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Beyond Religion: On the Lack of Belief During the Central and Late Middle Ages

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The subject of the following discussion lies »beyond religion« as the period between the 12th and the 15th century differed radically in its religious understanding from modern conceptions of religion.[1] Instead of the term »religion«, I will thus use the terms »belief« and »faith« or rather their opposites, »unbelief« and »faithlessness«, as I shall focus on the question of the non-existence of belief and faith

Some historians of literature and philosophy use the word »atheism« to designate the absence of faith even for the time before the reformation.[2] But in Medieval Studies this term is often deliberately set aside. Here, the term »unbelief« is largely preferred. »Atheism« is dismissed as a conception too young for this period. The term itself did nor even occur in Latin Christianiry before the late 15th and early 16th century. As Concetta Bianca in her study on the history of the term has shown, the term expanded into the Latin language through translations from the Greek. In Greek the term »atheos« had been widely used both in the classical and in the later periods, mostly as a synonym for »impious« in polemical use, for example against Christians and Jews, as well as by them.[3] But in Medieval Latin it was virtually unknown. Used in reference to the 12th to the 15th century of Latin Chrisrianity, the term »atheism« could therefore cause anachronistic misrepresentations in many respects.

»Unbelief« is understood as a soft conceptual substitute to designate »atheist« phenomena from this period of which no theoretical atheist thought is known.

1 Bernhard Maier, »Religionsgeschichte (Disziplin)«, in: *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 28 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1997), pp. 576–585; Talal Asad, »The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category«, in: *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, ed. by id. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. 27–54.

2 Friedrich Niewöhner & Olaf Pluta (eds.), *Atheismus im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999).

3 Concetta Bianca, »Per la storia del termine ›atheus‹ nel cinquecento: Fonti e traduzioni Greco-Latine«, in: Studi filosofici (Annali dell'Instituto universitario orientale, Napoli) 3 (1980), pp. 71–104.

As such the term has found its way into the history of philosophy and free thought. As a universal and a historical category it has been used for example in the »Encyclopaedia of Unbelief«. In his foreword the renowned philosopher Paul Edwards declared: »Unbelief [...] is primarily the rejection of belief in miracles and divine revelation, in life after death, and in any supernatural beings [...]. Long before Aquinas, Plato had argued that atheists constitute such a danger to society that removal by death is the only appropriate remedy. Throughout the centuries when Christianity dominated Europe this policy was strictly applied and real or alleged unbelievers were regularly burnt at the stake.«[4]

As this is the current state of affairs it seems to be useful to reflect on the research strategies employed. Is the term »unbelief« really a welcome solution for all those who wish to embark upon the unknown lands beyond faith in the Age of Faith? I would like to argue against it. This shall be done in three steps. After a sketch of the present use of the analytical concept »unbelief« in Medieval Studies the state of research concerning phenomena of »unbelief« shall be considered. A short discussion of some semantic variations of the terms »infidelis« and »infidelitas« in the Central and Late Middle Ages will follow at the end.

The Present Use of the Analytical Concepts »Unbelief« and »Atheism«

At present, we witness the emergence of a third analytical category beside heterodoxy and orthodoxy. Leaving aside for the moment the actual extent of unbelief, the terms »disbelief« and »unbelief« are already in use in Medieval as well as in Early Modern studies to designate »not believing in God«.[5] At the same time the Latin terms »infidelitas« and »infidelis« are sometimes translated as terms for »unbelief« in this sense and are interpreted accordingly.[6] These studies prolong the history of European atheism proper into the Middle Ages. While atheism is

4 Paul Edwards, »Foreword«, in: *The Encyclopedia of Unbelief, I-II*, ed. by Gordon Stein (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1985), part I, p. xi.

5 John Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief in Medieval Europe* (London: Hodder, 2005) and Silvia Berti, »At the Roots of Unbelief«, in: *Journal of the History of Ideas* 54/4 (1995), pp. 555–576.

6 André Vauchez (ed.), *Die Geschichte des Christentums, V. Machtfülle des Papsttums (1054–1274)* (Histoire du christianisme des origines à nos jours, Germ. edition, ed. by Odilo Engels) (Freiburg, Basel & Vienna: Herder, 1994), p. 910; Othmar Hageneder, »Der Häresiebegriff bei den Juristen des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts«, in: *The Concept of Heresy in the Middle Ages (11th-13th C.): Proceedings of the International Conference Louvain May 13–16 1973*, ed. by Willem Lourdaux (Mediaevalia Lovaniensia I, 4) (Leuven & The Hague: University Press, 1976), pp. 42–103, in particular pp. 60–61; Peter Dinzelbacher, »L'incroyance à l'époque de la Foi«, in: *Revue des sciences religieuses* 73 (1999), 1, pp. 42–79; Robert N. Swanson, *Religion*

largely considered a phenomenon of the secularized world, its exact beginnings are disputed. Even the precise object of historical research itself has been contested over the last decades. In his famous work on »Le Problème de l'incroyance au XVI siècle« from 1947[7] Lucien Febvre declared the assumption that atheism had its origin in the 16th century to be a myth.[8] Those who had thought otherwise had misunderstood the meaning of the term »atheism«, which at that time was only an unspecific polemical term. Since then, controversies have arisen.

