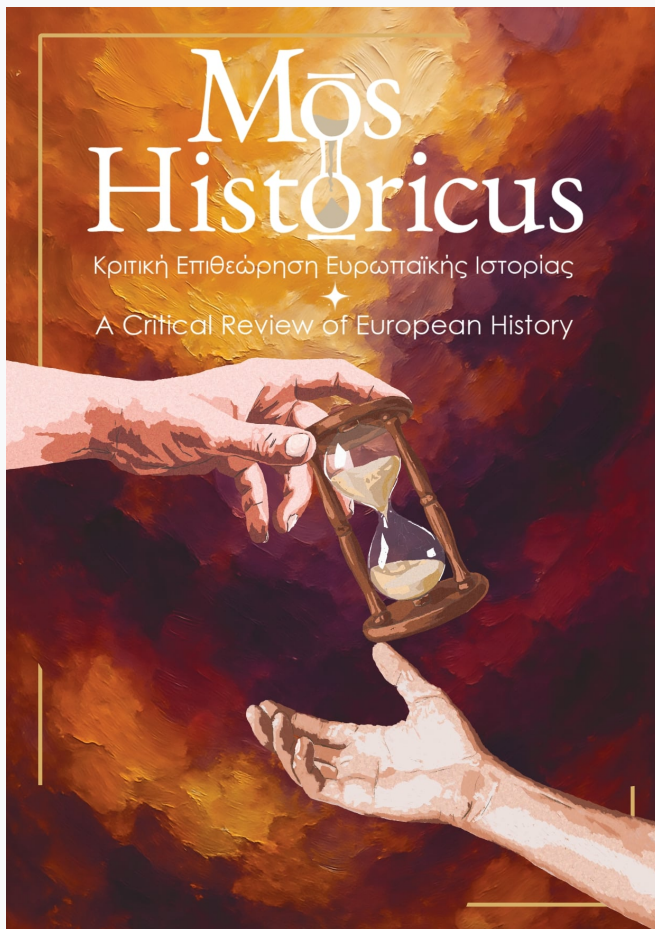


Mos Historicus: A Critical Review of European History

Vol 3, No 1 (2025)

Mos Historicus: A Critical Review of European History



Pastorate in crisis: pastors, heresy, and heretics in Geoffrey of Auxerre's Sermons on the Apocalypse

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doi: [10.12681/mh.41288](https://doi.org/10.12681/mh.41288)

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To cite this article:

Noutsou, M. (2025). Pastorate in crisis: pastors, heresy, and heretics in Geoffrey of Auxerre's Sermons on the Apocalypse. *Mos Historicus: A Critical Review of European History*, 3(1), 26–46. <https://doi.org/10.12681/mh.41288>

Pastorate in crisis: pastors, heresy, and heretics in Geoffrey of Auxerre's *Sermons on the Apocalypse*

Η Ποιμαντική σε κρίση: πάστορες, αιρέσεις και αιρετικοί στο έργο,
Sermons on the Apocalypse, του Geoffrey της Auxerre

Matina Noutsou*

Ματίνα Νούτσου

ABSTRACT: The birth of heresy in the 12th century has been related to the overall socio-economic and religious developments of the time. Allegations of heresy could be deployed for political reasons, or they could be expression of a religious antagonism among newly established monastic orders and lay groups and clerics. In this framework, I will discuss the Sermons on the Apocalypse of the Cistercian abbot Geoffrey of Auxerre and particularly the entanglement of heresy allegation and criticism against clergy. The aim is to discover new insights on the Cistercian abbot's approach towards clergy, and the multiple ways that charges of heresy could be deployed by Geoffrey in order to

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Η Δρ. Ματίνα Νούτσου είναι ανεξάρτητη ερευνήτρια. Έχει λάβει το διδακτορικό της δίπλωμα (PhD) από το Πανεπιστήμιο Masaryk (Masarykova univerzita) στο Μπρνο της Τσεχίας, και το μεταπτυχιακό της (MA) από το Πανεπιστήμιο της Κοπεγχάγης (Københavns Universitet). Το κύριο ερευνητικό της ενδιαφέρον είναι η ιστορία του Κιστερκιανού Τάγματος τον 12ο αιώνα και η σχέση μεταξύ της μοναστικής και της λαϊκής πνευματικότητας στον Ύστερο Μεσαίωνα, με ιδιαίτερη εστίαση στη συμμετοχή των Κιστερκιανών κατά της αίρεσης. Έχει δημοσιεύσει διάφορα άρθρα και κεφάλαια σε βιβλία, συμπεριλαμβανομένων των πλέον πρόσφατων: «Blurring the Boundaries: Monastic Values and Lay Conduct in the Anti-heretical Writings of Bernard of Clairvaux», *I quaderni del m.æ.s. - Journal of Mediæ Ætatis Sodalitium*, 22:1s (2024), special issue: *Blurring the Boundaries of Religious Dissent: A New Approach to Heresy in the Middle Ages*. "'We are not to believe that he hesitated to give correction, for his ministry is applauded': Politicizing the Fight against Heresy in the Writings of Geoffrey of Auxerre", *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, 57:1 (2022). Η Δρ. Νούτσου εργάζεται αυτή την περίοδο πάνω στην πρώτη της μονογραφία, με προσωρινό τίτλο *Cistercians, Heresy and Persecution: Politicising the Cistercian Anti-Heretical Fight, 1145-1184*, η οποία βασίζεται στη διδακτορική της διατριβή.

construct a specific clerical identity in accordance with his monastic thinking and the ideal of spiritual reform.

Keywords: Cistercian Order, Geoffrey of Auxerre, heresy, anticlericalism, spiritual reform, clerical identity

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ: Η γέννηση της αίρεσης τον 12ο αιώνα έχει συσχετιστεί με τις γενικότερες κοινωνικοοικονομικές και θρησκευτικές εξελίξεις της εποχής. Οι κατηγορίες για αίρεση μπορούσαν να χρησιμοποιηθούν για πολιτικούς λόγους ή να αποτελέσουν έκφραση θρησκευτικού ανταγωνισμού μεταξύ νεοϊδρυθέντων μοναστικών ταγμάτων και λαϊκών ομάδων και κληρικών. Στο πλαίσιο αυτό, θα συζητήσω το έργο " Sermons on the Apocalypse " του Κιστερκιανού ηγουμένου Geoffrey of Auxerre και ιδιαίτερα την αλληλοσύνδεση των κατηγοριών για αίρεση και της κριτικής κατά του κλήρου. Στόχος είναι να ανακαλύψω νέες ιδέες σχετικά με την προσέγγιση του Κιστερκιανού ηγουμένου απέναντι στον κλήρο και τους πολλαπλούς τρόπους με τους οποίους οι κατηγορίες για αίρεση μπορούσαν να χρησιμοποιηθούν από τον Geoffrey προκειμένου να κατασκευάσει μια συγκεκριμένη κληρική ταυτότητα σύμφωνα με τη μοναστική του σκέψη και το ιδεώδες της πνευματικής μεταρρύθμισης.

