the movement in the first place!

Junge points out that Lutherans and Catholics, since the signing in 1999 have then started discussions on further aspects of doctrinal differences and condemnations (ibid:251):

The "differentiated consensus" method made it possible to speak of a "receptive ecumenism" that describes an overall approach to ecumenical engagement. Confident of the vast common ground made up by the many things we hold in common, it sets out to receive the otherness of the other, if not as a gift, then at least as a question and a challenge to one's own identity and ways of being the church.

A direct result of this process was the apology of the Lutheran Churches to the Mennonite World Council for the wrongs committed by Lutherans against the Anabaptists during the Reformation and afterwards.

The *focused approach*, agreeing on the core aspect, makes it possible to then tackle other difficult subjects, as Junge points out (ibid:264): *"We recently reached agreement on the subject of our next dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church. It is going to be about "Church, Ministry and Eucharist." Nothing less than that."*

This JDDJ also impacted on the Churches in South Africa. As the Protestant churches were busy preparing for the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation in 2017, the Catholic Bishop's Conference approached the researcher, a Lutheran Bishop, with the request to meet and establish a South African JDDJ forum, especially in view of the Reformation Anniversary Celebrations. The circle was soon enlarged to include all the churches that have since adopted the JDDJ. The South African group had already started with the discussion on Eucharist, even before it was announced by Junge.

This study pointed out in chapter five that various reformation thinkers such as Johan von Staupitz, Phillip Melanchthon and attendees of the Poor of Christ at the Synod of Chanforan were against separating from the Roman Church, and ascribed it to the value of loyalty to the one Church of Christ, lived by the Poor of Christ. A focused theology with this loyalty to the one Church will make it possible to discuss many difficult topics, and also to agree to disagree on many.

c) Loyalty to the one Church of Christ

As shown in Chapter five of this study (pg. 170) the Romanesque wing of the Poor of Christ with time survived in isolation and developed its own church structures, which later became the Waldensian Church. The German wing, however had been part of society and existed within the church, despite being persecuted by it.

They managed to distinguish between the Church of Christ and the human impact on it. During the Reformation people like Staupitz (Chapter five: 166) supported the reformational thinking, but did not support a split of the Church.

When the split then happened, it resulted in a continuous process of further splitting up of the protestant movement, with condemnation of those who believed differently. It was only in the 20th century that the awareness of the one global church of Christ started to gain ground again in the rise of ecumenical bodies. But even they often still had an attitude of “us and them”, those who belong, and those who do not quite belong.

In South Africa there are various ecumenical bodies that demonstrate this. The Church Unity Commission was started in 1968. Duncan (2011:19) lists the participating churches as “*Church of the Province of Southern Africa the United Congregational Church of South Africa, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in South Africa, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa and the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa*”.

The intended full unity was never achieved. With time other Protestant churches were invited as observers and later as members. It is, therefore, a strong ecumenical body, but excludes the Evangelical and Pentecostal Churches.

Duncan states (ibid:37):

In the general sphere of ecumenism, a significant issue relates to the manner of approach to Church unity. The predominant approach tends to be protectionist, i.e. how can churches unite by retaining as much of their historical traditions as possible and making the minimum of concessions to other traditions? This approach is focused on maintaining the past and allowing it to dominate the present and future.

Even in ecumenical engagement it seems that the “fenced” approach ultimately lead to erecting boundaries. Matters such as infallibility and inerrancy of scripture, faith baptism vs infant baptism, manifestation of the Holy Spirit, ordination of women have become fences that determine who belongs, and who not.

The “focused” approach, acknowledging that Christ is the head of the Church, which has many manifestations and countless differing theologies can lead to better co-operation while at the same time respecting the differences.

We can learn from the Poor of Christ that the loyalty to the one Church of Christ should supersede the loyalty to the own denomination. The German wing of the Poor of Christ stayed in the church and parishes and because of that had a much greater impact on church and society than the isolated Romanesque wing. Their focus on Christ allowed them to stay loyal to the church, even though they had significant doctrinal disagreements on issues such as purgatory and the role of laity.

How can this loyalty to the Church of Christ be implemented in a society like South Africa with such a divided church? The current COVID 19 crisis provides an example of how that can happen. The South African Council of Churches (SACC) made a passionate call on all its member churches to work together rather than next to each other, to address issues arising from the lockdown. During the weekly Zoom meetings of Church Leaders¹⁹ this was a major topic of discussion. Within

¹⁹ The researcher is part of this group of Church leaders, participated in all the meetings and

the first weeks of the lockdown a “SACC Local Ecumenical Action Network (LEAN) - Starter Pack”²⁰ was sent to all member churches. It defines a LEAN as

...an existing network (e.g. fraternal, alliance etc.) or new group of ten or more churches · from a local neighbourhood · from different denominations · that have connected with each other · to collaborate with local action during the Covid-19 pandemic in South Africa.

During the weeks that followed it became increasingly clear how difficult it was to get LEANs going, due to lack of ecumenical interaction on a local level. From the oral reports given at meetings it emerged that some LEANs consisted of clergy from one denomination only, ignoring all the other denominations in the area. In the “COVID ISSUES UPDATE FOR SACC CHURCH LEADERS APRIL 30, 2020” the General secretary writes:

We are behind on the application of local pastoral care because of the slow process in gathering LEANs. It must be made clear that our campaign for a national network of LEANs is out of no desire to control local churches; it is to facilitate an efficient and responsive network of church care and “church in action”.

Fortunately, as the crisis grew, more and more clergy realised the benefit of such co-operation. LEANs could make a significant impact in their areas, due to the combined effort of all the churches.

Chapter five of this study showed that the Poor of Christ impacted on their communities through their credibility and life style based on the teachings of Christ. Where Christians from different churches are eager to live out their faith and develop an all-surpassing loyalty to the Church of Christ, ecumenical co-operation flourishes, to the benefit of general society.

received all the material cited from the SACC.

²⁰ available at <https://churchinaction.org.za/index.php/resources-tools/church-leaders/lean>, accessed on 20.05.2020

d) Strengthening laity

When speaking about the Reformation and its important role players, immediately the name of theologians come to mind. The historical contextual analysis and synthesis showed that, although the theologians were key in putting on paper the theological statements, the Reformation would have stayed a theological debate, had it not been for the strong basis of support from lay people. As can be seen from the Diet of Speyer, the lay people did not only represent secular authority, but to a large extent were fully involved in the theological debate, contributing from their own knowledge and thinking.