Some, like Winfried Schröder[9], insist the term »atheism« should only denote theoretical atheistic thought, which includes an explicit denial of the existence of any God or gods. According to him atheistic thought began in the mid and late 17th century and not any earlier. David Wootton[10] and others designate as »atheist« anyone who was classified as such by theological polemics[11] and hence, their history of atheism starts at about 1500. Scholars following this line believe it to be anachronistic to exclude the heretics and the impious from the history of atheism. They also feel that the denial of the existence of any gods is only an extreme instance of the widespread criticism of the clergy and of religious deviance in the 16th century. Concerning ambiguous and sceptical works they are prepared to read between the lines and set aside confessions of belief in these works as insincere acknowledgements of common expectations, as a mere »oratio recta«.[12]

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and Devotion in Europe, c.1215-c.1515 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 329–342.

7 Lucien Febvre, *Le Problème de l'incroyance au XVIe siècle: La Religion de Rabelais* (orig. 1947) (Paris: Albin Michel, 1968).

8 Paul O. Kristeller, »The Myth of Renaissance Atheism and the French Tradition of Free-Thought«, in: *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 6 (1968), pp. 233–243.

9 Winfried Schröder, *Ursprünge des Atheismus: Untersuchungen zur Metaphysik- und Religionskritik des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart & Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1998).

10 Michael Hunter & David Wootton (eds.), *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

11 Gisbert Voetius, »De Atheismo, 1639«, in: Idem, *Selectarum disputationum pars prima* (Utrecht: Waesberge, 1648), pp. 114–226; François Garasse, *La doctrine curieuse des beaux esprits de ce temps, ou pretendus tels* (orig. Paris: Chappelet, 1623; reprint Farnborough & Hants: Gregg 1971); Marin Mersenne, *Quaestiones celeberrimae in genesim, cum accurata textus explicatione. In hoc volumine athei, et deistae impugnantur, & expugnantur, & Vulgata editio ab haereticorum calumniis vindicatur* (Paris: Cramoisy, 1623).

12 David Wootton, »New Histories of Atheism«, in: *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, ed. by Michael Hunter & David Wootton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 13–53, in particular pp. 25–29 and passim; directly against Febvre: David Wootton, »Lucien Febvre and the Problem of Early Modern Unbelief«, in: *Journal of Modern History* 60 (1988), pp. 695–730. Critical towards the method of reading between the lines Berti, »Roots of Unbelief«, op.cit. (note 5), pp. 559–561. Reading methods are the field of an important controversy in studies of atheism, see also Herbert Jaumann, »Wortlaut und Kontext. Überlegungen zur historischen Interpretation anhand von Winfried Schröder: Ursprünge des Atheismus (1998)«, in: *Scientia Poetica* 6 (2002), pp. 131–146 and Winfried Schröder, »Verteidigte Thesen und

Yet, both positions have the same general outlook. The history of atheism is told as a heroic narrative. Historians of atheism are advocates for their heroes. And they display a very critical habitus as they are searching for the origins of emancipation from the yoke of the church. Some of the narrative topoi recurring in these narratives, such as the assumed tyranny of the church, the violent persecution of atheists by the church, the philosophical atheist and others can already be found in the first fully developed history of atheism. It was told in one of the earliest atheistic pamphlets, the »Theophrastus redivivus« from about 1650.[13] The history of atheism is apparently deeply linked to the likewise heroic European narratives of enlightenment, rationality, scepticism and secularization.[14] These narratives form an integral part of the discourse of Western modernity.[15]

Returning to the studies on medieval »unbelief« it becomes apparent that the term »unbelief« in Medieval Studies has been[16] and still is conceptualized along the same lines. While »faith« as »belief« is understood as an »irrational conviction«, as it is often the case in the Humanities, the term »unbelief« is consequently understood as a lack of such convictions, hence, as rationality. See for example an important programmatic study on medieval unbelief by Susan Reynolds[17]. Commenting on a case in the 14th century inquisitorial register of Jacques Fournier, the future Pope Benedict XII (d. 1342), she writes: »One Montaillou woman, when asked where she got her doubts about hell and the resurrection from, said that she got them from no one: she thought of them for herself. Even medieval peasants – even peasant women – could think.«[18]

Surely it is about time to defend the assumption that peasant women can think. The term »scepticism« as well as the verb »to think« are employed in this context because of their connotations with intellectualism and enlightenment.

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erschlossene Absichten. Probleme der Interpretation heterodoxer Texte der frühen Neuzeit«, in: *Scientia Poetica* 6 (2002), pp. 147–152.

13 *Theophrastus redivivus. Edizione prima e critica, I-II*, ed. by Guido Canziani & Gianni Paganini (Florenz: La nuova Italia ed., 1981).

14 See e. g. William E. H. Lecky, *History of the Rise and Influence of Rationalism in Europe, I-II* (orig. 1865, 2nd ed. London: Longmans & Green, 1893).

15 Wolfgang Schluchter, »Rationalität – das Spezifikum Europas?«, in: *Die kulturellen Werte Europas*, ed. by Hans Joas & Klaus Wiegandt (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verlag, 2005), pp. 237–264.