Λέξεις κλειδιά: Τάγμα των Κινκερστιανών, Geoffrey της Auxerre, αίρεση, αντικληρικαλισμός, πνευματική μεταρρύθμιση, κληρική ταυτότητα



Introduction

In 1140 or 1141,¹ Geoffrey of Auxerre, a young student of master Peter Abelard in Paris, attended a sermon delivered by the famous Cistercian abbot, Bernard of Clairvaux.² The title

¹ The year 1141 is suggested by Feruccio Gastaldelli, "Le più antiche testimonianze biografiche su san Bernardo. Studio storico-critico sui 'Fragmenta Gaufridi'" in *Analecta Cisterciensia* 45, 1989, pp. 60-61; Feruccio Gastaldelli, *Studi su San Bernardo e Goffredo di Auxerre*, Sismel Edizioni del Galluzzo, Firenze 2001, p. 361. For the discussion on the date of Bernard's Sermon Cf. Marie Bernard Saïd OSB, "Introduction" in Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on Conversion: A Sermon to Clergy*, trans. Marie Bernard Saïd OSB, Cistercian Publications, Michigan 1983, pp. 12-13.

² Geoffrey describes this event in his hagiographical work of the life of Bernard of Clairvaux, *Vita prima*. Cf. Geoffrey of Auxerre, *S. Bernardi vita prima*, IV, 11, 10 in *Patrologia Latina* 183, p. 327; William of Saint-Thierry,

of the sermon was *On Conversion, a sermon to clerics (Ad clericos de conversione)*. In this sermon the abbot of Clairvaux dealt with the question of the “conversion” of the clergy towards a more chaste life modelled on the life in the monastery.³ This event had such a paramount influence on Geoffrey that he decided to abandon the student life in order to enter the monastic life and join the Cistercian Order. As a Cistercian monk, Geoffrey of Auxerre served as Bernard of Clairvaux's secretary, a position that granted him a privileged and close relationship with the abbot. This proximity allowed Geoffrey to accompany Bernard in his extensive and varied activities outside the monastic sphere. Thus, Geoffrey gained firsthand knowledge and practical experience concerning the major theological and political issues confronting the Church.

After Bernard's death, he became abbot of Igny in 1157 and, in 1162, abbot of Clairvaux, a position which he was forced to resign from in 1165, most probably due to either his involvement in the Becket controversy or internal disputes in the Cistercian Order.⁴ In 1171 he was chosen as abbot of the monastery of Fossanova and in 1176 of Hautecombe. Throughout his life in the Cistercian Order Geoffrey engaged in matters and conflicts in the world beyond the monastic walls.⁵ Among these was the issue of heresy, a matter that had become an increasing concern for the ecclesiastical authorities of his time.⁶

Both Jean Leclercq and Ferruccio Gastaldelli considered Geoffrey of Auxerre a significant, though often underestimated, figure within the Cistercian Order during the mid-12th century. They argued that despite being overshadowed by Bernard of Clairvaux, Geoffrey made substantial contributions to the development of Cistercian theology through his own

Arnold of Bonneval, and Geoffrey of Auxerre, *The First Life of Bernard of Clairvaux*, trans.: Hilary Costello, OCSO, Liturgical Press, Athens, Ohio and Collegetown, Minnesota 2015, p. 189.

³ There is a debate among historians for the aim of this Sermon to the clergy of Paris. Hayden V. White argued that Bernard wished to convert clerics to monasticism, Cf. Hayden V. White, “The Gregorian Ideal and Saint Bernard of Clairvaux”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 21 (1960), pp. 321-348. The same argument is expressed in the introduction of the English translation of the Sermon. On the contrary, John Sommerfeldt suggested that in this Sermon Bernard expressed his appreciation to the clergy and thus he sought to guide the clerics towards a more pious way of life in order to be able to fulfil their duty as ministers. Sommerfeldt pointed out that “conversion” had a more abstract and general meaning in Bernardine thought, without necessarily meaning entry into a monastery. Cf. John Sommerfeldt, *Bernard of Clairvaux: On the Spirituality of Relationship*, The Newman Press, New York 2004, pp. 93-97.

⁴ Adriaan H. Bredero, “The Canonization of Bernard of Clairvaux” in M. Basil Pennington (eds.), *Saint Bernard of Clairvaux: Studies Commemorating the Eight Centenary of his Canonization*, CS 28, Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, 1977, pp. 86-91.

⁵ The details on Geoffrey's life are from F. Gastaldelli, *Goffredo di Auxerre: Super Apocalypsim*, (Temi e Testi, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Rome, 1970, pp. 11-18. Cf. Jean Leclercq, “Le Témoignage de Geoffroy d'Auxerre sur la vie Cistercienne”, *Analecta Monastica*, 2^e serie, *Studia Anselmiana* 31 (1953), pp. 174-181; Leclercq, “Les écrits de Geoffroy d'Auxerre”, *Revue Bénédictine* 62 (1952), pp. 274-291.

⁶ The historiography on heresy in the 12th century is vast. In the following chapters I will discuss with further details the work of historians that are relevant to my study.

written works.⁷ Geoffrey authored numerous works, such as the *Fragmenta*, the earliest record of events concerning Bernard's life, which he had begun to write while he was accompanying the abbot of Clairvaux in his travels.⁸ Furthermore, Geoffrey initiated around 1148 (five years prior to Bernard's passing) the composition of Bernard's *vita*, *Vita prima Sancti Bernardi*, which was a part of the efforts for the canonization of the abbot of Clairvaux.⁹ Geoffrey was the author of the last three of the five books of this work. In addition to the works on Bernard's life, he composed two commentaries, the first on the Song of Songs and the second on the *Apocalypse (Super Apocalypsim)*, which is the focus of this study.¹⁰ The compilation on the book of Revelation consisted of 20 sermons originally delivered on different occasions in front of a monastic audience. Geoffrey reworked these sermons during the last years of his life.¹¹ In his sermons, the author interpreted the Book of Revelation as a hermeneutical tool for understanding the challenges and conflicts of his era¹² and for edifying his audience.¹³

The topics of the sermons were diverse. The Cistercian abbot discussed matters ranging from theological issues to aspects of monastic life. Geoffrey of Auxerre's sermons offer a window into his vision for the proper social order of Christian society. Through them, he explored questions of social hierarchies and delineated the specific duties and responsibilities of monks, clerics, and the laity. Geoffrey's references to secular issues are quite limited. He did, however, raise a problem that was troubling the churchmen of his time, namely heresy. In two of his Sermons (Sermon 14 and 18) he described how heretics threatened the Church and the Christians. In Sermon 14 he discusses how wandering laymen and especially women were publicly preaching without having permission, while local clergy seemingly tolerated this behavior. This Sermon is a valuable source for the early history of the Waldensians, as it refers, among others things, to the Council of Lyon, where the founder of the group, Valdes, gave the profession of faith, but then "returned to his vomit", as Geoffrey vividly described.¹⁴ At the same time, it is also relevant to the problem of women preaching, as Beverly Kienzle has

⁷ Leclercq, "Le Témoignage de Geoffroy", *ibid.*, p. 174; Gastaldelli, *Studi su San Bernardo e Goffredo di Auxerre*, *ibid.* pp. 373-374.