The Poor of Christ in essence were a lay-led movement. *Lay* is often misunderstood as meaning theological illiteracy. This clearly is not the case when looking at the Poor of Christ. They might not have known many of the theological debates of their times, but they could very well formulate a faith response when asked. The *Liber Antiheresis* discussed in chapter two of this study, is an extensive handbook to train the lay preachers in theological debate. As was shown in Chapter five: 169 the training of their lay *Meister* and *Meisterinnen* was intense. They in turn did not keep their knowledge to themselves, but passed it on to the people that they cared for. This study had also pointed out that church authorities lamented the fact that the preachers of the Poor of Christ were often better equipped to preach and teach than the clergy (Chapter two: 63), and even secretly admired the fact that ordinary people could read, write and give account of their faith. Had the Poor of Christ depended on well-trained ordained theologians, they would not have survived. Instead they focused on equipping and enabling ordinary people, who could then pass on what they had learned and continued to learn, to the next generation, even in the absence of *Meister* and *Meisterinnen*, and in the long periods between being visited by them.

The ministry of the Poor of Christ was empowering the laity, who could stand their own ground as teachers and theologians. It was shown in chapter six: 190 that the population of the imperial cities played an important role in establishing the Reformation. Their contributions show that it was not a political opinion, but a theological one that resulted in their stance.

As pointed out with regard to church growth in Ethiopia, when lay people are empowered to study scripture, it brings in a whole new dynamic into church life. Lay people are normally the first teachers to young children – either as parents, or through children’s ministries. The better they are equipped, the firmer the foundation for the next generation will be.

For any church to be resilient, it needs to have a strong focus on the training and equipping of lay people. They need to be able to answer to what they believe. This goes much deeper than memorising a catechism and reciting the “right” answer when asked.

The researcher has worked in communities where a strong emphasis was placed on reciting Luther’s small catechism off by heart, but without reflecting on it. Many people could recite the explanation of the second article of the Apostolic Creed:

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won [delivered] me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, in order that I may be [wholly] His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true. (Luther’s Small Catechism <http://bookofconcord.org/smallcatechism.php> accessed on 10.05.2020)

It clearly states that salvation was achieved by Christ. It even ends with “*This is most certainly true*”. He made a point to ask each new group of confirmands: How do I get to heaven? Almost without fail the response was: *By keeping the commandments*. When talking to the parents about this, they too did not make the connection and even were proud that their children “knew the answer”.

This is just one of many examples which illustrate that reciting without reflection can be meaningless.

Both the *Heidelberg Catechism* and *Luther's Small Catechism* follow the pattern of asking questions and then providing the answer. The intention is that Christians must know what they believe. However, when question and answer are merely recited without understanding it becomes a futile exercise.

For that reason, it is important that critical thinking and reflection is encouraged. As with the Poor of Christ, significant emphasis must be placed on the study of scripture, so that Christians don't just learn the "right" answer off by heart, but are challenged to answer the catechism questions based on what they have learnt from scripture. Critical reflection on the teachings of the own denomination must be encouraged.

The Poor of Christ, as members of the Roman Church, were critical of their own church and presented alternatives which sustained them but were not tolerated by the church. Lay members, equipped and encouraged to think critically about their own denomination, are not a threat, but contribute to the resilience of a faith community, helping it to focus on what really matters.

Another important aspect of the Poor of Christ was the training that happened in the homes. It was necessitated by the danger that they operated under, but it had the positive result that in these small groups the teaching and learning could be much better achieved than through large gatherings.

During the 2020 COVID 19 lockdown, in South Africa all religious gatherings were banned. This took effect shortly before Easter. Initially there was huge resistance against this, since congregating to pray, to worship and celebrate is an integral part of the Christian Faith. Churches however, had no choice but to comply. They were left with three options: not to have any worship services, which was unthinkable; have virtual services recorded and accessed via Internet, or to have divine services in the homes, led by a member of the household. Denominations with a strong tradition of house groups could easily adapt to these circumstances. Those, however, with an exclusive focus on priest-led services battled with this situation.

This applies even more to the issue of Holy Communion. The Poor of Christ, as a rule, received the Eucharist from their parish priest. However, when banned from

attending, they celebrated in their homes. Holy Communion was too important to be skipped.

With the lockdown, debates started as to what to do regarding Holy Communion, since it is an integral part of the life of most denominations. The responses varied, based on the theological positions of denominations.

The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Johannesburg wrote to his diocese: “*The Holy Father has granted in the Decree in Time of COVID-19 the faculty to all priests to celebrate this Mass ALONE and omit the procession to the place of repose*” (https://www.radioveritas.co.za/images/PDFs/Response_to_the_National_Lockdown_Covid-19.pdf, accessed on 14.05.2020)

The Anglican Church in Southern Africa had the following post on their webpage, by Retired Bishop Geoff Quinlan (**bold** is part of quote):

I have begun **celebrating the Eucharist on line** in a way that allows participants to make their communion. I use the full Eucharistic service with the Consecration Prayer and ask participants to have bread and wine with them at home for consecration. In the Eucharistic prayer I then consecrate, by intention, the bread and the wine before me and also that in the homes of communicants.

The Apostolic Faith Mission in South Africa instructed its members in a statement issued by the National Office Bearers on 24 March 2020 that during lockdown all liturgical services, including *the Lord’s communion*, are suspended.

Larson, presumably a Lutheran, describes the debate that has gone viral in his community (2020:1): “*This debate concerns whether Holy Communion is legitimate when done “virtually” over the internet. This debate is serious.*” As the ban on services continued, he observed the debate became “*more civil*”, since the fasting from communion was extremely difficult to all involved. In this process the debate shifted to asking: What prevents us to celebrate “virtually”, since all elements are present. In his context the debate resulted in having such virtual Communion Services, where a priest officiated in one place and the congregants communed in their

homes. He concludes: “*Virtual communion*” is a responsible step in in extremis times for the encouragement and continued formation of the faithful individually and together.” (ibid:4)

We, in our Lutheran denomination, issued a guideline to all members, on how to celebrate communion at home, without the presence – virtual or real – of a pastor. The document, issued on 7 April 2020, states: ²¹

We are in extraordinary times. Church Council of NELCSA has agreed that during this time we should find ways of making it possible for our members to celebrate communion in their homes. There is no way that the pastors can visit all the homes - apart from the fact that it now would be in contravention of the lockdown.

We therefore encourage families living together in their homes, as well as singles, to not only hold devotions, but also to celebrate communion.

The researcher, who is the bishop of NELCSA, admits that this document is heavily influenced by the results of this study, implementing lessons learnt from the Poor of Christ as summed up in the values and methods of Valdes and the Poor of Christ in chapter six of this study. Theologians around the world were debating on whether virtual communion, where a priest celebrates it in a live broadcast, and parishioners participate in their homes, can be regarded as “real”, we asked: What can we learn from the New Testament? The guiding text was John 6,35-58, where Jesus, time and again is asked how one can eat and drink his body and blood, and every time his answer is: Eat and drink – without giving any explanation. From this we concluded that in the time of lockdown our task is not to ask: Is it possible, but to make it possible that people eat and drink, partake in the body and blood of Christ. Thinking of the Poor of Christ, who in times of exclusion, celebrated in their homes, he proposed that during this lockdown period Christians should be encouraged to celebrate in their homes as well. Following the example of the Poor

²¹ <http://www.nelcsa.net/holy-communion-during-exceptional-times.html>, accessed on 21.05.2020

of Christ to equip the laity, the handout referred to above, was prepared and distributed. Strictly speaking, this was by-passing protocol, and to some extent even going against established doctrine. However, the importance to participate in the body and blood outweighed.