16 George C. Coulton, »The Plain Man's Religion in the Middle Ages (orig. 1916)«, in: *Ten Medieval Studies*, ed. by id. (Cambridge: University Press, 31930), pp. 189–200, in particular pp. 194–197.

17 Susan Reynolds, »Social Mentalities and the Case of Medieval Scepticism«, in: *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, ser. 1, 6 (1991), pp. 21–41.

18 Reynolds, »Social Mentalities«, op.cit. (note 17), p. 36; she refers to *Le Registre d'inquisition de Jacques Fournier, évêque de Pamiers (1318–1325), I-III*, ed. by Jean Duvernoy (Bibliothèque Méridionale 41, 1–3) (Toulouse: Privat, 1965), part I, p. 265: »...solum per se ipsam hoc cogitavit et credidit.«

Reynolds makes strategic use of them as an advocate for the case of the peasant women, for whom she claims a place on the roll of honour alongside the philosophers of atheism and religious criticism.

The Question of Unbelief in the Middle Ages in Recent Studies

Her advocacy might not be out of place. The question whether any absence of faith existed has usually been answered in the negative.[19] It is true, intensive historical research on lay spirituality and heretical movements during the 20th century has shown that there was indeed radical criticism against Latin Orthodoxy. But criticism of the clergy[20] and of the popes often expressed intense spirituality. Not surprisingly it was often uttered by the Orthodox and by members of the clergy themselves.[21] Criticism against certain miracles, against certain saints and relics also seems not to have been rare.[22] Sometimes they were brought forward from Orthodox quarters;[23] and sometimes they were not. None of the central theological teachings and spiritual practices remained unchallenged during the Central and Late Middle Ages by opposing theological and social thinking. Alternative beliefs and practices were advocated against them. Intensive research during the last few decades has also shown that medieval blasphemy was indeed

19 See e.g. Bernard Hamilton, *Religion in*

20 František Graus, *Pest – Geißler – Judenmorde: Das 14. Jahrhundert als Krisenzeit* (Veröffentlichung des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte 86) (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988); Eckhardt C. Lutz & Ernst Tremp (eds.), *Pfaffen und Laien – ein mittelalterlicher Antagonismus? Freiburger Colloqium 196* (Scrinium Friburgense 10) (Fribourg: Universitäts-Verlag, 1999).

21 E.g. Kaspar Elm, »Antiklerikalismus im deutschen Mittelalter«, in: *Anticlericalism in Late and Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Peter A. Dykema & Heiko A. Oberman (Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought 51) (Leiden: Brill, 1994), pp. 3–18; see the case studies by John van Engen, »Late medieval anticlericalism: The case of the New Devout«, in: Ibid., pp. 19–52; Peter Blickle, »Antiklerikalismus um den Vierwaldstättersee, 1300–1500: Von der Kritik der Macht der Kirche«, in: Ibid., pp. 115–143.

22 Michael Goodich, »Miracles and Disbelief in the Late Middle Ages«, in: *Mediaevistik* 1 (1988), pp. 23–38; Friedrich Prinz, »Der Heilige und seine Lebenswelt: Überlegungen zum gesellschafts- und kulturgeschichtlichen Aussagewerk von Viten und Wundererzählungen«, in: *Santi e Demoni nell'alto medioevo occidentale (secoli XI)*, 7–13 aprile 1988, I-II (Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo 36) (Spoleto: Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 1989), I, pp. 285–318.

23 Guibert of Nogent, »De pignoribus sanctorum«, *Patrologia Latina* CLVI, pp. 607–680.

widespread. In most cases, however, it was not the expression of opposition towards faith[24] as it was described in the heroic narratives of atheism.[25]

Thus, while the monolithic Age of (one) Faith was shatrered to pieces for good, the rich findings of heresy studies seem to render the idea of the existence of total absence of faith even more improbable. Consequently, members of the anthropological school of French Medieval Studies dismiss the idea altogether.[26]

Those medieval people who did not believe there was an immortal soul, a resurrection, the incarnation of God, or a virgin birth, a purgatory, who did not believe in the Trinity or in the value of praying for the dead, to name just some frequently uttered unorthodox positions, might or might not have learned these ideas and practices, together with polemic arguments against orthodoxy and orthopraxy, from roaming heretics. Walter Wakefield and John Edwards, who studied inquisitorial records of the 13th and the 15th century respectively, can only suggest the possibility that their protagonists were indeed the materialists they appear to be.[27]

A man was reported to the Bohemian inquisition in the first half of the 14th century because he declined to look at the Eucharist in Mass. Was he or was he not influenced by the religious movements current in Bohemia, which largely concentrated on the question of transubstantiation? The inquisition was led to believe the former.[28] Who can tell whether a certain English knight, who in the late 14th century wilfully enjoyed a stolen Eucharist with oysters and onions at his home, had mer Lollards before, who also refuted the dogma of transubstantiation? Who knows whether he believed in some magical benefit of his doings, as some modern scholars assume in accordance with their theories on Medieval religious practices, or whether he simply discovered the Eucharist was no better

24 Carla Casagrande & Silvana Vecchio, *I peccati della lingua. Disciplina ed etica della parola nella cultura medievale* (Rome: Ist. Enciclopedia Italiana, 1987); Corinne Leveleux, *La parole interdite: Le blasphème dans la France médiévale (XIIIe-XVIe siècles). Du péché au crime* (Paris: De Boccard, 2002); Gerd Schwerhoff, *Zungen wie Schwerter. Blasphemie in alteuropäischen Gesellschaften 1200–1650* (Konflikte und Kultur – Historische Perspektiven 12) (Konstanz: UVK-Verlag, 2005), all with bibliographies.