⁸ Costello, "Introduction", *ibid.* p. xvii.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. ix.

¹⁰ For a list over Geoffrey's published and unpublished works Cf. Leclercq, "Les ecrites de Geoffroy d' Auxerre", *ibid.* pp. 27-46.

¹¹ Gastaldelli, *Goffredo di Auxerre*, *ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

¹² Goffredo Di Auxerre, *Super Apocalypsim*, *ibid.*, p. 58. Cf. Geoffrey of Auxerre, *On the Apocalypse*, trans. Joseph Gibbons, Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, Michigan 2000, pp. 18-19.

¹³ Goffredo Di Auxerre, *ibid.*, p. 58. Cf. Geoffrey of Auxerre, *ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁴ Goffredo Di Auxerre, *ibid.*, p. 179. Cf. Geoffrey of Auxerre, *ibid.*, p. 144. Christine Thouzellier, *Catharisme et val-déisme en Languedoc à la fin du XIIe et au début du XIIIe siècle : politique pontificale, controverses*, Béatrice-Nauwelaerts, Louvain and Paris 1969, pp. 26-27 ; Robert Moore, *The War on Heresy: Faith and Power in Medieval Europe*, Profile Books, London 2012, pp. 220-222.

shown.¹⁵ Sermon 18 refers to the heresy of the so-called Cathars¹⁶ and narrates the conversion of two heretics around 1180, an event attributed to the preaching of Henry of Marcy, a Cistercian abbot who later served as a papal legate.¹⁷

This inquiry aims to refocus on Geoffrey's Sermon 14 and shift our attention to the entanglement between the allegation of heresy and the references to clerical behavior. In Sermon 14, the author linked the problem of heresy with the inadequacies of the clergy offering a vantage point for exploring Geoffrey's attitude towards clerics. By benefiting from the insights of modern historiography, a closer examination of this connection provides us with the opportunity to discover new insights into the Cistercian abbot's approach towards clergy. Additionally, we can follow how allegations of heresy were deployed by Geoffrey in an effort to fight the religious dissidents, to remind his audiences of the importance of the clergy, and to construct a specific clerical identity in accordance with his monastic thinking. Geoffrey of Auxerre's anti-heretical discourse consists of a valuable case study as he comes from a monastic order, the Cistercians, which focused on a stricter monastic life and obedience to the Rule of St Benedict,¹⁸ while promoting spiritual renewal not only of the monks but also of the clergy and the laity.

Modern Scholarship on Medieval Allegations of Heresy in the 12th century

Modern scholarship has pointed out that references to heretics and allegations of heresy became more common in the writings of ecclesiastical writers of the 12th century, reflecting the Church's growing concern with religious dissidents.¹⁹ Historians have scrutinized the link

¹⁵ Beverly Kienzle, *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, University of California Press, California 1998, pp. 100-106.

¹⁶ For a discussion on the developments in the historiography of medieval heresy, Cf. Peter Biller, "Through a Glass Darkly: Cf.ing Medieval Heresy", in Peter Linehan and Janet I. Nelson (eds.), *The Medieval World*, Routledge, London 2003, pp. 308-26. For the debate on the existence of Cathars as an organized group or as construction of medieval churchmen, Cf. Jörg Feuchter, "The Cathars", in Richard Flower (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Heresy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2025, pp. 301-322.

¹⁷ Goffredo Di Auxerre, *Super Apocalypsim*, *ibid.*, p. 58. Cf. Geoffrey of Auxerre, *On the Apocalypse*, *ibid.*, pp. 18-19. Cf. Sermon 14: Goffredo Di Auxerre, *ibid.*, pp. 175-182. Cf. Geoffrey of Auxerre, *ibid.* pp. 139-147. Sermon 18: Goffredo Di Auxerre, *ibid.*, pp. 206-221. Cf. Geoffrey of Auxerre, *ibid.*, pp. 175-189.

¹⁸ Francis Kline, "Saint Bernard and the Rule of Saint Benedict: An Introduction" in John R. Sommerfeldt (eds.), *Bernard Magister: Papers Presented at the Noncentenary Celebrations of the Birth of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux*, Cistercian Publications, Spencer 1992, pp. 169-183. Cf. also: Emilia Jamrozak, *The Cistercian Order in Medieval Europe, 1090-1550*, Routledge, London and New York 2013; Mette Birkedal Bruun, "Introduction", in id. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Cistercian Order*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2012, pp. 1-25.

¹⁹ Raoul Manselli, "De la Persuasio à la Coercitio", in id. *Le Credo, la Morale et l' Inquisition*, (Cahiers de Fanjeaux) Privat, Toulouse 1971, pp. 175-197, 180-181; Henri Maisonneuve, *Études sur les origines de l'Inquisition*, Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, Paris 1960; Bernard Hamilton, *The Medieval Inquisition*, Holmes and Meier Publishers, New York: 1981, pp. 21-30; Michael Frassetto, "Precursors to Religious Inquisitions: Anti-

between these references and heresy. They have convincingly established the close bonds of religious dissidence with the overall social, political and religious environment in which it was born.²⁰ It was the German historian Herbert Grundmann who argued in 1935 in his seminal work *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages (Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter)* that by studying the religious culture of the 12th and 13th centuries, we discover how the various religious movements that emerged during this era—such as the new monastic orders, the mendicant orders, the awakening of female spirituality, and heretical groups—in fact shared some common elements, such as their devotion to the model of apostolic life with austerity, poverty and preaching. Grundmann’s groundbreaking argument was that these movements had a common origin in the religious development of Europe in the 12th century and gradually formed different orders and sects. Therefore, the study of heresy cannot be isolated from the discussion of other religious phenomena.²¹

More recently, Sita Steckel has expanded Grundmann’s argument illustrating how the polemic against heresy, anti-clerical discourse and criticism against monastic orders were indeed interrelated.²² R.I. Moore in his pioneering study *The Formation of a Persecuting Society* by studying the churchmen’s attitude towards marginalized groups, such as the heretics, the Jews and the lepers, illustrated how the secular and the ecclesiastical elites of the High Middle Ages created the image a common enemy seeking to solidify their own power.²³ He repeated and expanded his argument in his work *The War on Heresy*, where he described how the Cistercian Order, and especially Bernard of Clairvaux and Geoffrey of Auxerre, were involved in this process.²⁴

heretical Efforts to 1184,” in Donald Prudlo (ed.), *A Companion to Heresy Inquisitions*, Brill, Leiden 2019, pp. 41-72; Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation*, Blackwell, Oxford³ 2002; Jennifer K. Deane, *A History of the Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham 2011; Christine Caldwell Ames, *Medieval Heresies: Christianity, Judaism and Islam*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2015; Richard Flower (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Heresy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2025.