The most important aspect for us, however, was the realization that there is only one table of the Lord, and that, whoever gathers, and wherever they gather, from whatever denomination, all share in the one body, the one blood, the one Lord. With this realization the sense of the one Church of Christ was much stronger than during normal celebrations. The feedback received confirmed this.

The lockdown situation made it very clear that the resilience of a church does not depend on how many priests there are, but on whether the laos, the people understand themselves to be fully Church – even without a priest or pastor.

e) The equal role of women in the Church

Based on 1 Cor 14, 34f some denominations currently do not ordain women.:

Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

and 1 Tm 3, 11-15

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

By this decision many other New Testament instances are ignored where women played a very important leadership and proclamation role. This is especially true for the various Easter morning reports, where, time and again women are first

commissioned to proclaim to the disciples the good news that he has risen (Mk 16, 6f; Mt 28, 5-8; Jn 20, 16-18).

Part of the resilience of the Poor of Christ was because of the role of the *Meisterinnen*, who, even in a male dominated society could teach and train especially the mothers, who in turn could pass on this knowledge to their children. The fact that the Poor of Christ took this decision despite it being in conflict with general practise in society, the Roman Church and scripture passages cited above, can be ascribed to the way they read and interpreted the Bible. In cases of conflict between the teachings of Jesus in the gospels and the letters of the Apostles, they placed a higher value on the teachings of Jesus.²² Giving an equal role to women was in line with the example that Jesus had set. It was pointed out in this study that the important role of women in the run up to the 16th century Reformation needs to receive much more attention.

Even after the Reformation in the Protestant churches the equal role of women was not recognized and practised, to the detriment of church and society. To ban half of the membership from developing their proclamation skills despite the overwhelming Easter testimonies is, simply put, foolishness, and depriving the church of a major asset, even today. Kaunda and Phiri (2016:2) say about women in the Africa Initiated Churches (AIC):

While acknowledging that women are marginalised in some AICs, the majority of these churches recognise the spiritual virility or vitality operating in women who are endowed with the power of the Holy Spirit.

They point out that, due to the emphasis on the working of the Holy Spirit, who does not discriminate against women, women can be founders of congregations

²² Martin Luther had a similar approach with his criteria of reading scripture: "Das, was Christum treibet" – that in scripture which promotes Christ, is the Word of God for us. "*Auch ist das der rechte profesteyn alle bucher zu taddelln, wenn man sihet, ob sie Christum treyben, odder nit, Syntemal alle schrifft Christum zeyget Ro. 3. vnnd Paulus nichts denn Christum wissen will .1. Cor. 2. Was Christum nicht leret, das ist nicht Apostolisch, wens gleich Petrus odder Paulus leret, Widerumb, was Christum predigt, das ist Apostolisch, wens gleych Judas, Annas, Pilatus vnd Herodes thett.*" (WA DB 7,25 (1522).

and play leading roles in the AIC much more readily than in traditional churches. *“This may explain why there are also a good number of the Spirit-type churches which are founded and led by women even among Zulus, despite being patriarchally oriented societies.”* (ibid:5)

Haddad relates how missionary women introduced schools for girls and women, with the main focus on teaching them skills around traditional roles for women. These met on a weekly basis, also for prayer, and generally became known as the *manyanos*. *“The term, manyano was first coined by the Methodist women to refer specifically to their weekly meetings known as prayer unions. Increasingly, it was adopted by women from other denominations when referring to their church organizations”* (Haddad 2016:158). Such *Women’s leagues* or *Prayer Women* or *Women in Uniform* today form an integral part of many churches in South Africa. Although they play an important role, in many cases it is not an equal one. The uniform speaks to this. Haddad explains that the uniform originally was a sign of dignity and liberation for women in a male-dominated environment, since it showed that they had a place and function in church (ibid:169). However, at the same time, the uniform is also seen by more and more modern women as a *tool of oppression* (Ibid:170). The researcher has been part of discussions where women were arguing that the uniform is part of the old system to “keep women in place”.

Based on the examples cited above, it seems that the South African churches of European origin have greater difficulties in recognizing women as equal in ministry than most African Initiated Churches. At the same time, even in churches where women cannot be ordained, the women are often the real back bone of the church. The Lutheran World Federation has a policy²³ that at conferences the guideline of 40/40/20 should be adhered to: At least 40% men, 40% women, 20% youth. (LWF Gender justice policy:4). We have observed that, whilst the policy is adhered to,

²³ <https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-lwf-gender-justice-policy> accessed on 21.05.2020

especially in the Southern and Western African regions the woman delegates are very often totally silent, raising the suspicion that dominant male church leaders select them for that reason.

We learn from the Poor of Christ that gender cannot be allowed to be a disqualifier when it comes to teaching and nurturing the talents of the people. Who ever has a gifting, should be encouraged and supported to develop that gift.

The empowering of women will at the same time even empower men, since there are tasks that by traditional bias are reserved for women, where gifted men were not allowed to fulfil that role. The church should be that place, where more than elsewhere Gal 3, 28 is put into practise: *“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”* And this, we certainly learn from the Poor of Christ.

f) Teaching, learning and living the faith

This links up with the role of laity mentioned above. A strong point of the Poor of Christ was that they did not only know the teachings of Jesus, but that they put them into practise, thus gaining respect from their communities.

Sadly, in our time religion is used as a means to gain trust and then preach money out of people. As was seen in chapter two of this study (pg. 51) Lateran III already was addressing the issue of excessive wealth of bishops and prelates. In that time people had no choice but to pay church taxes, and, apart from that, as shown in chapter three, pages 127ff of this study, fear of hell and damnation was further used to extract monies. However, in today's modern South Africa people chose where to go. There is no church tax that one is obliged to pay. We cannot say that those attending are victims of a system forced onto them. Yet, current court cases, such

as against Prophet Bushiri,²⁴ who is regarded as one of the wealthiest preachers in Africa, show that they have large followings and that poor people are willing to give huge offerings in support of them. A list of the wealthiest pastors globally²⁵ has 14 out of the first 20 living in Africa.

Kgatle (2017) asks the question why people within the churches of such prophets remain loyal to them, even if it is to their own detriment? He states that: *“Most of the pastors in Neo-Pentecostalism reject such a training [theological training for ministry], let alone academic activities of theological field.”* and sees in this a sign of *anti-intellectualism*. He sees the desire for miracles as a main reason why middle and upper class people follow these prophets. Although he mentions hypnotism as another possible reason, he does not substantiate it sufficiently. His recommendations to counter this all deal with creating more accountability, which includes reporting to the SACC. Although this might help, we are of the opinion that it will not really make a difference, since these prophets do not adhere to any rules and regulations, and that one should rather focus on his observation of anti-intellectualism.

