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Abstract

The Observant Movement was a widespread effort to reform religious life across Europe. It took root around 1400, and for a century and more thereafter it inspired or shaped much that became central to European religion and culture. The Observants produced many of the leading religious figures of the later Middle Ages—Catherine of Siena, Bernardino of Siena and Savonarola in Italy, Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros in Spain, and in Germany Martin Luther himself. This volume provides scholars with a current, synthetic introduction to the Observant Movement. Its essays also seek collectively to expand the horizons of our study of Observant reform, and to open new avenues for future scholarship.

Disciplines

Cultural History | European History | History of Science, Technology, and Medicine | Medieval History

Comments

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Reformers on Sorcery and Superstition

Michael D. Bailey

Calls for reform and renewal were nearly universal across Western Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹ While reverberating through much of Christian society, these calls were especially intense within late medieval religious orders.² Also during these two centuries, concern over superstition and sorcery escalated across Western Christendom, particularly among certain ecclesiastical authorities who eventually began to articulate still-fluid but coalescing stereotypes of diabolical witchcraft. These paired developments share some intriguing similarities. While both issues generated heightened levels of energy and anxiety in the late medieval period, neither entailed basic concerns that were entirely new. The idea of ecclesiastical reform had been prevalent in Christian thought practically from the beginning of the church itself, developing powerfully in the patristic era, and emerging as an ever-present concern from the time of the Gregorian reform in the eleventh century onwards.³ In the late Middle Ages, however, ecclesiastical authorities deployed traditional rhetoric with a new intensity and in new contexts. For example, James Mixson has shown how age-old concerns about Christian poverty and propertied religious orders meshed with new social and economic realities especially in the post-plague West.⁴ Likewise a dialectic of proper Christian religion opposed to superstition extended back to the time of the early church fathers, as did clerical condemnation of all forms of sorcery as inevitably demonic, but such trends gathered new force in the late medieval period, culminating in the fifteenth century with notions of diabolical, conspiratorial witchcraft and Europe's earliest major witch hunts.⁵ Scholarship has also

fashioned another similarity, here purely historiographical, between reformist concerns and increasing anxiety about superstition and diabolical sorcery in the 1300s and 1400s, insofar as it has frequently characterized important late medieval developments in both areas as mere preludes to the great convulsions of the 1500s and 1600s: Reformations both Protestant and Catholic, and the period of Europe's most out-of-control witch hunts.⁶

The overshadowing importance of sixteenth and seventeenth century developments in terms of both reform and renewal, on one hand, and sorcery and superstition, on the other, is in the broadest sense undeniable. Nevertheless, late medieval developments demand to be understood on their own terms. Here I want to set these two trends in relation to one another as contemporary developments, rather than reading them in light of their well-known historical outcomes, to see how such a comparison might enrich our understanding of fourteenth- and especially fifteenth-century religious culture. My contention is that the particular drive for reform that emerged in this era often interacted with and (at points) reinforced specific concerns over superstition and diabolical sorcery that many authorities now perceived as infecting Christian society. I do not argue for any necessary causality. By no means were all religious reformers aggressive opponents of witchcraft, and likewise one could certainly detest superstition and sorcery without being an active proponent of ecclesiastical reform. Such preoccupations did, however, overlap in important ways. In order to give some contours to this claim, I will first chart key examples of that overlap through a simple prosopography of church reformers who also engaged with issues of superstition and sorcery. I will then explore the connections between these areas of concern more deeply through case studies of two figures, Bernardino of Siena and Johannes Nider, who were both leaders within the observant movements

of their respective religious orders and prominent opponents of witchcraft in the early fifteenth century.