²⁰ Cf. for example: Jacques Le Goff (ed.), *Hérésies et sociétés dans l'Europe préindustrielle : 11e-18e siècles*, Mouton & Co, Paris and La Haye 1968; Robert Moore, *The Birth of Popular Heresy*, Arnold, London: 1975; Alexander Patschovsky, “Heresy and Society: On the Political Function of Heresy in Medieval World”, in Caterina Bruschi, Peter Biller (eds.), *Texts and Representations of Medieval Heresy*, York Medieval Press, Woodbridge, Suffolk 2003, pp. 23-44.

²¹ Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages: The Historical Links between Heresy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Women’s Religious Movement in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century, with the Historical Foundations of German Mysticism*, trans. Steven Rowan, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 1995, and especially pp. 7-30 and 209- 235.

²² Sita Steckel. “Hypocrites! Critiques of Religious Movements and Criticism of the Church, 1050–1300” in Jennifer Kolpacoff Deane and Anne E. Lester (eds.), *Between Orders and Heresy: Rethinking Medieval Religious Movements*, University of Toronto Press Toronto, Buffalo, and London 2022, pp. 79-126.

²³ Robert Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society, Authority and Deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250*, Blackwell, Oxford², 2007, pp. 114-172.

²⁴ Moore, *War*, *ibid.*, especially p. 329.

The question of Cistercian involvement in the Church's anti-heretical struggle particularly in Southern France was furthermore addressed by the French historian Jean-Louis Biget. In his contribution to the volume titled *Inventer l'hérésie?*, he claimed that the Cistercian monks, including Geoffrey, constructed heresy. He argued that they did so as they feared religious antagonism caused by religious groups claiming to be the true followers of *vita apostolica*.²⁵

More recently, Uwe Brunn's research on the emergence of heresy in the Rhineland, particularly his references to the existence of Cathars, highlighted a direct link between anti-heretical rhetoric and the dynamics of canonical reform. Brunn has observed that the anti-heretical discourse of churchmen like Bernard of Clairvaux, who launched a preaching mission in the region in 1146 for the Second Crusade, was a direct result of the canonical reform movement. For Brunn, allegations of heresy were a byproduct of the campaign for clerical reform.²⁶

In addition to historiographical approaches that link the emergence of heresy to broad economic, social, and religious developments, another crucial perspective comes from historians who have argued that the appearance of religious "deviants" in works written by monks and addressing monastic audiences informs us of the authors' monastic worldview. Hence, the anti-heretical polemic helps us to understand how the Cistercians conceive the world around them, their own role in it and their approaches towards not only the dissidents but also the laity and the clergy.²⁷ Martha Newman in her work, *The Boundaries of Charity* has argued that Geoffrey sought to warn his audience about the existence of heresy as a danger to the unity of the Church. Moreover, as Newman has demonstrated, the Cistercians, among them Geoffrey, felt compelled to defend the Church and the Christian society as a consequence of their monastic ideology of spiritual reform and their notion of *caritas*. Thus, they participated in anti-heretical struggle by preaching against heresy.²⁸ Likewise Beverly Kienzle, by studying

²⁵ Jean- Louis Biget. "Les Albigeois: Remarques Sur une Dénomination" in Monique Zerner (ed.), *Inventer l'Hérésie? Discours Polémique et Pouvoirs avant l'Inquisition*, Centre d'Études Médiévales, Nice 1998, pp. 219-255.

²⁶ Uwe Brunn, *Des contestataires aux "cathares": Discours de réforme et propagande antihérétique dans les pays du Rhin et de la Meuse avant l'Inquisition*, Institut d'études augustiniennes, Paris 2006, pp. 124-31.

²⁷ Martha G. Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity: Cistercian Culture and Ecclesiastical Reform, 1098-1180*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1996, pp.219-234; Beverly Mayne Kienzle, *Cistercians, Heresy and Crusade in Occitania, 1145-1229: Preaching in the Lord's Vineyard*, York Medieval Press, York 2001, especially pp. 8-9; Christine Caldwell Ames, "Crusade, Inquisition, and Monasticization, (unpublished paper presented at a conference, Kalamazoo, 2014); Matina Noutsou, "Blurring the Boundaries: Monastic Values and Lay Conduct in the Anti-heretical Writings of Bernard of Clairvaux", *I Quaderni Del m.æ.S. - Journal of Mediaeval Sodalitium*, 22 (2024), pp. 1-22. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2533-2325/19074> (Accessed: 26.04.2025).

²⁸ Newman, *Boundaries of Charity*, *ibid.*, pp. 219-234.

the Cistercian anti-heretical rhetoric in the years 1145- 1209, has argued that, although Cistercian authors did not fabricate heresy, they, in accordance with their monastic thought, sought to defend not only the Church but their own Order against those who challenged their monastic values and became their competitors in the pursuit of a more pious way of life.²⁹

Taking as point of departure the framework of religious culture in the middle of the 12th century and particularly the milieu of spiritual antagonism, as described by historians, I will discuss the interplay of the references to heresy in Geoffrey of Auxerre's anti-heretical writings and his criticism towards clergy. Furthermore, by relating Geoffrey's overall monastic Cistercian thought to the heretical charges, I will demonstrate that these Sermons allow us not only to understand the Cistercian abbot's approach towards the clergy but to observe how "the heretical card"³⁰ functioned as one of the weapons in an effort to reform clerics.