We concur with Ramantswana (2019) who *“argues that neo-prophetic churches are tapping into people’s longing for the fresh divine word to speak directly into their personal situations.”*

As stated above, the adherents of these prophets go there out of their own free will. Two lessons can be learnt from this study regarding this matter:

Firstly, the answer does not lie in secular authorities protecting the people through laws. This was the approach followed by the Roman Church, showed in chapter two. Laws and decrees were aimed at forbidding and regulating. They did not stop

²⁴ <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2019-11-29-prophet-bushiri-to-stand-trial-next-year-on-fraud-and-money-laundering-charges/> accessed on 21.05.2020

²⁵ <https://eafeed.com/30-richest-pastors-world-their-net-worth-2020/> accessed on 27 April 2020.

the abuse of authority, but in the process good movements and people were banished and even executed.

Secondly: Instead of protecting the people/laity through laws and rules, the better solution is to equip them through sound teaching. Lay people need to have a firm knowledge of scripture, which will, time and again, become the *“fresh divine word speaking into their personal situations”*, as was the case with the Poor of Christ. Sound teaching will also provide people with a solid foundation and knowledge which will help them to better discern when they are being misled. Many of those attending these strange services come from established churches where they should have received such a solid foundation. This again speaks to the importance of not limiting the teaching to give dogmatically correct answer, but empower the *laos* to think critically and understand and challenge what they are taught.

g) Serving, rather than ruling

The Poor of Christ could spread so fast during their first fifty years, and persevere up until the Reformation also due to the fact that they were not dependent on one or two strong leaders. Valdes trained others to become teachers and trainers, and so did these in turn to others.

The danger of any strong developed hierarchy is that those in leadership forget the basic instruction of Jesus to his disciples: (Mk 10,42f)

You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.

On the local level this then leads to a pastor-centred church, where pastors act as if the congregation is there to serve them and fulfil all their wishes in turn for the pastor honouring them with his attention. Deans, and after them the bishops and archbishops demand to be treated with respect. Phrases such as *“your excellency,*

your highness, my lord bishop” further enhance the danger of church leaders *“lording it over them and ... exercise authority over them”*. Such *“lording leadership”* actually weakens the church, instead of strengthening it. *“Mainline churches that are on the verge of death may need to transform, embracing less of power and influence yet gaining biblical authority whose power is the servant Jesus Christ.”* (Meylahn & Musiyambiri 2017:3).

Strong leadership is important in any organisation. When, however, church leadership forgets that it is called to serve, it becomes a stumbling block.

Kgatle says about the Apostolic Faith Mission (2015:184f):

... since its inception, the Apostolic Faith Mission experienced schism that threatened church growth and expansion. There were many pastors especially in the Black section who were dissatisfied in the church because they did not participate in leadership positions and as a result decided to start their own organisations or churches. In some instances, the church suffered huge membership loss because of these schisms.

This observation adds another aspect to the issue of leadership struggle: that of race or ethnicity, where authority is assumed by some and denied to others, merely because of their race. Kgatle continues to describe how ultimately unity was achieved, to a large extent due to the servant leadership of the leaders of the sections (ibid:217): *“It takes a humble servant to prioritise the needs of others. It further takes qualities of servant leadership such as described in Mark to pursue unity.”*

Musiyambiri, in a case study of the Anglican Diocese of Harare comes to the conclusion *“that the leadership has been characterised by power and authority rather than following democratic, transparent and community involvement such as in ubuntu and servant leadership.”* (Meylahn & Musiyambiri 2017:3)

This type of leadership style was observed by us within the Lutheran Family in Southern Africa as well. The Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa, which is the regional expression of the Lutheran World Federation, has to mediate in top-

leadership power struggles on an all too frequent basis.

Servant leadership or lack thereof is not only a matter of the top leadership. It filters down to local leaders and group leaders in a congregation. The desire to “rule and lord over” is a human one.

The Poor of Christ did not have a strong hierarchy, which was due to the fact that no one assumed for him or herself the highest authority. Those who were in authority, the *Meister* and *Meisterinnen*, used that authority to enable others, which made the movement so much more resilient. We agree that “*The leader’s primary motivation is in enhancing greatness in others*” (Meylahn & Musiyambiri 2017:2).

In view of this it is important that already in training of pastors, *servant leadership* must be part of the curriculum. In evaluating candidates for the ministry, those in charge of training must be alert to candidates displaying the urge to rule and to be honoured and revered, and who see the ministry as an easy route to becoming important.

Even more important, however, is that church leaders lead by example by actively discouraging the practise of being celebrated and honoured in the same way as political leadership. Induction of church leadership should not resemble coronation services of kings and queens, but must focus on the fact that these leaders are “*only servants*”, doing what the Lord calls them to do.

On a local level the elders or church councillors too need to understand that they are not the rulers in charge of a congregation belonging to them, but called to lead and guide in Christ’s congregation. All in leadership position need to be constantly reminded that they are accountable to the Lord of the Church, who, whilst being the highest authority, is at the same time the ultimate servant leader.

Valdes refused to stop preaching because he understood his calling to come from God. This however, did not result in him seeing himself as person being a higher authority than priests and bishops. He received his authority from Christ, and within

that authority preached and taught others. But he did not assume authority for authority's sake. The concept of the servant-leader is crucial for church leaders today in their mis-focused desire for wealth, fame, status.

2. Which mistakes is church repeating?

This section focuses on the negative examples shown in the research. It was highlighted in chapters two and three how the mediaeval church to a large extent was to blame for its own problems due to the conduct of its leadership and clergy. Just as the historical contextual analysis and synthesis shows how many aspects together show the impact that the Poor of Christ had on the 16th century reformation, the same method can be applied: many aspects brought together give show how church and church authorities can have a detrimental effect on their societies. Georg Hegel stated: *“What experience and history teach is this — that nations and governments have never learned anything from history, or acted upon any lessons they might have drawn from it”*²⁶ We believe that church authorities who could learn from two thousand years' history are often more “Beratungsresistent” than *nations and governments*.

One major problem, already discussed above, is when church leadership strives to rule rather than serve. Linked to that is the desire for power and resultant power struggles.

a) Unhealthy power-relationship with secular authority

As seen in chapter two, for centuries the church was involved in power struggles with secular authority. At times the church lorded it over emperors and kings, at other times these emperors and kings ruled over the church. And then there were those periods where church and secular authority worked together in *unholy relationships*, which we define as: not for the wellbeing of society, but for the benefit

²⁶ https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Georg_Wilhelm_Friedrich_Hegel accessed on 21.05.2020

of the few in authority in church and government. Church and secular authority together abused and exploited the people that they were supposed to care for. We saw in chapter three that these unholy relationships resulted in the destruction of whole communities and the eradication of the Poor of Christ in some regions.