A Prosopography of Reformers Addressing Superstition and Sorcery

A number of men who preached, wrote, or otherwise worked for religious reform in the late medieval period also engaged with issues of superstition, sorcery, and witchcraft. Or to approach the matter from the opposite angle, when we examine the full careers of religious and intellectual authorities who expounded against superstition and sorcery, we often find them involved in various reformist efforts as well.⁷ No sharp divide separated regular from secular clergy on these points. Although a number of prominent fifteenth-century witch-hunters came from the Dominican order, for example, this was primarily due to their activities as inquisitors. There was no special rhetoric of opposition to diabolical sorcery within religious orders, and such ideas circulated just as easily outside of them.⁸ Likewise studies of religious reform have increasingly revealed that these movements drew from larger historical dynamics in no way limited to the orders themselves. In many cases, the impetus for a stricter observance within religious orders came from intellectuals among the secular clergy.⁹

We may begin our survey, therefore, with one of the most influential proponents of reform in this period among the secular clergy, Heinrich of Langenstein. Educated at the University of Paris, he was forced to leave that institution as a consequence of the papal schism, eventually settling at the University of Vienna in 1384. There he worked to establish the university's theological faculty, along with what scholars have since identified as a distinct "Vienna school" of practical, reform-minded theology. Regarding the schism, Heinrich was an

early advocate of resolving it through a general church council, which would also address other abuses and undertake other reforms within the church.¹⁰ He also promoted reform among the regular clergy, articulating a call for stricter observance of their ordained lifestyle in a sermon addressed to the Augustinian canons at Klosterneuburg just outside Vienna shortly after he arrived in the Austrian capital.¹¹ Already by this time he had established himself as a critic of a certain kind of superstition, namely astrological divination, which he had found gaining considerable credence at the French court before he had departed Paris.¹²

One of Heinrich's successors at the University of Paris (and ultimately the chancellor of the university before he was elevated still further to become a cardinal of the church), Pierre d'Ailly, was also a powerful critic of astrological superstition. Astrology was widely regarded as a legitimate science in the later Middle Ages, having garnered the support of such intellectual luminaries as Albertus Magnus and Roger Bacon in the thirteenth century, and aspects of the art continued to be held in high esteem in court and university circles throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Writing in the early 1400s, d'Ailly himself was actually quite an astrophile, touting the potential of legitimate astrology to help chart a course through the continuing dilemma of the papal schism. Briefly put, against those who saw the schism as heralding the advent of the apocalypse and who therefore argued for a sort of resigned quiescence, he used the predictive potential of astrology to demonstrate that the world was, in fact, nowhere near its appointed end, and thus ecclesiastical leaders could and should work to resolve the schism and restore the church to a healthy state.¹³ Like Heinrich of Langenstein, d'Ailly favored the conciliar approach to ending the schism, and he played a prominent role in the reforming Council of Constance that eventually did so.¹⁴ Like all medieval advocates of astrology, however, he also

had to recognize some corrupt and illegitimate usages of the astral arts, including many varieties of illicit divination, which he defined as superstitions.¹⁵

Another important leader at the Council of Constance and a very powerful voice for church reform was d'Ailly's former pupil Jean Gerson.¹⁶ He was also a major critic of sorcery, divination, and magical practices. He initially pronounced against "superstition, sorcery, and foolish belief" in a sermon delivered in 1391, and in 1402 he completed his first significant tract on this subject, *On Errors Concerning the Magic Art (De erroribus circa artem magicam)*.¹⁷ He continued to write on such themes until the end of his life in 1429, ultimately producing a half-dozen other tracts to complement *On Errors*. In these he addressed such diverse topics as astrological divination, the healing power of astral talismans, superstitions pertaining to special observances of certain days and times, and superstitious beliefs and practices that had accrued around the performance of the Mass.¹⁸ While Gerson followed his master d'Ailly in regarding astrology as in essence a legitimate science, he was far more dubious about the legitimate potential of astrological predictions than his mentor, and far more worried about the dangers of illicit corruptions and evident superstitions. Upon being sent a copy of Gerson's skeptical *Trilogium of Theological Astrology (Trilogium astrologiae theologizatae)* in 1419, d'Ailly cautioned his former pupil that, just as there were some "superstitious astrologers" who engaged in improper practices, so there were also "superstitious theologians" who condemned astrology far too severely and needed to restrain themselves.¹⁹ Gerson, however, did not relent.