Cistercians and Clerical Conduct

Geoffrey's interest in clerical behavior is certainly not an isolated case. Historiography has demonstrated how monastic authors, since the first centuries of Christianity, were intensely preoccupied with the life and conduct of the clergy, and the 12th century was indeed not an exception.³¹ On the contrary, as Maureen Miller has argued, in this period "a sufficiently well-formed notion of clerical-ness" had been shaped.³² Geoffrey was active in an era from the Gregorian Reform of the 11th century to the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, which was very important for the shaping of the ideal clerical conduct. The Gregorian Reform aimed to free the clergy from secular influence and control. Concurrently there were established by the papacy some strict demands when it came to the moral life of clergy, condemning the sale of ecclesiastical offices (simony), the clerical marriage (Nicolaiism) and generally a conduct that was overly secular and insufficiently spiritual.³³ In the aftermath of the Gregorian Reform,

²⁹ Kiezele, *Cistercians, Heresy and Crusade*, *ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

³⁰ I am inspired by the title of the edited volume Kare Bollerman, Thomas M. Izbicki, Cary J. Nederman (eds.), *Power and Resistance from the Eleventh to the Sixteenth Centuries: Playing the Heresy Card*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2014.

³¹ Julia Barrow, *The Clergy in the Medieval World: Secular Clerics, their Families and Careers in North-Western Europe, c. 800-1200*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2015, p. 82; Maureen C. Miller, "Reform, Clerical Culture, and Politics" in John Arnold (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Christianity*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014, pp., 305-311; Robert N. Swanson, "Apostolic Successors: Priests and Priesthood, Bishops, and Episcopacy in Medieval Western Europe" in Greg Peters and C. Colt Anderson (eds.), *A Companion to Priesthood and Holy Orders in the Middle Ages*, Brill, Leiden 2015, p. 25.

³² Miller, *ibid.*, 305

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 303- 322; Jehangir Yezdi Malegam, "Pro-Papacy Polemic and the Purity of the Church: The Gregorian Reform" in Keith Sisson and Atria A Larson (eds.), *A Companion to the Medieval Papacy: Growth of an Ideology and Institution*, Brill, Leiden and Boston 2016, pp. 37-65.

several Church Councils addressed the issue and set demands on the life of the clergy. The Fourth Lateran Council has been described as a watershed (also) for the clerical conduct due to the various decrees which aim at regulating the life, the appearance and more generally the behavior of the clergy.³⁴

The Cistercian order showed great interest in the life and conduct of priests. John Sommerfelt illustrated how Bernard of Clairvaux admired the clergy, who undertook the demanding role of guiding Christians and had to strike a difficult balance between secular and spiritual matters.³⁵ As Newman has described, the Cistercians believed that the clergy's responsibilities regarding the guidance of Christians and the defense of the unity of the Christian society were of great importance.³⁶ According to their monastic ideology, the monks could fully dedicate themselves to their contemplative life, when the clerics could fulfil their role as ministers and the well-being of Christian society was secured.³⁷

However, they recognized that prelates and clerics did not always possess the requisite virtues and did not live up to these expectations, as they were preoccupied with earthly matters, neglecting the spiritual dimension of their ministry, which was- according to the Cistercian ecclesiology- more important. Thus, the monks had to actively intervene by promoting the spiritual progress of the clergy. The Cistercian message of spiritual reform could be conveyed to the clergy through the extensive network of contacts that the Cistercian monasteries had with bishops and prelates. Furthermore, numerous Cistercian monks became bishops and maintained close ties with the Order. Cistercian abbots, notably Bernard and Geoffrey, did participate in many ecclesiastical councils and synods, where they could discuss clerical behavior, compose treatises and hagiographical texts, write letters and preach sermons, and where they could articulate their ideals about the clergy. As Newman noted: "the Cistercians became the dominant voice for clerical reform in the 12th century".³⁸

Geoffrey of Auxerre on priests: praise, guidance, and criticism

Returning to Geoffrey of Auxerre and to his Sermons on the Book of Revelation, we can observe how the Cistercian abbot unfolded his vision of Christian society, where harmony comes as a result of a strict societal division. Similar to Bernard of Clairvaux, and other

³⁴ Swanson, "Apostolic Successors", *ibid.*, p.41.

³⁵ Sommerfeld, *On the Spirituality*, *ibid.*, pp. 27-29

³⁶ Newman, *The Boundaries*, *ibid.*, p. 156.

³⁷ Cf. Martha Newman, "A Well- trained Clergy", in *The Boundaries of Charity*, *ibid.* pp. 141-170.

³⁸ Newman, *ibid.*, 156.

churchmen of the 12th century,³⁹ Geoffrey applied the tripartite scheme of Daniel, Job and Noah, which represents the monks, clergy and laity in order to illustrate how these social strata should work together in harmony to secure the well-being of the Church and personal salvation.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, Geoffrey showed a greater interest in the ecclesiastical and secular leaders, who were responsible for the well-being of the Church and Christian society.⁴¹ In his work he outlined their responsibilities in governing Christians: “The Lord’s body is the Church (Col 1:24); his hands refer to men holding office, his right hand to spiritual ministries and his left to corporal deputies”.⁴² He reminded them that their power had divine origins.⁴³ Moreover, the Cistercian abbot focused on the common responsibility that ecclesiastical and secular leaders shared, namely the proper governance of Christians. However, in accordance with the overall Cistercian thought (as described in the previous chapter) for Geoffrey the office of priests was considered more important than that of kings: “the priestly anointing is worthier than the royal. Kings are anointed only by priests; priests are not anointed by kings”.⁴⁴ In order to further articulate his point, the Cistercian abbot referred to the Old Testament:

“we read that under the Old Covenant some priests once exercised civil responsibilities. Not only were they not punished for this, they were even commended. But when one of the kings Uzziah (one of the kings of Judah), who is otherwise highly praised, dared to exercise the priestly office, he was immediately punished by being struck on the forehead with leprosy” (2 Co 26:19)⁴⁵

In his Sermons on the Apocalypse, Geoffrey of Auxerre repeatedly expressed his profound admiration for the clergy and he did not hesitate to show how crucial and difficult the task undertaken by priests was: “you have taken on an arduous and difficult task, to serve a variety of temperaments (RB 2:31)”, Geoffrey comments.⁴⁶ For the Cistercian abbot, similar to other Cistercian writers, notably Bernard of Clairvaux, the priests were ministers, shepherds

³⁹ Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2011, pp. 289- 323.

⁴⁰ Gofredo di Auxerre, *Super Apocalypsim*, *ibid.*, p. 109. Cf. Geoffrey of Auxerre, *On the Apocalypse*, *ibid.*, p. 69. However, his references on the laity, in comparison with the ones on clergy, are limited in his work.

⁴¹ Newman, *The Boundaries*, *ibid.*, p. 141 and 171.

⁴² Geoffrey of Auxerre, *ibid.*, p. 47. Cf. Gofredo di Auxerre, *ibid.*, p.87: “Manus Domini in corpore eius, quod est ecclesia, officiales viros commendant, dextera quidem spiritalibus ministeriis, laeva corporalibus deputatos”.

⁴³ Gofredo di Auxerre, *ibid.*, p.78. Cf. Geoffrey of Auxerre, *ibid.*, p. 38.