Our modern context is vastly different from that of the 16th Century. The church has split up into many denominations. The bishop of Rome is the head of only one of many churches. Christian denominations are spread across all continents and exist in societies with a huge variety of government structures such as empires, monarchies, democracies and dictatorial states. In some, Christianity is the majority religion, in others a minute minority. In some countries there is mainly one denomination, in others, such as South Africa, a large number of denominations exist, with none of them having a clear majority.

Despite the diversity of systems and multitude of denominations, there are examples of unholy relationships between church and secular authorities that have developed in many of them. These were not limited to particular denominations or particular forms of secular authority. The temptation to form such unholy partnerships is deeply human – regardless of race, culture, creed or ideology. Holy wars resulted in millions of people losing their lives in the process, or suffering in other ways.

From the recent history of South Africa two such examples will be discussed:

The partnership between the three Afrikaans Sister Churches and the National Party led Government in the 20th century, and the too comfortable relationship between the South African Council of Churches and the ANC led government in the early phase of democratic South Africa.

The partnership between the three Afrikaans Sister Churches and the National Party led Government in the 20th century

There is much similarity between this example and that mentioned above, where church and authority together destroyed communities and banished or killed faithful

critics. Although Apartheid had been part of the South African Landscape almost since the arrival of the first Europeans at the Cape, and although it was practiced and further legalized under British rule in the Union of South Africa long before the emergence of the National Party, with the National Party taking over in 1949 it became not only a political, but also a theological construct. Already in 1949 the Christian Council of South Africa (CCSA) *“started to protest against the apartheid laws imposed by the National Government in South Africa”* (Pillay 2002: 120)

Müller (2018, 110f) states: *“Both nationalism and Christianity have, in some cases correctly, been identified as responsible for fostering situations of violence and repression. ...When Christianity and ethnic nationalism combine, as was the case with Afrikaner Christian nationalism during apartheid, it makes for an interesting, if paradoxical, set of circumstances.”* It could be described as a caring oppressive system: Caring towards all those who accept the fact that they are lesser human beings. When Apartheid became a theology, the political debate also became a theological debate. Disagreeing with the policy of Apartheid meant that you became a church heretic. You no longer deserved to be cared for by your church, you now also were an enemy and danger to the state. This was regardless of your ethnicity or religion. A good example of such a “heretic” was Dr Beyers Naudé, who moved from respected synod moderator in the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) to being a defrocked, banished traitor – defrocked by his church and banished by the secular authority (ibid 115).

Meiring (2015:217) shows how the DRC *“had previously found itself at the forefront of ecumenical developments.”* It was part of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches from its beginning in 1875, invited to join the world wide Reformed Ecumenical Synod in 1946 and was present at the founding of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1948. However, after World War II the global attitude changed. Meiring (ibid) cites the German theologian, Martin Niemöller’s words to the representative at the WCC in 1957: *“No, Sir, we do not want to have relations with you at all. We have experienced physically what racism can do to civilised people!”* Having experienced the unholy relationship between the German state

churches and the Nazi regime, Niemöller was very sensitive to similar developments happening in South Africa.

The most decisive moment for the DRC was when it had to decide whether to align with secular authority or not after the Cottesloe consultation. Van der Merwe (2010:154ff) gives an overview of the consultation and its decisions. The Cottesloe consultation was called in December 1960 by the World Council of Churches (WCC), in response to the Sharpeville massacre in March of the same year. At that conference the participating member churches of the WCC, formulated and issued a statement addressing various wrongs in the South African System, rejecting Apartheid and demanding equal treatment of all people living in South Africa. Beyers Naudé was one of the representatives of the DRC at that conference, who supported and signed the declaration.

The South African prime minister, HF Verwoerd condemned the declaration and demanded an answer from the DRC (ibid 156): *“the churches have not yet spoken. The voice of the churches still has to be heard through the different synods where members and ministers are present.”* This statement already shows the close connection between government and the Afrikaans churches. “churches” does not refer to the voice of the churches – they had already spoken through the declaration -, but only to the Afrikaans churches. The others were ignored as irrelevant. After this call by the prime minister, in the DRC synod after synod distanced itself from the Cottesloe declaration.

By these synod decisions the DRC was now formally church in partnership with secular authority, giving it moral and theological foundation. The unholy relationship was complete. Van Aarde (Ungerer et al 2017:2) states: *“The then South African Prime Minister Dr H.F. Verwoerd, together with some Afrikaner church leaders, was instrumental in the Cottesloe Consultation not succeeding in realisation of its goals.”*

The DRC however, was not alone in this regard. Other, mainly white, churches silently agreed by not taking a stand or claiming to stay out of politics.

This unholy relationship of church and state resulted in immense suffering for a large portion of the South African society. Although the white population benefitted, the country as a whole was held back, because the majority of the population was prevented to fully participate, develop their full potential and contribute to the building of the country and society. So, ultimately, it was detrimental, even to the white population. *“If one part suffers, the whole body suffers”* – based on Paul in 1 Cor 12, 26.

However, with time more and more voices within the DRC became critical of Apartheid. In 1974 a group of theologians formed the *Belydende kring*. (BK) *“Its twin objectives were to unite the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) family of racially constituted churches and to witness prophetically against the political and economic injustices of the apartheid system”* (Kritzinger 2019:03). In 1979 the BK issued a declaration. The forth statement is of particular interest to this study, since it deals with who the highest authority of church is:

The church may, in faithful allegiance to its Head, Jesus Christ, come into conflict with human authorities. If the church has to suffer in the process, we know that this is part of the way of God’s people through history and that the word of Christ remains in force, “I will never leave you or forsake you” (Heb 13:5) (ibid:100).

Theologians from the DRC family, in their addressing apartheid, recognise that the loyalty to Christ is non-negotiable, even if it leads to conflict with secular authority. Plaatjies-van Huffel (2014:304) points out:

Because of its opposition to apartheid, the members of the BK became victims of security legislation. The BK was viewed as the authentic voice of the oppressed within the DRCA and DRMC. The BK period represents the struggle within the church. The BK swayed the theological thinking of the DRMC and the DRCA, and ultimately influenced the drafting and acceptance of the Belhar Confession.

For the issue dealt with in this passage: Which mistakes is the church repeating?, the 5th section and ending of the Belhar confession is of particular interest:

We believe that, in obedience to Jesus Christ, its only Head, the church is called to confess and to do all these things, even though the authorities and human laws might forbid them and punishment and suffering be the consequence (Eph. 4:15-16; Acts 5:29-33; 1 Peter 2:18-25; 1 Peter 3:15-18). Jesus is Lord. To the one and only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be the honour and the glory for ever and ever. (Plaatjies-Van Huffel 2017, 494).