25 E. g. Leonard W. Levy, *Blasphemy. Verbal Offense against the Sacred, from Moses to Salman Rushdie* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2nd edition 1995).

26 *Faire croire:*
siècle: Table ronde (Rome, 22–23 juin 1979), ed. by the École française de Rome (Collection de l'École française de Rome 51) (Rome: École française, 1981).

27 Walter L. Wakefield, »Some unorthodox popular ideas of the thirteenth century«, in: *Medievalia et Humanistica* new series 4 (1973), pp. 25–35; John Edwards, »Religious faith and doubt in late medieval Spain«, in: *Past and Present* 120 (1985), pp. 3–25.

28 Alexander Patschovsky (ed.), *Quellen zur böhmischen Inquisition im 14. Jahrhundert* (Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Quellen zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters 11) (Weimar: Böhlau, 1979), p. 176.

than common bread, as related by the medieval chronicler?[29] And what does it mean if he found out the Eucharist was only bread? Does this qualify him as a rationalist or as some utterly ignorant fellow? The local clergy treated him mildly. They did not consider him a heretic, but only an ignorant penitent worthy of mercy, perhaps because the knight was very powerful in that region.[30] From manifestations of mere lack of faith there is no method to determine whether they were caused by an alternative set of beliefs or by the total absence of such beliefs.[31] Instead, assumptions mainly about what was or was not possible in the Middle Ages seem to decide the question of the existence of the absence of faith.[32]

Despite these difficulties and the dominant narratives some scholars object to what they view as romantic distortions. Consequently, the third category »unbelief« mentioned above, as »non-existence of faith«, has already become a reality in Medieval Studies, even if a very marginal one. The aforementioned essay by Susan Reynolds presents a critical discussion of trends in the history of mentalities and historical anthropology. Gerd Schwerhoff offered ing findings on some rather stark blasphemous statements, which admittedly do not entirely fit into his earlier refutation of the thesis that blasphemers are atheists.[33] A thoughtful chapter in Robert Swanson's »Religion and Devotion«[34] was devoted to the absence of faith. Another chapter in John Arnold's »Belief and Unbelief in Medieval Europe«[35] or in Robert Bartlett's new history of England and others followed and added to the growing sample of examples, which deserves further investigation and methodological reflection.[36] These scholars declare that although usually nearly impossible to prove, sometimes it can be shown and above all it makes theoretical sense to assume the existence of strong doubts, ignorance, disinterest, and even the total absence of faith. This they

29 *The St. Albans chronicle: The Chronica maiora of Thomas Walsingham, I. 1376 – 1394*, ed. and transl. by John Taylor, Wendy R. Childs & Leslie Watkiss (Oxford medieval texts) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), p. 404; the hypothesis of magical practices is sustained by John Taylor und Wendy Childs in their introduction to this chronicle, p. cix.

30 *Chronica maiora of Thomas Walsingham*, op.cit. (note 29), p. 406.

31 Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief*, op.cit. (note 5), p. 219.

32 See the discussion by John C. Sommerville, »Religious Faith, Doubt and Atheism: Comment«, in: *Past and Present* 128 (1990), pp. 152–155; John Edwards, »Religious Faith, Doubt and Atheism: Reply«, in: *Past and Present* 128 (1990), pp. 155–161.

33 Gerd Schwerhoff, »Die alltägliche Auferstehung des Fleisches. Religiöser Spott und radikaler Unglaube um 1500«, in: *Historische Anthropologie* 12 (2004), 3, pp. 309–337; Schwerhoff makes clear that these examples are rare exceptions from the rule, for the entire concept see Schwerhoff, *Zungen wie Schwerter*, op.cit. (note 24).

34 Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe*, op.cit. (note 6), pp. 329–342.

35 Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief*, op.cit. (note 5), pp. 216-226.

36 Robert Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings 1075–1225* (The New Oxford History of England) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), pp. 476-481.

usually designate as »unbelief« or »disbelief« respectively. When this conception is compared to medieval semantics, some important differences present themselves. With all due caution some preliminary observations shall be discussed here.