⁴⁴ Geoffrey of Auxerre, *ibid.*, pp. 41- 42. Cf. Gofredo di Auxerre, *ibid.*, p.81: “quam sit dignior sacerdotalis unctio, quam regalis. A solis enim sacerdotibus reges ununtur, non a regibus sacerdotes”.

⁴⁵ Geoffrey of Auxerre, *ibid.*, p. 42. Cf. Gofredo di Auxerre, *ibid.*, p.81: “Et nonullos olim sacerdotum sub Veteri Testamento regia administrantes officia, non solum in nullo proinde punitos legimus, sed etiam commendatos, cum unus regum et regum Iuda Ozias, in aliis quidem laudatus, officium sacerdotale praesumens, sine ulla dilatione multatus, lepra fuerit in fronte percussus”.

⁴⁶ Geoffrey of Auxerre, *ibid.*, p. 71. Cf. Gofredo di Auxerre, *ibid.*, p.110: “Arduam rem et difficilem suscepistis, multorum moribus deservire”.

and pastors.⁴⁷ Therefore, the author of the sermons on Revelation reminded the priests of their responsibilities as they needed to advise, support and lead their flock to salvation, according to each person's needs.⁴⁸

In addition to his admiration, in his sermons on the Apocalypse, Geoffrey did not hesitate to give his guidance to the clergy, particularly regarding the balance between secular and ecclesiastical responsibilities:

“The task of the spiritual priest is to seek peace (Ps 34:14; P 3:11), to give God peace offerings (Ex 32:6; Lv 9:18) and a sacrifice of praise (Ps 50:14, 23) in contemplation, in prayer, and in devotion of mind. The ablution, then, refers to the remedy of penance, the kingdom to the exercise of justice, and priesthood to the study of wisdom”⁴⁹

This question reappeared in his sermons on the Apocalypse, when the Cistercian author, similar to Bernard, deployed the image of Lazarus, Martha and Mary which represents the harmonious coexistence of the contemplative, active and penitent life.⁵⁰ The fact that the Cistercian abbot referred to the tension between contemplative and active life twice in his Sermons attests to the centrality of this question in his thought. In his *Sermo ad praelatos in concilio convocatos* (Sermon for the Prelates Summoned to Council), he deployed the image of the four faced beast of the Book of Ezekiel⁵¹ to highlight the need for clerics to find the right balance.

Even if Geoffrey recognized the need for the priests to take care of both their worldly and spiritual tasks, he nevertheless advised them in his sermons not to direct their attention to secular matters but to concentrate on spiritual issues. “I pray that the priests of modern times may be mindful of the grace and that they may direct their attention less to worldly honors than to spiritual greatness and constancy” the abbot warned in his Sermon 3 of his commentary.⁵² And again in Sermon 9 he urged clergy: “the stars are the church's angels, and

47 Gofredo di Auxerre, *Super Apocalypsim*, ibid., pp.110, 118. Cf. Geoffrey of Auxerre, *On the Apocalypse*, ibid., pp. 70, 80.

48 Gofredo di Auxerre, ibid., pp.110, 118, 132. Cf. Geoffrey of Auxerre, ibid., pp. 71, 80, 94.

49 Geoffrey of Auxerre, ibid., p. 42. Cf. Gofredo di Auxerre, ibid., p.82: “Ad inquirendam pacem, pacificas hostias et sacrificium laudis in contemplatione, in oratione, in devotione mentis offerre Deo, spiritali competit sacerdoti. In hunc igitur modum ablutio quidem ad remedium paenitentiae, regnum vero ad exercitium iustitiae, ad studium sapientiae sacerdotium referatur”.

50 Gofredo di Auxerre, ibid., p. 82 Cf. Geoffrey of Auxerre, ibid., pp. 42-43. For the interpretation of this image in Bernard of Clairvaux's writings and generally the medieval thought, Cf. Thomas Merton, *The Cistercian Fathers and their Monastic Theology*, Liturgical Press, Minnesota 2016, p. 349 and Giles Constable, *Three Studies*, ibid., pp. 66-67.

51 *Patrologia Latina* 184: 1095-102.

52 Geoffrey of Auxerre, *On the Apocalypse*, ibid., p. 41. Cf. Gofredo di Auxerre, *Super Apocalypsim*, ibid., p.81: “Meminerint tamen obsecro moderni temporis gratiae sacerdotes, nec ad extollentiam saecularem sed ad magnanimitatem magis meminerint et constantiam spiritalem, quam sit dignior sacerdotialis unctio, quam regalis”.

the lampstands their churches; stars of such kind must never decline to his left hand, where are riches and glory, but must remain in his right hand, where there is long life (Pr 3:16)".⁵³ Thus, Geoffrey seemed to underline the importance of the spiritual dimension of clerics' office as an attempt to direct their attention away from secular matters.

Perhaps he was concerned that priests, who did not have a "safe" contemplative life like that of the monks, could be attracted and seduced by worldly temptations such as pride or vanity and a way of life inconsistent with their office, and therefore they needed to be reminded of the danger. These sources suggest that Geoffrey of Auxerre believed in the supremacy of the contemplative life and actively sought to disseminate monastic ideas and ideals to the broader clergy. Newman has argued that as the Cistercian sermons on clergy were mostly addressed to monastic audiences, their aim could be to alert the monks to the danger of being isolated in the monastery and urge them to participate in the spiritual reform of the clergy.⁵⁴ I would argue that the Cistercian abbot was also interested in the clergy and he attempted to create a particular clerical identity that was closer to the monastic ideals of spiritual life rather than a secular way of life.

Returning to Geoffrey's work, in Sermon 6 he reminded the audience that "the raven loves gold; angels do not lay up money in hiding places, in chests, or in strong boxes".⁵⁵ The guidance became more specific; Geoffrey warned the priests that the love for money (avarice) and the clerical office were incompatible. This warning might be an expression of the monastic and especially Cistercian contempt for material wealth, which was – in their eyes – one of the diseases that destroyed the Church. Geoffrey highlighted the Cistercian dedication to the ideal of poverty.⁵⁶ In addition, this advice echoed the program of the Gregorian era as well, when clerical greed was under fierce attack and the accusations of simony against the clergy became a frequently used weapon by the reformists.⁵⁷

It remains unclear whether Geoffrey's critique steamed from disappointed with the conduct of contemporary priests; what emerges more clearly from his sermons is his sense of moral responsibility to stress the importance of the clerical office and remind them of their obligations, in a manner consistent the approaches of other Cistercian authors. I believe that

⁵³ Geoffrey of Auxerre, *On the Apocalypse*, *ibid.*, p. 94. Cf. Gofredo di Auxerre, *Super Apocalypsim*, *ibid.*, p.132: "Stellas angelos ecclesiarum et eorum ecclesias candelabra iam exposuerat, et necesse est eiusmodi stellas non ad sinistram inclinari ubi divitiae et gloria, sed in dextera stare ubi longitude dierum".