Although the focal point of both the declaration of the BK and the Belhar confession was Apartheid and the church's rejection of it, the passages cited above speak to the underlying problem, addressed in this study: When church and secular authority join forces in an unholy partnership. In the South African situation, the result was the formalisation, legalising and expanding of Apartheid. However, in other instances the result might not have a racial connection. In the case of the mediaeval *Roman Church* this partnership with secular authority resulted in crusades to the Holy Land, as well as the brutal instruments of the Inquisition against the church's own members.

The Belhar confession points out that *obedience to Jesus Christ* as Head of the Church overrides any secular authority, which applies in any current situation.

The next example shows how easy it is for church to lose this focus.

The comfortable relationship between the South African Council of Churches and the ANC led government in the early phase of democratic South Africa.

Chapter two of this study showed how in periods where church and secular authority were in partnership, it led to the neglect of those that they had to care for. The church did not criticise the rulers, and the rulers did not interfere with the church. The *comfortable relationship* discussed in this section is a contemporary illustration of this. The Cottesloe consultation was a turning point in the South

African church landscape. The churches that had formed the CCSA in 1936 continued to support the declaration and in 1968 formed the South African Council of Churches (SACC). It became an important organisation in the struggle against Apartheid (Pillay 2002: 121). With the banning of all movements and parties that worked towards a non-discriminatory South Africa, the SACC became the “voice of the voiceless”. Although the South African Government saw it as a major threat and made many attempts to intimidate and harass the leadership, it never was banned. Through international funding it could maintain a strong administrative and leadership structure and played an important role in leading South Africa into a new democratic dispensation.

When this new dispensation finally became a reality after the first democratic elections in 1994, a significant number of clergy became politicians. One notable example is Rev Frank Chikane. He was the General Secretary of the SACC from 1987 to 1994, and then became a member of the African National Congress (ANC) central committee, and eventually minister in the presidency of the republic of South Africa. Whereas up to 1994 the SACC was a fierce critic of the government, now it found itself in a very close and uncritical relationship to its former colleagues and the politicians on whose behalf it had spoken before.

Pillay&Womack states (2019:6):

...the SACC began to lose its prophetic voice and while not outright supporting the ANC, it did little to oppose it or to change any current ills within society. When one studies the Central Committee (CC) Communiqué from 2006, this lack of a prophetic voice is clear to see, with the document even calling for a deepening of its partnership with government and other social institutions.

With this the SACC fell into the same trap as the DRC in the previous system: it aligned itself with the secular authority. Pillay *et al.* correctly states:

I find good reason to even go as far as to suggest that the SACC practised state theology during this time. Both its nicknaming as the “ANC at prayer”

(CORAT Africa 2009, 40) and its practise of critical solidarity (deemed as a form of state theology)²⁷, give good reason to suggest the presence of a state theology. (ibid)

Whereas the focus in the previous system was on Apartheid, the underlying problem of church-state partnership was overlooked. With legalised Apartheid being overcome, the SACC slipped into the role of the DRC to become the church partner to government. This uncritical partnership reached its climax during the presidency of Jacob Zuma, where for a long time the voice of the SACC was either silent or very subdued, almost polite in its criticism.

A period of discernment started in 2007. Pillay *et al.* (ibid, 7f) refers to the *Christian Organisation Research and Advisory Trust of Africa's* (CORAT) report that played a major role in pointing out deficiencies. Of particular interest for this study is the reference that the SACC is lacking “*credibility among communities*” It confirms what we observed in this study, that the church lost credibility, also due to its close ties with secular authority. In the case of the SACC it can be seen how quickly this loss of credibility can happen.

It was only from 2010 that the critical discernment was slowly starting to show results. In announcing her retirement, the long-serving secretary of the SACC, Irene Meadows, writes on 14 December 2010 (Letter to Church Leaders, 14.12.2010):

I thank God for the opportunity of serving in an organization world renown for its fight against the unjust system of Apartheid and to now enjoy the fruit of that labor, which is the freedom we as South Africans now enjoy.

²⁷ The *Kairos Document* defines state theology as „*the theological justification of the status quo with its racism, captialism and totalitarianism. it blesses injustice, canonises the will of the powerful and reduces the poor to passivity, obedience and apathy*“ (Kairos Document, Chapter 2 accessed on 16.05.2020 at http://ujamaa.ukzn.ac.za/Libraries/manuals/The_Kairos_Documents.sflb.ashx)

The SACC has lost that fighting spirit, but I believe with the change of management soon, God will raise it up again and bring the person or persons with vision and passion for people...

A quote from the Statement of the SACC Tri-annual conference, February 2014 shows this slowly increasing, but yet subdued criticism. Parts in **bold** are to highlight the careful wording of criticism, which can easily be overlooked otherwise:

On reflecting on the state of the nation, we give thanks and praise to Almighty God for the changes in our country since the birth of our democratic South Africa some 20 years ago. We recognise with thanksgiving and gratitude the many positive things that have been accomplished in these past years. We also, regrettably, express our concern that still much more must be achieved in the areas of education, health and social transformation. **We were hoping** that President Jacob Zuma would have used the opportunity in his recent State of the Nation Address to unfold a vision and action plan to address these issues as we move into the future **but we were left somewhat disappointed that this was not the case.**

It must be kept in mind that this was formulated five years into the presidency of Jacob Zuma, where many issues about corruption and abuse were already public knowledge. This is common knowledge confirmed another four years later. The General Secretary, on 15 February 2018 writes, welcoming the resignation of President Jacob Zuma (**bold** by us)²⁸:

The South African Council of Churches (SACC) welcomes the decision as announced by President Jacob Zuma last night, 14 February 2018, to resign as President of the Republic of South Africa. The resignation is a

²⁸ <http://sacc.org.za/2018/02/> accessed on 20.05.2020

step towards unburdening the country of **a presidency that has been followed by controversy from the very beginning.**

President Zuma has consistently said that he does not know what he has done, “wenzeni uZuma”. Even in his formal resignation statement, he said he has not been told why he has to resign. It is remarkable that President Zuma has not absorbed the reasons that many have put forward in their calls for his resignation. **The SACC may have been one of the first organisations to recommend in April 2016, that he should resign,** following the Nkandla judgement by the Constitutional Court of March 31, 2016.

The letter on the one hand claims that the SACC was one of the first to call for Zuma’s resignation. At the same time, it becomes clear that this call only happened seven years into his term of office, although the problems had been there from the start.

Just as, after the Cottesloe Consultation, the National Party government identified the Afrikaans *susterkerke* as their church partners, the ANC Government moved away from the SACC as the critical voices became louder. Alternative structures with church leaders loyal to the party were formed. This started in all earnest in 2008, as can be seen from a discussion document, prepared Dr Mathole Motshekga, chief whip of the ANC (Presented 5 January 2011, spelling mistakes original):

However, when it comes to faith matters the ANC does not pursue a party political agenda. It works with faith-based organisations and leaders regardless of their political affiliation or orientation. The primary goal being the creation of the non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and cohesive society in which the value of all citizen is measured by their common humanity (Ubuntu/Botho).