Semantic Observations

Both the terms »belief« and »unbelief« today designate matters of conviction. From the 12th to the 15th century too one's personal attitude mattered. Mere mechanical adherence was not considered to be sufficient. A demand for such a personal acceptance was expressed in the canons of the 4th Lateran Council in the year 1215.[37] Inquisitors in the 14th century wanted to know whether an accused believed a teaching to be true in his or her heart.[38] At the beginning of the 15th century the theologian Jean Gerson (1363–1429) of Paris in his »Opusculum tripertitum«, written for the instruction of lay people, also stressed that the believer was to believe »firmissime«.[39] Who ever had any doubts on the articles of faith should submit to the teachings of the Mother Church and the learned doctors, who know best.[40]

By which terms, however, did medieval writers express the case that someone did not believe in God? No systematic research has been done on this seemingly simple question. Just how complicated it would be, shall be indicated here by another example from the Montaillou corpus of early 14th century inquisitorial protocols mentioned above. These much-discussed protocols recorded very detailed hearings of witnesses and suspects from the village of Montaillou and

37 *Conciliorum oecumenicorum decreta*, ed. by Guiseppe Albertigo (German edition by Josef Wohlmuth) (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2000), p. 206: »Firmiter credimus et simpliciter confitemur... .«

38 *Le Registre d'inquisition de Jacques Fournier*, op.cit. (note 18), passim, see e.g. the case discussed on p. 105.

39 »Opusculum tripertitum. De Praeceptis Decalogi, de Confessione et de Arte Moriendi«, in: *Joannis Gersonii opera omnia*, ed. by Louis E. Du Pin (orig. Antwerp 1706, reprint Hildesheim: Olms, 1987), vol. I, pp. 425–450, in particular p. 428: »Et quod ipse Deus unus sit et trinus. Cur etiam aut ad quem finem homo creatus sit. Firmissime credendum est et nullatenus dubitandum quod solum unus est Deus omnipotens, omnia sciens et omnem perfectionem habens in tribus personis distinctis... «, also p. 429 and passim. Concerning the title and the translation into Latin see Fidel Rädle, »Johannes Gerson: De arte moriendi, lateinisch ediert, kommentiert und deutsch übersetzt«, in: *Literatur – Geschichte – Literaturgeschichte: Beiträge zur mediävistischen Literaturwissenschaft. Festschrift für Volker Honemann zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. by Nine Miedema & Rudolf Suntrup (Frankfurt a. M.: Lang, 2003), pp. 721–738 (edition pp. 727–738).

40 »Opusculum tripertitum«, op.cit. (note 39), p. 429.

the surrounding area in the South of France. As such they present precious information on a variety of questions concerning secular life as well as popular and heretical beliefs in medieval rural areas, which are often not accessible in Medieval Studies.[41]

While the English phrase »not to believe in God« will unambiguously be understood as »not to believe that a god exists« the Latin phrase »non credere in Deum« (»not to believe in God«) poses problems. Aude Fauré, a young peasant woman, could not, for the life of her, believe in transubstantiation. And desperate as she was about it, she was equally unable to »credere in Deum«.[42] Because Aude herself and her witnesses go into some detail on this point the context makes clear what she meant. She very much believed that an omnipotent God existed. She thought, however, that she could never be redeemed, because she did not expect the Eucharist to be anything but bread and struggled with disturbing thoughts on incarnation, birth and blood. She did not hope for God's mercy anymore; she was desperate.

»Credo« in the language of the New Testament and in Christian Latin is more often »to trust someone« than »to be convinced about a fact«.[43] Apparently the term »belief« comprised a more complicated semantic field than it does in modern times, or rather, the modern meaning is a reduced one compared to the medieval conception. Thus, eminent scholars of Latin and medieval history consequently misunderstood Aude's phrase and considered her an unhappy atheist, who fell prey to her doubts. The seemingly evident meaning of the Latin phrase had been misleading them.[44] Aude, by the way, was not burned by the inquisition, but merely sentenced to go to church on Sundays, to fast on Fridays,

41 The first was the anthropological study by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou, village occitan de 1294 à 1334* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), followed by continuations and critical evaluations of Le Roy Ladurie's methods and findings e.g. by Matthias Benad, *Domus und Religion in Montaillou. Katholische Kirche und Katharismus im Überlebenskampf der Familie des Pfarrers Petrus Clerici am Anfang des 14. Jahrhunderts* (Spätmittelalter und Reformation, neue Reihe 1) (Tübingen: Mohr, 1990). See also the articles in Anne Brenon & Christine Dieulafait (eds.), *Autour de Montaillou. Un village occitan. Histoire et religiosité d'une communauté villageoise au Moyen Âge. Actes du colloque de Montaillou (25–26–27 août 2000), sous la direction de Loy Ladurie* (Domaine Historique) (Castelnaud la Chapelle: l'Hydre Éditions, 2001).

42 *Le Registre d'inquisition de Jacques Fournier.*

43 Hugh of St. Victor, »Questiones et decisiones in epistolas S. Pauli«, in *Patrologia cursus completus ... omnium SS. patrum, doctorum scriptorumque ecclesiasticorum sive Latinorum, sive Graecorum. Series latina* CLXXV, p. 438c: »Et est sciendum, quod aliud est credere Deum esse, quae est fides cognitionis; aliud est credere Deo, quae dicitur fides consensus; aliud credere in Deo, quae dicitur fides fiduciae; aliud credere in Deum, quod est per fidem et dilectionem io Deum tendere.«

44 E. e. Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages. A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua († 203) to Marguerite Porete († 1310)* (Cambrigde: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 214.

to confess and take communion four times a year, and to visit certain churches in the region.[45] Nothing shameful or painful was imposed on her.