⁵⁴ Newman, *The Boundaries*, *ibid.*, p. 170.

⁵⁵ Geoffrey of Auxerre, *ibid.*, p. 71. Cf. Gofredo di Auxerre, *ibid.*, p.110: "Aurum monedula diligit; pecuniam in loculis, in scriniis, in gazophylaciis angeli non reponunt".

⁵⁶ Newman, *ibid.*, p. 156.

⁵⁷ Robert Moore, *The Origins of European Dissent*, St Martin's Press, New York 1977, pp. 46-82.

these sermons should be interpreted in the context of the clerical reform that the Cistercians promoted in the aftermath of the Gregorian Era.⁵⁸ Besides, as Newman has argued, Geoffrey was quite resolute when it came to the question of clerical reform: not only did he compose a sermon on this matter but he also participated in various ecclesiastical synods and councils in order to advocate the reform of the priests.⁵⁹ His sermons on the Apocalypse confirm it.

The author did not limit himself to indirect or hidden criticism of the clergy. In Sermon 13, the tone becomes harsher:

“Would that today our priests may contend with tongues afire rather than with rigid iron swords! Would that they found armaments and shields fit for burning intolerable, and would prefer the dalmatic to the breastplate, the miter to the helmet, the pastoral staff to the military banner! The servants of God are to fight for God with spiritually powerful weapons, not with material and physical ones (2 Co 10:4), contending with prayer, preaching, supplication and reproof (1 Tim 2:1)”⁶⁰

It is noteworthy that in this passage, the priests are undergoing a transformation that bears many similarities to the monastic metamorphosis. Just as monks became *Milites Christi* ("Soldiers of Christ")—an image that appears frequently in both the Benedictine Rule and Cistercian spirituality—the clergy are likewise reimagined through a militaristic and ascetic lens. This analogy serves to elevate the priesthood by aligning it with the disciplined, spiritual rigor of the monastic ideal.⁶¹ Thus, the monastic ideal of spiritual warfare is propagated to the clergy.

Geoffrey continued his Sermons by accusing priests of lacking the ability to preach or to follow the advice of the Spirit for the well-being of their churches.⁶² Therefore, in Geoffrey's sermons we see that there is a recurring allegation either directly or indirectly, that the pastorate is in crisis as the priests of his time have lost the balance between spiritual and worldly concerns. Hence, they do not fulfil their duties properly and they prefer to give their attention to secular matters.

⁵⁸ Newman, *The Boundaries*, *ibid.*, p. 157.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁶⁰ Geoffrey of Auxerre, *On the Apocalypse*, *ibid.*, p. 135. Cf. Gofredo di Auxerre, *Super Apocalypsim*, *ibid.*, p. 170: “Utinam nostri hodie sacerdotes linguis potius igneis quam mucronibus ferreis dimicarent, utinam comburenda igni arma et scuta non tollerent, loricas pro dalmaticis, pro mitris galeas, pro virgis pastoralibus vexilla militaria non praeferrent. Armis siquidem non materialibus, non corporalibus, sed spiritalibus et potentibus Deo, Dei ministro pugnandum; oratione, praedicatione, obsecratione et increpatione fuerat dimicandum”.

⁶¹ Katherine Allen Smith, “Spiritual Warriors in Citadels of Faith: Martial Rhetoric and Monastic Masculinity in the Long Twelfth Century” in Jennifer D. Thibodeaux (ed.), *Negotiating Clerical Identities: Priests, Monks and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2010, pp. 86-110 (and especially pp. 86-87).

⁶² Goffredo di Auxerre, *ibid.*, p. 170. Cf. Geoffrey of Auxerre, *ibid.*, p. 135.

The heresy of Nicolaitism

Criticism against clergy is expressed in multiple ways in the Sermons on the Apocalypse. In Sermon 9, Geoffrey commented on the passage 2:1-7 of the Book of Revelation, which discusses the letter to the Church of Ephesus about matters that trouble the church.⁶³ Taking as point of departure the sentence “you hate the deeds of Nicolaitans” (*Odisti facta Nicolaitarum*) he provided his audience with a definition of heresy, according to which heresy is either a self-chosen erroneous belief, which is stubbornly defended, or a form of inappropriate behavior:

“The deeds, he says, of the Nicolaitans (Rv 2:6). Error alone, or rather the stubborn choice to continue to err in matters of faith, makes heretics. Some are deceived concerning the Trinity or the twofold nature of Christ, others regarding the church’s sacraments. Some go astray over their behavior and actions, excepting norms that faith rejects or rejecting norms that faith accepts”⁶⁴

This passage is noteworthy as Geoffrey expanded the definition of heresy and equaled the adherence to wrong beliefs, or better beliefs that are condemned by the institutional Church, to reprehensible behavior.⁶⁵ As he explained, Nicolaitans were not accused because of their beliefs but due to their actions: namely, lust and gluttony. In this way heresy becomes a problem that is related to everyday conduct and the Church acquires the right to intervene in the behavior of Christians not only by advising but also by condemning under the threat of an allegation of heresy. Geoffrey observed that Nicolaitism had been condemned by the Church, and “no one today professes its foolishness”⁶⁶. However, he adds that “adherents of impurity” still exist.⁶⁷ Thus he reminded his audience that “... God hates not only the words of such people but their deeds; he hates not only declared heresy but an offensive way of life”.⁶⁸

At the same time, this passage provides us with the opportunity to observe how heresy allegations could be deployed by the Cistercian abbot to attack part of the clergy or urge clerics to reform. Geoffrey’s reference to the biblical heresy of Nicolaitism cannot be accidental, as his audience was aware that Nicolaitism was an accusation against clerical marriage, as especially

⁶³ Goffredo di Auxerre, *Super Apocalypsim*, *ibid.*, p. 136. Cf. Geoffrey of Auxerre, *On the Apocalypse*, *ibid.*, p. 98.

⁶⁴ Geoffrey of Auxerre, *ibid.*, p. 98. Cf. Goffredo di Auxerre, *ibid.*, p. 136: “Facta”, inquit, “Nicolaitarum”. Cum haereticos faciat solus error vel obstinatio magis errandi circa articulos fidei, alios tamen in his decipi constat quae ad summam pertinent Trinitatem, vel alterutram naturam Christi, quosdam in sacramentis ecclesiae, nonnullos etiam super his quae in suis cuique moribus vel operibus eadem fides insectanda docet, vel sectanda commendat”.