Beyond elite astrological divination, Gerson also castigated many decidedly humble kinds of superstition: the simple spells and healing charms that ordinary laypeople typically employed, and the commonplace omens that they observed. Significantly, especially in light of the highly gendered notion of diabolical witchcraft that was to develop in the fifteenth century,

he associated superstitious practices particularly with uneducated women on several occasions.²⁰ In his very first sermon on the topic in 1391 he mentioned “old female sorcerers” (*vielles sorcières*), and he did so again in *On Errors Concerning the Magic Art* (here in Latin as *vetulae sortilegae*).²¹ In a later tract criticizing common superstitions, he made sure to label these women in both Latin and the French vernacular as “*vetulae sortilegae, gallice vieilles sorcières*,” so audiences at all levels would get his meaning (one assumes Gerson envisioned his writings being used, in part, as the basis for preaching or other means of instructing the laity).²²

While Jean Gerson was active in Paris in the early 1400s, two hundred miles to the east the theologian Nikolaus Magni of Jauer (now Jawor, in Polish Silesia) arrived at the University of Heildelberg. Like Gerson, he too attended the Council of Constance when it convened to resolve the papal schism, and he engaged there in broader debates about church reform, especially the reform of parish clergy. He also pressed for reform at various episcopal synods in Germany, stressing especially the need for parish clergy to provide proper pastoral care.²³ A decade before Constance, in 1405, he had already written a long treatise *On Superstitions (De superstitionibus)* that survives in more than 150 known manuscript copies, testifying to its popularity in the fifteenth century (curiously, however, unlike many other important late medieval works this treatise never found its way into print).²⁴ Other Central European theologians with reformist interests who addressed issues of superstition, magic, and the maleficent capabilities of demons in the early fifteenth century include Nikolaus of Jauer’s Heidelberg colleague Johannes of Frankfurt and the Vienna theologian Thomas Ebendorfer.²⁵ In addition to these theologians, around the middle of the century, the Zurich canon Felix Hemmerli wrote several short tracts on the power of spells, charms, blessings, and exorcisms. He too had attended the Council of Constance, and from 1432 until 1435 he attended the Council of Basel as

well. His exposure to impulses of church reform there led him to advocate for practical reforms in his own church in Zurich, and to write about matters of reform in the church as a whole.²⁶

Also working for church reform in the western arc of the Alps in the middle of the fifteenth century was Giorgio of Saluzzo (also known as Georges of Saluces). He was bishop of Aosta in the duchy of Savoy from 1433 until 1440, and then bishop of Lausanne from 1440 until his death in 1461. In both diocese, he promoted reform, and his reforming zeal helped to motivate his strong opposition to heresy, especially that of the Waldensians (or *vaudois*), and ultimately to witches whom he suspected were infesting his lands (also termed *vaudois* in Francophone regions).²⁷ He played a key role in instigating some of the earliest witch hunts in Western Europe, which were centered in lands ringing the Western Alps.²⁸ In particular he appointed and worked closely with the Franciscan inquisitor Ponce Feugeyron, who probably wrote one of the most graphic early descriptions of diabolical witchcraft and witches' sabbaths, the *Errors of the Gazarii* (*Errores Gazariorum*, another generic term for heretics that became associated with witches).²⁹ Certainly that document appears to have been written by an inquisitor in the later 1430s in the region of Aosta.

Also important to consider as a possible nexus of reforming zeal and concern over superstition and witchcraft is the great church council that met not far north of the Alps in the second quarter of the fifteenth century. Like the Council of Constance before it, the Council of Basle (1431-1449) was a great engine of church reform and a great meeting-place for leading religious reformers.³⁰ It was also surely a clearinghouse for ideas about sorcery, superstition, and newly emerging stereotypes of diabolical witchcraft. For example, a version of the *Errors of the Gazarii* appears to have circulated at Basel. While church reform was formally part of the council's agenda, however, and so reformist discussions and debates appear in its official

records, conciliar sources are silent on issues of sorcery, superstition, and witchcraft. Much evidence suggests that like-minded men came together and discussed these topics informally while they were in Basel, but we have no way of knowing exactly how (or if) they saw these matters relating to the other issues with which they engaged while at the council.³¹