The case of »infideliras« (»unbelief«) leads to similar traps, because, again, the modern meaning is reduced compared to the medieval conception. Neither »fides« (faith) nor »infidelitas« denoted only or even centrally personal convictions. It was the interrelation that mattered, the mutual commitment, the avowed relation to a powerful person, like »fealry« in English. In secular matters such as charters, laws, and historical narratives it was »infidelitas« to break a contract, to act against an oath, to act disloyally or to breach trust. The English terms »infidelity« and »faithlessness« still show traces of this meaning.[46]

Those who are designated as »infideles« are not simply those who fail to hold orthodox convictions, even if it is true that this might be one of their characteristics. First and foremost »infideles« are those who act disloyally in some way or those who, by way of treason or of bad luck are no part of the mutual relations between God, Latin Christians, and their kings.[47] The term »infidelis« consequently designates all those who are not Christians, most prominently Muslims, as it is still the case with the English term »infidel«, because they were neither loyal to the Christian God nor to their kings and laws. Heretics are the second category of »infideles«; blasphemers are a third, because both acted disloyally to their vows in baptism. Schismatics like anti-popes and their supporters, Orthodox Greeks and Oriental Christian confessions can be considered as »infideles« in their relation to the Pope and the Church of Rome, even if they do not err in theological matters. The impious Latin Christians are another category of »infideles«. They hold perfectly orthodox convictions, but still act disloyally or distrustfully with respect to God, his commandments and his community.

While the term obviously often has negative connotations, the exact tone of these four different kinds of »infideles« largely depends upon the genre of texts, where the term is utilized. As is well known, ecclesiastical law and polemical texts, for example within the frame of the crusades, tend to show a negative attitude towards Muslim or Pagan »infideles«.[48] In epic literature Muslim »in-

45 *Le Registre d'inquisition de Jacques Fournier*, op.cit. (note 18), part II, pp. 103–104.

46 For some sources see Jan F. Niermeyer & Co van de Kieft, *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus. Lexique latin médiéval – Medieval Latin Dictionary – Mittellateinisches Wörterbuch*, revised edition by Johannes W. J. Burgers (orig. 1976) (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2002), part I, p. 697, s.v. infidelitas; Charles du Fresne du Cange, *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis, I-VI* (orig. Paris, 1883–1887, reprint Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1954), part III, p. 487, s.v. fidelis.

47 Herbert Helbig, »Fidelis Dei et regis. Zur Bedeutungsentwicklung von Glaube und Treue im hohen Mittelalter«, in: *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 33 (1951), pp. 275–306.

48 David Blanks & Michael Frassetto present a new perspective (eds.), *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perception of Other* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

fideles«, women and men, can be described as noble and virtuous.[49] Used for non-Christians the term can be used as a »terminus technicus« rather than as a verdict. Since these kinds of »infideles« were clearly known by the Latins to believe in something, even if it was not the truth in their eyes, they will be left aside for the present discussion.

At any rate, it is not Muslims, but »infideles« as deviant baptized Latins, laymen as well as clerics and monks, who are at the centre of attention in pastoral literature and in hagiography. Doubtful and impious »infideles« are regularly converted by angels, wonders and saints to a deeper understanding of God's will and power. Saints and wonders were needed here, for there was no other effective sanction ready against not being pious.[50] While the mendicants tried to convince the impious by preaching morals to them,[51] the power of the lower clergy in the parishes over their communities was often limited. The clerics were poorly trained and socially a part of the flock they were supposed to lead. Calls for reform and better education of the clergy and the people were raised periodically. »Infidelitas« as not attending church on Sundays, being bored in church, disturbing the sermon with laughter or shouting, breaking the ten commandments, falling prey to the seven capital sins, murmuring repeatedly against bad weather or a grave sickness caused by an unkind God[52], who always seemed to help the bad and to punish the good or who proved to be powerless and therefore useless altogether, are also phenomena pastoral literature has in mind. Here, for example in sermons, examples or treatises on confession and preaching, »infidelitas« was considered as widespread indeed, and to be a grave sin.[53]

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49 *Wolfram von Eschenbach. Parzival*, ed. by Karl Lachmann (text of the 6th edition of 1926), transl. by Peter Knecht, introd. by Bernd Schirok (Berlin et al.: De Gruyter, 1998); Joachim Heinzle, *Wolfram von Eschenbach. Willehalm. Nach der Handschrift 857 der Stiftsbibliothek St. Gallen* (Altdeutsche Textbibliothek 108) (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1994); Carl Lofmark, »Das Problem des Unglaubens im ›Willehalm‹«, in: *Studien zu Wolfram von Eschenbach. Festschrift für Werner Schröder zum 75. Geburtstag*, ed. by Kurt Gärtner & Joachim Heinzle (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1989), pp. 399-413.

50 Goodich, »Miracles and Disbelief«, op.cit. (note 22); Prinz, »Der Heilige«, op.cit. (note 22); Michael Goodich, »Innocent III and the miracle as a weapon against disbelief (original 2003)«, in: Idem, *Lives and Miracles of the Saints: Studies in Medieval Hagiography* (Variorum Collected Studies 798) (Aldershot: Ashgate/Variorum, 2004), XIV, pp. 456-470.