⁶⁵ Grundmann, *Religious Movements*, *ibid.*, pp. 12-13; Patschovsky, “Heresy and Society”, *ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

⁶⁶ Geoffrey of Auxerre, *ibid.*, p. 99. Cf. Goffredo di Auxerre, *ibid.*, p. 137: “eiusmodi stultitiam nemo hodie profitetur”.

⁶⁷ Goffredo di Auxerre, *ibid.*, p. 137. Cf. Geoffrey of Auxerre, *ibid.*, p. 99.

⁶⁸ Geoffrey of Auxerre, *ibid.*, p. 99. Cf. Goffredo di Auxerre, *ibid.*, p. 137: “quod non modo verba sed facta eiusmodi hominum, non modo professionem haereticam sed oscenam conversationem oderit Deus”.

in the 11th century it became one of the main issues during Gregorian reform.⁶⁹ Geoffrey seems to carry forward this tradition by demanding clerical purity.

Criticism of the clergy and the problem of heresy.

As noted in the introductory section of this inquiry, Sermon 14 of Geoffrey's compilation treats the topic of heresy among the laity. The thematic basis for Sermon 14 is the passage of the Apocalypse in the letter to the Church of Thyatira (2:18-21), where the "prophet" Jezebel preaches false beliefs and seduces the population. Beyond the sermon's importance for the history of heresy, in this passage we observe how the relationship between the problem of heretics and the criticism of the clergy is best illustrated. Geoffrey referred to the text of the Apocalypse, where the angel of the church of Thyatira is accused of allowing Jezebel to "teach and lead servants astray to fornicate and to eat food sacrificed to idols".⁷⁰ In accordance with this theme, Geoffrey blamed the ministers of his time for allowing heresy become stronger, because they hesitated to intervene in order to correct or punish the error: "we are not to believe that he hesitated to give correction, for his ministry is applauded", exclaims Geoffrey in front of his audience.⁷¹ He further accused priests of showing too much tolerance, as they are afraid of exercising severity.⁷² The Cistercian abbot believed that priests show too much patience when it comes to their approach to heresy. Patience is a virtue praised in other circumstances but in the case of fighting against heretics it is not useful.⁷³ Geoffrey deployed the biblical image of the priest Eli (1 S 2:12, 4:18; RB 2:26) who was condemned as he failed to punish his sinful sons in order to demonstrate how the priests should not fail to punish the wrongdoers.⁷⁴

Hence, according to the Cistercian abbot the behavior and the weakness of the priests are one of the reasons for the spread of heresy. The passage in this Sermon offers an example of how the ecclesiastical authors of the 12th century could connect the problem of heresy with

⁶⁹ Michael Frassetto (ed.), *Medieval Purity and Piety: Essays on Medieval Clerical Celibacy and Religious Reform*, Garland, New York 1998, and especially the chapter: Uta-Renare Blumenthal, "Pope Gregory VII and the Prohibition of Nicolaitism", in *ibid.*, pp. 239-267; Grado Giovanni Merlo, "Christian Experiences of Religious non-Conformism" in Arnold (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Christianity*, *ibid.*, pp. 436-454.

⁷⁰ Geoffrey of Auxerre, *On the Apocalypse*, *ibid.*, p. 139. Cf. Goffredo di Auxerre, *Super Apocalypsim*, *ibid.*, p. 176: "docere et seducere servos meos, fornicari et manducare de idolothytis".

⁷¹ Geoffrey of Auxerre, *On the Apocalypse*, *ibid.*, p. 143. Cf. Goffredo di Auxerre, *Super Apocalypsim*, *ibid.*, p. 178: "non est credendum quod arguere dissimulaverit, cuius ministerium approbatur".

⁷² Goffredo di Auxerre, *ibid.*, pp. 178-179. Cf. Geoffrey of Auxerre, *ibid.*, pp., 142-143.

⁷³ Goffredo di Auxerre, *ibid.*, pp. 178-179. Cf. Geoffrey of Auxerre, *ibid.*, pp., 142-143.

⁷⁴ Goffredo di Auxerre, *ibid.*, pp. 178-179. Cf. Geoffrey of Auxerre, *ibid.*, pp., 142-143.

clerical behavior.⁷⁵ At the same time, Geoffrey indirectly calls for clerical reform and fulfill their duty when it comes to the defense of the Church, the proper guidance of Christians and the punishment of those who threaten the well-being of the Church and the salvation of Christians.

Conclusion

In Geoffrey of Auxerre's sermons on the Apocalypse, his admiration for the priestly office is evident in his recognition of their spiritual authority and their role in shepherding the Christian faithful. At the same time, this admiration is coupled with a pointed criticism as he believed priests were not living up to their sacred responsibilities. He envisions a clergy that is directed towards spiritual matters and apprehends its responsibilities regarding the governance the Christians. In a similar vein, Geoffrey also believed that priests were duty-bound to remain vigilant against heresy and to contend for the preservation of the Church's unity. For Geoffrey, the clergy should always seek to maintain a balance between the spiritual and the secular, between understanding and correcting, between tolerance and punishment. However, the Cistercian abbot's sermons suggest that he perceived a crisis within the clergy, as both his indirect and direct criticism illustrate. Geoffrey's approach may be attributed to the competitive atmosphere between clergy and the new monastic orders in the era after the Gregorian Reform. It can also be understood in the context of the clerical reform that the Cistercians were promoting.

In the Sermons on the Apocalypse, Geoffrey of Auxerre does more than simply inform his audience about two contemporary issues: the need for clerical reform and the threat of heresy. He strategically interconnects these two problems, presenting one as a direct consequence of the other. Accusations of heresy in Geoffrey's writings serve as an opportunity either to inform his monastic audiences about issues in the world outside the monastery or to promote the Cistercian vision of clerical reform. According to this vision, the spiritual dimension of the clerical responsibilities is paramount, along with their duty to fight for the salvation of Christians and the unity of the Church.

⁷⁵ The clerical behavior and the inabilities in fulfilling the priestly role have furthermore entered the polemical (monastic) discourse against heresy. For figures as Hildegard of Bingen, Elisabeth of Shonau and her brother Eckbert of Shonau, the excessive way of life of clerics was an excuse for heretics' criticism and anticlerical attacks. For example Cf. Beverly Kienzle, "Operatrix in vinea domini : Hildegard of Bingen's Preaching and Polemics against the Cathars", *Heresis : revue d'hérésiologie médiévale Année*, 26-27 (1996), pp. 43-56.

Finally, it may be argued that by promoting this reform through his commentary on the Apocalypse, Geoffrey of Auxerre sought to construct a clerical identity that was closely aligned with monastic ideals, specifically emphasizing the primacy of spiritual matters and the necessity of defending the Church.

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