In 2008 the ANC elevated CRA to a Sub-Committee of the National Executive Committee (NEC) and tasked it to:

- Mobilise faith communities for social transformation;
- Cultivate the values of a just and caring society;

- Guide various charter processes;
- Create a mechanism for interaction with broader society on cultural, religious and linguistic matters, etc..

CRA was then renamed Commission for Religious and Traditional Affairs (CRATA). CRATA facilitated the establishment of the National Interfaith Leaders Council (NILC). In other words, NRLF, MRM, and NILC are the brain children of the ANC.

Pillay *et al* states on the formation of NILC (2019:8):

...there is a strong correlation between the SACC's ousting and their criticism of the government. This move to sideline the SACC provided it with the freedom to more fully develop a critical/prophetic role and forced them out of the comfort zone they had come to establish.

We observe the similarity with the events mentioned in Chapter two of this study. When a pope became critical towards an emperor, the emperor would appoint an anti-pope with whom a comfortable relationship could continue. Modern governments don't have to take such a step – they can side-line the critical voices and elevate the loyal churches as "advisors". The Post-Reformation Europe saw similar developments in the principle: *Cuius regio, eius religio*. In each region the regent determined the religion/denomination – Protestant or Roman Catholic, which ultimately resulted in the 30-year war from 1618-48.

Church leaders have to be vigilant that they do not become part of such comfortable relationships but maintain their loyalty to Christ as highest authority. South African Churches need to re-affirm their prophetic voice addressing abuse of authority and neglect of duty by secular authority and at the same time ask itself whether it is still fulfilling its own calling, or resting in comfort.

Pillay *et al* cautions (ibid:10):

So, while the SACC had regained a public and even prophetic role, it does not seem to have addressed the ecumenical climate of South Africa, and rather morphed into a political watchdog.

It is not enough for church *not* to be in an unholy partnership with secular authority, or just to be a critical voice to rulers. Church needs to be what it is called to be: Salt, light – a blessing to the people. This was a core strength of the Poor of Christ, which resulted in them being welcomed by people, even if rejected by structures- church and civil. This is unpacked in the next section.

3. What positive impact can church have on society?

The Poor of Christ impacted on society mainly through their authentic, holistic approach. They did not develop a strategy on how to better impact on society. Rather, they heard the message of Jesus and put it into practise. Their faith was not only one part of their life – their life and their faith were one. Whether being a merchant, teacher or doctor, there was no separation between what they believed and what they lived. It was pointed out in this study that they were accused of pretending to be merchants or doctors or teachers in order to cover up for what they were really up to. The reality however, was that they indeed had these professions as followers of Christ.

We learn from the Poor of Christ that the most powerful impact that Christians can have, is when they are people of integrity and reliability.

It was pointed out that one of the “give-aways” of the Poor of Christ was their refusal to take an oath, which resulted in many of them being executed. This refusal had very practical implications, because linked to the refusal to take an oath is the commitment to keep your word. Based on the words of Jesus (Mt 5, 37): *“let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.”* they were people who could be trusted and were respected by their communities for their integrity and reliability.

A holistic and authentic approach cannot be copied from others. Nor can it be delegated to subcommittees and projects. Authenticity does not happen by a church resolution. It is a way of life.

Pillay (2017:5) addresses this under the topic “Spirituality” and states:

Spirituality is the pattern by which we shape our lives in response to our experiences of God as a very real presence in and around us. To be spiritual is to take seriously our consciousness of God’s presence and to

live in such a way that the presence of God is central in all that we do. Such spirituality turns to the world, not away from it.

Our daily lives and encounters with people around us should reflect the holistic impact of our faith – be it as a pastor, a sales person, teacher, pensioner, craftsman ... if we can be “Poor in Christ”, as mentioned in chapter one, page 2 of this study– dependent on Christ and living from him, we can and will have an impact on society as the Poor of Christ had.

We concur with Pillay 2017:5):

... any piety that appears to be content with a personal relationship with Jesus, and which shuns or belittles the horizontal dimension of discipleship, is suspect. Any spirituality that advocates a withdrawal from what is going on in the world is contrary to Christ’s spirit.

The *COVID19 crisis* results in this spirituality being put to the test. As the lockdown in South Africa commenced, it was clear that many people would suffer – not from the virus, but from being without income and food. While government started planning to deal with this, church communities did not wait, but sprang into action. The SACC also immediately started talks with the relevant government structures in order to co-operate as far as possible. eventually the SACC church leaders agreed to focus on those people that fall through the cracks, not being cared for by government grants and support.

Verbal report back at the weekly Zoom meetings of church leaders show that many local ecumenical support projects never stopped, despite being against lockdown rules, since the need was apparent and hunger cannot be put on hold till structures are in place. The months to come will further put us to the test, since all indications are that the misery will increase for quite a while.

In this regard a valuable lesson can be learnt from the Poor of Christ: The biggest difference will not be made by major relief campaigns, but by a large number of Christians living out their faith, following the example set by Christ and making a difference where they are and by how they care.

The final question that we would like to address, is whether in our multi-denominational world with an abundance of societies and groupings, there is space for a movement such

as the Poor of Christ?

4. Is there space for a movement such as the Poor of Christ in our times?

To answer this, a few aspects emanating from this research need to be highlighted.

Firstly, the Poor of Christ never *established* a movement – they *were* a movement. Although they were forced to develop some kind of structure, what defined them was their calling and their way of life, not their structures.

Secondly, the movement, especially the Germanic wing, always was part of the church and worked within in the church, even if in secret.

Thirdly, they did not have elaborate strategies and long term plans. They wanted to share the message of Christ and help people live accordingly, by teaching and guiding them to become mature Christians, who in turn could nurture others.

We believe that there is indeed space for similar movements that work across denominational divides for the benefit of the world. We also believe that such movements cannot be “created” or “designed” by task teams putting together values and suggesting how they can best be implemented. As was shown in this study, the Roman Church wanted to copy the Poor of Christ and their ministry, by instructing the Augustinian Order to do the same – but it could not be copied.

Olivier (2019) discusses Phyllis Tickle’s book: *The Great Emergence*. There is interesting correlation between what she defines as characteristics of the *Emergence Christian* and what this study showed as characteristics of the Poor of Christ. These include (ibid) “radical adherence to the words and teachings of Jesus found in scripture”, being “willingly susceptible to the power of truth over against dogma and dogmatic exegesis” She sees various movements such as *Fresh Expressions* and *Taizé* as part of this new emergence, even if the movements themselves do not realise it.

We agree that there is much movement within Christian churches and society at large, but do not see this as something leading to a *Great Emergence*. There are too many impulses going into opposite directions – Multi-faith movements on the one hand, and extreme fundamentalist groups on the other, just to mention one example. We do believe, however,

that within churches, and across denominational lines, there will be movements such as the Poor of Christ that will impact on church and society.