51 See also Alexander Murray, »Piety and Impiety in Thirteenth-Century Italy«, in: *Popular Belief and Practice*, ed. by Geoffrey Cuming & Derek Baker (Studies in Church History 8) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 83–106.

52 See e. g. the illustrations for the illiterate that mentions some terminally ill people upon their death beds bemoaning pain and an unkind God in *artes moriendi*, like Cornelia Schneider, *Gutenberg-Museum Mainz: Ars moriendi* (Kulturstiftung der Länder, Patrimonia 108) (Mainz: Gutenberg-Museum, 1996).

53 Siegfried Wenzel (ed.), »Robert Grosseteste's treatise on confession, ›Deus est‹«, in: *Franciscan Studies* 30 (1970), pp. 218–93; *Thomas de Chobham. Summa de arte praedicandi*, ed. by Franco Morenzoni (Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis 82) (Turnhout: Brepols,

But it is important to understand that this kind of »infidelitas« was usually *only* a sin. It was not a crime and not normally justiciable, like heresy or blasphemy. While heresy and blasphemy could be a kind of »infidelitas«, »infidelitas« was not always heresy or blasphemy. Adequate contrition provided, it could be forgiven. Robert Grosseteste (c. 1175–1253) warns the father confessor not to scold his flock too hard and reminds pastors and the miserable sinner on the brink of desperation that King David had committed murder and the Apostle Paul even had persecuted Jesus Christ himself; and still they were holy.[54]

In short, »infideles« as non-Christians are frequently featured in Latin law and poetic literature. Heretics, blasphemers, schismatics and their »infidelitas« are obviously a recurring topic in law, polemics and theological thought. »Infideles« as disinterested, ignorant, doubting and somewhat lax Latin Christians are dealt with at length in pastoral writings. It comes as a surprise, therefore, that scholastic thinkers were apparently not concerned with systematic thought on »infidelitas«. There is no systematic treatment of »infidelitas« in Peter Lombard's (1095/1100–1160) sentences[55], the most important medieval schoolbook on theology, nor in the commentaries written on them.[56] One reason for this disinterest of the theoretical theologians is banal at first sight but instructive upon a second reading. There was no conception of »infidelitas as such«.

Presenting the only systematic discussion of »infidelitas« known to me, Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–1274) in his instructive exposition on »infidelitas« in the »Secunda Secundae« of the Summa Theologiae makes this point very clear.[57] Although one could with some right assume that there is only one kind

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1988); »Opusculum tripertitum«, op.cit. (note 39), as »ungloube«, also in comparison to the »ungloube« of the Non-Christians see *Berthold von Regensburg. Vollständige Ausgabe seiner deutschen Predigten, I-II*, ed. by Franz Pfeiffer & Joseph Strobl (Wien: Braumüller, 1862–1880), part I, pp. 529–530.

54 »Robert Grosseteste's treatise ›Deus est‹«, op.cit. (note 53), pp. 260–261: »Quod si fecerit, est diligenter revocandus, scilicet auctoritatibus et exemplis sanctorum, ut David, qui adulter erat et homicida et postea factus est prophetiae summus nuntius; et Magdalena post tot peccata facta apostolorum apostola; et Petrus, qui ter negavit Dominum, post factus princeps apostolorum; et latro reus sanguinis et seditionis paradisum primus intravit; et Paulus de persecutore factus est praedicator.«

55 *Magistri Petri Lombardi Sententiae in IV libris distinctae, ad fidem codicum antiquorum restituta, I-II*, ed. by the Collegium S. Bonaventura Ad Claras Aquas (Grottaferrata: Ed. Collegii S. Bonaventura Ad Claras Aquas, 1971–1981).

56 See e.g. a commentary, which is very much aware of the philosophical problems of the day: *Marsilius von Inghen. Quaestiones super quattuor libros sententiarum*, transl. by Manuel Santos Noya, ed. by Georg Wieland et al., I-II (Studies in the History of Christian Thought 87, 88) (Leiden, Boston & Köln: Brill, 2000).

57 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II q. 10–12, 17, 24. The main distinction is explained in q. 10, art. 1, 3.: »Respondeo quod infidelitas dupliciter accipi potest. Uno modo, secundum puram negationem: ut dicatur infidelis ex hoc solo quod non habet fidem. Alio modo potest intelligi infidelitas secundum contrarietatem ad fidem: qui scilicet aliqui[s] repugnat auditui

of »infidelitas« as there is one »fides« against which it is opposed, there are in fact several different kinds, Thomas declares.[58] Most of them, like »infidelitas« of non-Christians, blasphemers and heretics, have been discussed in the present sketch.[59] In the discussion that follows Thomas makes sure to always define which sort of »infidelitas« he has in mind at which point. This is very important to him, as not all of these different kinds of »infidelitas« are evaluated in the same way and therefore it is advisable to make the object of the respective paragraphs very clear.