While many churchmen who wrote or preached against sorcery and superstition in the fifteenth century also engaged with general currents of church reform, such as dominated the great ecclesiastical councils of Constance and Basel, still others had more explicit ties to varieties of Observant reform. The Vienna theologian Nikolaus of Dinkelsbühl, for example, although not a monk himself, played a major role in promoting the reform of Benedictine monasteries in Austrian lands. A leading faculty member of the University of Vienna and loyal servant of Duke Albrecht V, Nikolaus was also a prominent figure at the Council of Constance. While there, he wrote a brief treatise on the *Method of Reform (Reformationis methodus)* to be used in monastic houses. In 1418, as the council was winding down, the newly elected pope Martin V granted Duke Albrecht a license to conduct visitations and to enact reforms in Benedictine and Augustinian houses in his domain. The reforming effort began with the great Benedictine monastery at Melk, which then, of course, became a leading light of Benedictine observance in Central Europe.³² Following the example of his teacher Heinrich of Langenstein, Nikolaus was also deeply interested in pastoral and moral reform, and he was one of the most important members of the Vienna school of theologians promoting rejuvenation and renewal of that sort. In this capacity, he addressed himself to the issue of superstition in a series of sermons on the Decalogue (superstition being treated as a form of idolatry and so a violation of the First Commandment). He assembled these sermons into an influential treatise *On the Commandments of the Decalogue (De preceptis decalogi)* in 1423.³³

Among religious clergy who promoted reform both within their own orders and beyond them, and who also addressed sorcery and superstition, we find around the middle of the fifteenth century two influential Carthusians.³⁴ In 1452 Jakob of Paradise penned a treatise *On the Power of Demons (De potestate demonum)*. He had become a Carthusian in Erfurt a decade earlier, in the early 1440s. Prior to that, he had been a Cistercian in the monastery of Paradise at Meseritz (Międzyrzecz), in the diocese of Posen. There he had helped direct the reform of the Cistercian order in Poland, and he continued to work for monastic reform even after he moved to the more restrictive Carthusian order. Here his influence manifested less through direct leadership of any one reformist movement than through the intellectual guidance he was able to provide, which extended well beyond his own order. Ultimately his writings on religious reform proved very popular among a number of observant orders and congregations.³⁵ An even more prolific and influential figure was Denys the Carthusian, who spent most of his career in the monastery at Roermond in his native Limburg. He wrote a short work *Against the Vices of Superstitions (Contra vitia superstitionum)* probably sometime in the 1450s, and early lists of his works also show a treatise *Against Magic Arts and Errors of Waldensians (Contra artes magicas et errores waldensium)*, although no copies of this work are known to have survived.³⁶ He also wrote on many aspects of individual and monastic reform, and even played an active role in such efforts when he accompanied Nikolaus of Cusa on his reforming legation through Germany and the Low Countries.³⁷

Moving to the mendicant orders, we find a number of highly placed observant leaders also deeply engaged with issues of superstition and sorcery. Perhaps the greatest figure in the history of the late medieval Franciscan observant movement was Bernardino of Siena.³⁸ He rose through the ranks of the order to become vicar general, and only six years after his death in 1444

he became the first Observant Franciscan to be sainted. Aside from guiding the Franciscan reform, he also directed his moral zeal against what he perceived to be the intolerable corruptions of superstition, sorcery, and witchcraft (as well as sodomy and Jewish usury) in impassioned sermons preached across his native northern Italy.³⁹ Other leading Italian Observants including Giovanni of Capistrano, Giacomo of the Marches, and Roberto Caracciolo of Lecce addressed similar themes in their preaching as well.⁴⁰ At the end of the fifteenth century, the observant Bernardino Busti included an important sermon on superstition in his collection the *Rosary of Sermons (Rosarium sermonum)*.⁴¹