We believe that such movements will most likely be born without fanfares and prior planning, but rather grow through their authenticity and core values, just like the Poor of Christ. Indeed, we believe that there are currently such movements, some well-known, others obscure and only known to those who benefit from their presence.

One such known movement is the *Taizé community*. It started off as a ministry for refugees by Brother Roger in Taizé during the second world war. Since then it continued to develop and now has a global impact, mainly on the realm of spirituality. It states about itself:²⁹

The Taizé Community is made up of over a hundred brothers, Catholics and from various Protestant backgrounds, coming from around thirty nations. By its very existence, the community is a “parable of community” that wants its life to be a sign of reconciliation between divided Christians and between separated peoples.

Yet another one is the *Focolare Movement*³⁰ which was started by Chiara Lubich, also during World War II in Trent, Italy. It states about itself: “*Our aim is to contribute to building a more united world in which people value and respect diversity. We are inspired by Jesus’ prayer to the Father, “May they all be one.” (Jn. 17:21).*” In their work they do not only work with whomever is willing, they organize global interdenominational youth events and conferences. They actively engage church leaders from all denominations to bring them together in a “*Meeting of Bishops of various Churches*”, a non-threatening fellowship environment, thus assisting in breaking down barriers.

Both of these movements have in common with the Poor of Christ that they were not started by a church decision or conference resolution, but through the vision of an individual that attracted others to become part of this vision. Both, like the Poor of Christ,

²⁹ https://www.taize.fr/en_rubrique2602.html Accessed 28.04.2020

³⁰ <https://www.focolare.org/en> Accessed: 28.04.2020

spread far beyond the place where they started, and do not exist for their own benefit.

It seems that there is no recipe for such a formation, but rather a specific calling to a person or small group. This again points to the importance of authenticity of people that live what they believe.

On a slightly different level we want to refer to the *Global Christian Forum*. Unlike the previous two movements, it was not started by an individual, and then grew into a movement, but was purposefully formed to bring together Christians from all Churches, since none of the existing bodies such as the WCC and other global communions have succeeded in achieving this yet (Jones 2013:1ff). It's Guiding Purpose Statement reads³¹:

To create an open space wherein representatives from a broad range of Christian churches and inter-church organizations, which confess the triune God and Jesus Christ as perfect in His divinity and humanity, can gather to foster mutual respect, to explore and address together common challenges.

In the spirit of John 17:21" that all of them may be one... so that the world may believe that you have sent me" and because of our faith in a reconciling God (2 Cor.5: 18-21) a forum could pursue the following:

- Deepen our commitment to God's Word and mission in the world;
- Enhance our understanding of contemporary expressions of Christian mission;
- Pursue principles and practices that enable us to deal freely, responsibly and peaceably with our Christian differences and distinctive qualities;
- Engage in theological reflection in areas of mutual concern;
- Strengthen the wholeness of the church by encouraging communication

³¹ <https://globalchristianforum.org/introduction/guiding-purpose-statement/>

and cooperation; and

- Foster relationships that may lead to common witness.

We can also mention as examples many attempts to re-define what church is about. Greyling&Pillay (2018) focus on *Emerging Churches, Fresh Expressions* and *House Churches* as types of restoration movements. However, unlike the 19th Century Restoration Movement they do not try to copy the *Early Church* but rather apply similar principles. “*The influence of postmodernism favours the spontaneous, fluid and organic nature that the early church presents and allows.*” (ibid:11)

Of the examples mentioned by Greyling&Pillay, the *House Churches* are the closest to the Poor of Christ, in that they focus on teaching and nurturing Christians in small groups. The difference, however, is that for the Poor of Christ the house gatherings did not replace the participation in the local parish service.

All of the above mentioned movements have in common that they are ecumenical and not schismatic by intention. They can, however, lead to the formation of new churches.

Taizé, Focolare and *Global Christian Forum* others purposefully work with people from different denominations, so that they can take back into their denomination what they have learnt from each other. This is in line with the loyalty to the one Church of Christ that was observed as characteristic of the Poor of Christ, and results in a much broader impact than those groups that do not work across denominations or form new churches.

Indeed, much can be learnt from the Poor of Christ. They do not provide us with a recipe for successful church, but rather challenge our norms and values, posing the question: Is church authentic in it's being church?

5. Summary of Research

The research asked the question (Chapter one:8): What impact did the Poor of Christ have on the *Roman Church*, creating the climate for the 16th Century Reformation? The historical contextual analysis and synthesis showed that they indeed had a significant impact, and therefore deserve to be brought into mainstream Church History Teaching.

Literature research provided the information needed. *Historical contextual analysis and synthesis* was used to bring the information together in order to answer these questions and fulfil the objectives.

Chapter two showed how the *synthesis* of various factors provided a window of opportunity during which the Poor of Christ could start, quickly spread and establish a strong foothold, which then could not be eradicated again, despite harshest methods of persecution.

The important role of laity featured in all the chapters. It was shown that the Poor of Christ in essence were a lay movement where the principle of teaching and training others to teach and train sustained them from generation to generation, not dependent on ordained clergy.

Chapters two and three spoke to the problematic role of church authorities in the history of the Poor of Christ. It was pointed out that the church harmed itself even more than it did the Poor of Christ.

Chapters three to five highlighted the role that studying and living out New Testament teachings played in sustaining the movement and enshrining the values from generation to generation, despite persecution. Chapter four showed the influence on the church internally through the *Poor Catholics* and the *Augustinian Order* and externally through the ministry and presence of the *Germanic wing of the Poor of Christ* in regions and cities of the Holy Roman Empire.

Chapter five showed how the movement survived. The *synthesis* of geographical evidence and reformation discourse indicate their impact on some important reformation regions.

Chapter six synthesized the findings to show that the Poor of Christ did play an important

role in creating a climate conducive for the 16th century Reformation explosion, and that they deserve to be brought into mainstream church history teaching.

Since history should not only speak about the past, but also help us to understand the present and shape the future, chapter seven asked what can be learnt from the Poor of Christ for today's church. We highlighted those values and methods of the Poor of Christ, which we believe can make a major impact today. We also pointed out where church authorities are in danger of repeating mistakes made during the time of the Poor of Christ.

Conclusion

The "Poor of Christ" had a significant impact on setting the scene for the 16th century Reformation, not through a defined set of doctrines, but through the impact that their core teachings and values had from generation to generation leading up to the Reformation. Contrary to popular belief, the main driving force leading to the Reformation explosion in the 16th century was not a handful of highly educated theologians, but a multitude of dedicated lay people who, despite all opposition and persecution, continued their ministry of sharing the message of Christ through word and deed, and taught the next generation to do the same. They significantly contributed towards the climate change in which the 16th century Reformation could blossom.

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