As is known, for Thomas the gravest form of »infideliras« and the one for which he had no sympathy whatsoever, was heresy, not Islam or Judaism, nor »atheism«. In fact, the denial of the existence of any God is not mentioned at all in this context. Apparently it forms no systematic part of »infidelitas« from Thomas's point of view, although he did discuss rational reasons to assume there was no God somewhere else in sum.[60] While »infidelitas« is juxtaposed to »orthodoxy« and »loyalty« and partly designates the lack of convictions, no passage is known where »infidelitas« is used unambiguously as a term for »to assert that there is no God«. And hence, it is not synonymous to the modern conception of »unbelief«.

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fidei, vel etiam contemnit ipsam secundum illud Isaiae LIII: ›Quis credidit auditui nostro?‹ Et in hoc proprie perficitur ratio infidelitatis. Et secundum hoc infidelitas est peccatum. Si autem accipiatur infidelitas secundum negationem puram, sicut in illis qui nihil audierunt de fide, non habet rationem peccati... non autem damnantur propter infidelitas peccatum.«

58 Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae* II-II q. 10, art. 5. »Utrum sint plures infidelitatis species« has the objective to refute the thesis that there is only one sort of infidelitas: »Videtur quod non sint plures infidelitatis species. Cum enim fides et infidelitas sint contraria, oportet quod sint circa idem...«

59 The issue of apostasy is beyond the scope of this paper. Here, too, medieval understanding and modern conceptions differ widely. Apostasy from the 12th to the 15th century is largely described as the return of baptized Jews and Muslims to their religions, as the breach of monks, clerics and nuns of their religious vows and of Christians becoming members of other religions. As apostasy was not at the forefront of ecclesiastical law and writing as it had been in late Antiquity, the term could be used as an unspecific pejorative term to designate some less grave offences, like impiety. For an overview and some basic sources see J. Bouché & A. Amanieu, s.v. »Apostasie«, in: *Dictionnaire de Droit Canonique* I (Paris: Letouzey, 1935), pp. 640–674.

60 Thomas von Aquin, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 2, art. 3: »1. Videtur quod Deus non sit. Quia si unum contrariorum fuerit infinitum totaliter destruetur aliud. Sed hoc intelligitur in hoc nomine Deus, scilicet quod sit quoddam bonum infinitum. Si ergo Deus esset, nullum malum inveniretur. Invenitur autem malum in mundo. Ergo Deus non est. 2. Praeterea, quod potest compleri per pauciora principia, non fit per pluta. Sed videtur quod omnia quae apparent in mundo, possunt completi per alia principia, supposito quod Deus non sit; quia ea quae sunt naturalia, reducuntur in principium quod est natura; ea vero quae sunta proposito, reducuntur in principium quod est ratio humana, vel voluntas. Nulla igitur necessitas est ponere Deum esse.« These statements are refuted with the «Quinque Viae« to prove the existence of God with philosophical means.

Conclusion

Paul Edwards and others err when they assume that »unbelievers« were automatically persecuted by the inquisition. Their historical conception is misleading mainly due to the imprecise use of analytical terms. There was no concept of »unbelief« or »infidelitas« as such during the Middle Ages. While heresy was justiciable by the church and blasphemy was justiciable largely by the towns, the territories, and by the kings, there was no juridical category for »infidelitas« defined as a failure to believe or as being impious. »Unbelief« as not believing or doubting was not included in the categories of heresy or blasphemy as a matter of course, nor was it automatically subject to the same sanctions. Today, alternative religious beliefs are still considered to be beliefs as contrasted to atheism. To fail to believe or not to believe at all seems to be the more radical position from this point of view. As it seems this was not always perceived in this way in the past. Lack of faith was not considered to be the most extreme form of deviation from faith. It could occur at the core of orthodoxy.

The use of the modern concept »unbelief« can clearly cause anachronisms and misinterpretations of the Latin terms. Latin and vulgar writings from the Middle Ages tend to differentiate far more clearly between the different forms of deviance than modern research strategies. The latter tend to import the material into the template of the opposition between »faith« and »reason«.

We should not be led astray by the category »unbelief«, as useful as it has been to provide space to think about the absence of faith before the 16th century against the overall theories about the assumed believing medieval people. Now the time has come for some new historiographic efforts to describe this space more precisely and to substitute the old heroic narratives of the history of secularization. I for one wish for a continuation of research into phenomena within this space and the exact terms used to describe them in the sources. And this should be undertaken throughout the entire Christian world, not only in consideration of Latin Christianity. There might be different opportunities of language within the entire »Orbis Christianus«. And their might be different modes of dealing with matters away from faith in other regions of Christianity, which could facilitate by means of comparison to describe and to understand the specific Latin conceptions in greater precision.[61]

61 On Syriac Christianity I suggested some preliminary thoughts, see Dorothea Weltecke, »Überlegungen zu den Krisen der syrisch-orthodoxen Kirche im 12. Jahrhundert«, in: *Syriaca: Zur Geschichte, Theologie, Liturgie und Gegenwartslage der syrischen Kirchen, 2. Deutsches Syrologen-Symposium* (Juli 2000 in Wittenberg), ed. by Martin Tamcke (Studien zur Orientalischen Kirche 17) (Münster, Hamburg & London: Lit, 2002), pp. 125–145.