The Dominican order yields similar examples. Johannes Nider was a leading observant within the Order of Preachers in the early fifteenth century, reforming several houses and ultimately becoming vicar general of the Dominican province of Teutonia. He also played a major role at the Council of Basel at least in its early years, and he penned several important treatises on religious reform in general as well as on specific issues such as monastic abstinence from meat.⁴² He is better known to history, however, as one of the most important early theorists of witchcraft, addressing “Witches and their Deceptions” in the highly influential fifth book of his *Anthill (Formicarius)*, as well as discussing sorcery and superstition in his Decalogue commentary *Preceptor of Divine Law (Preceptorium divine legis)*.⁴³ Even as Nider was engaged in Basel, Guido Flamochetti, the reforming prior of the Dominican house at Chambéry, south of Geneva, played a role in an inquisitorial court that conducted an early witch trial in the Swiss town of Fribourg in 1430.⁴⁴ A few decades later, as a particular stereotype of diabolical witchcraft consolidated in the lands of the western Alps (promoted, it must be said, by both lay and clerical writers, and within the church by non-reformers as well as reformers), yet another Dominican, Nicolas Jacquier, helped transmit that stereotype to other regions of Europe. Active

at the Council of Basel in the 1430s, where he almost surely met Nider, he wrote his *Scourge of Heretic Witches* (*Flagellum haereticorum fascinariorum*) in 1458 while serving as an inquisitor in the Burgundian Low Countries. A distinct group of observant houses coalesced there in 1464 as the Congregation of Holland (*Congregatio Hollandiae*), and Jacquier was firmly associated with the important Congregation house at Lille.⁴⁵

The Congregation enjoyed strong support from the Burgundian duke Philip the Good, who encouraged its formation in his northern territories. In addition to supporting the Dominican reform, however, he and his family were also associated, at least tangentially, with condemnations of superstition and emerging ideas of witchcraft. From his southern lands in the Duchy of Burgundy proper, Philip maintained close relations with Duke Amadeus VIII of Savoy, such that Amadeus's secretary Martin Le Franc actually dedicated the long vernacular poem *The Defender of Ladies* (*Le champion des dames*), which he wrote while attending the Council of Basel, to the Burgundian duke. This work included a lengthy debate about witchcraft between the "Defender" and his "Adversary."⁴⁶ Philip's father, Duke John the Fearless, also had a treatise concerning magic and superstition dedicated to him: *Against Diviners* (*Contre les devineurs*), composed in 1411 by the Dominican Laurens Pignon, who would go on to become Duke John's father-confessor.⁴⁷

At the very end of the fifteenth century, perhaps the most famous of all medieval reforming friars, Girolamo Savonarola, led a dramatic religious revival in Florence in the 1490s. He preached vigorously against all manner of corruptions and vanities, including (like the Franciscan Bernardino of Siena) usury and sodomy. Savonarola does not appear to have been much agitated by notions of witchcraft, considering witches to be mainly victims of demonic deception rather than agents of monstrous evil themselves.⁴⁸ He was, however, strongly opposed

to superstitious astrology. In addition to excoriating astrology in sermons, he also wrote a treatise *Against Divinatory Astrology (Contra l'astrologia divinatrice)*, a vernacular popularization of his contemporary Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's *Disputations Against Divinatory Astrology (Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem)*.⁴⁹ His hostility to astrology may have been rooted in his concern that credence given to false astrological predictions would undermine his own prophetic authority.⁵⁰

Of course, any discussion of condemnations of sorcery, superstition, and especially witchcraft emerging from the Dominican order in the fifteenth century must include the infamous *Hammer of Witches (Malleus maleficarum)*, written in 1486 and indisputably the most famous treatise on witchcraft of its age (and perhaps of all time). Its Dominican authorship is unquestioned, but its link to the Dominican observance is far more perilous. One of the men to whom its authorship is traditionally ascribed, Jakob Sprenger, was an observant leader of the highest stature, as prior of the reformed house in Cologne, vicar of the observance in the province of Teutonia, and powerful proponent of the new devotion of the rosary, which was championed by Dominican reformers.⁵¹ Debate rages, however, over whether he contributed much, if anything, to the actual composition of the *Hammer*.⁵² Along with Heinrich Kramer, the *Hammer of Witches*' principal author, Sprenger was an officially appointed papal inquisitor, and in 1484 he was a co-recipient of Pope Innocent VIII's famous bull *Summis desiderantes affectibus* (Desiring with supreme ardor), which directed church and secular authorities in upper Germany and the Rhineland to facilitate the efforts of the pope's two "beloved sons" Kramer and Sprenger in extirpating the "heretical depravity" of witchcraft from German lands.⁵³ The complaint that led to the issuance of that bull, however, came from Kramer alone. Furthermore

there is no evidence that Sprenger ever exercised his inquisitorial office (although he was involved in some heresy trials in other capacities), let alone that he ever hunted witches.⁵⁴

The tenuous connection between the *Hammer of Witches* and the Dominican observance highlights a problem for researchers trying to map the intellectual landscape of the fifteenth century. Even with some of the most famous texts from this period, we remain uncertain exactly who wrote what, or in what contexts. It also highlights an inevitable problem with any purely prosopographical study of possible connections between concern over witchcraft and commitment to reform. For although a number of leading figures engaged in religious reform can be linked to important texts addressing sorcery and superstition, as well as to some early witch-hunting activity, no explicit and incontrovertible correspondence between these endeavors ever emerges from these sources. None of these men wrote directly about how their interest in reform may have related to their concerns about magic or witchcraft, and certainly there were other churchmen who did not evince reformist concerns yet who nevertheless decried sorcery and superstition or hunted witches with varying levels of zeal.⁵⁵ To further clarify the connections that this simple survey has begun to suggest, therefore, we must look more deeply into the work of individual reformers who also addressed issues of superstition and sorcery.

The Fiery Preacher: Bernardino of Siena

In the late summer and early autumn of 1427, the Observant Franciscan Bernardino Albizzatechi delivered a series of forty-five sermons in the central Piazza del Campo of his hometown of Siena. On Sunday, September 21, he presented what is now certainly the most intensely studied of these sermons, at least by scholars of witchcraft, in which he dissected the

evil consequences of three deadly sins: pride, lust, and avarice.⁵⁶ Within the category of pride, he first addressed the wickedness of blasphemy against the Lord, and then he warned the Sieneſe about the dangers of spells and superſtitious prognostications, of professional enchanters, and above all of diabolical witches whom he was certain lurked in their miſt.⁵⁷ While ſpeaking of blasphemy, he deſcribed what “fearful judgment” might lie in ſtore for the ſinful city: it would be laid waſte with fire and fall under the rule of neighboring powers (always the great terror of the Italian city-states) if the populace did not correct their arrogant ways. He then promiſed that God would ſend ſimilar “ſcourges” if the Sieneſe would not alſo abandon their tolerance for, and reliance on, “ſpells and divinations.”⁵⁸ He accuſed the aſſembled citizens of having their palms read, of carrying parchment talismans with magical formulae written on them, of caſting lots, of uſing ſpells to heal themſelves when ſick or injured, and of ruſhing to diviners to identify a thief if they had been robbed of ſo much as five cents (*cinque ſoldi*). Bernardino addreſſed ſuch practices in a number of ſermons over the courſe of his career, regularly condemning what he regarded as ſuperſtitious practices intended to heal, protect, or otherwiſe benefit the uſer. His baſic meſſage was that ſuch rites always entailed reſort to demons and ſo endangered one’s ſoul.⁵⁹ On that September day in Siena, he delivered this eſſential warning in particularly dramatic faſhion.

Bernardino began the ſection of his ſermon directed againſt magic and witchcraft by firſt warning his audience not to uſe any ſuperſtitious ſpells, charms, or methods of divination themſelves. He alſo enjoined them not to ſeek out any of the professional or ſemi-professional healers, diviners, and cunning-folk who were prevalent not juſt in Italy but across Europe in this era.⁶⁰ He then blended theſe injunctions into an account of diabolical, conſpiratorial witchcraft – a ſtereotype that was only beginning to take ſhape in the early fifteenth century. He had recently

preached about witches (*streghe*) in Rome, he told his Sienese audience. Although his sermons had initially received a muted reception, ultimately some of his listeners came forward with accusations, and in the course of the subsequent trials the accused produced some horrific confessions.⁶¹ One woman admitted, supposedly without any torture being applied, that she had murdered no fewer than thirty young children by sucking their blood. She also claimed that she had spared another sixty children from such a fate, but each time she did so, she had to offer the devil the limb of some animal in sacrifice instead. She had even killed her own son, grinding his corpse into a magical powder that she then used in her vile rites. She did not attest to night-flight or anything like a full witches' sabbath, but her testimony pointed to her membership in an extended diabolical cult when she described how she often went before dawn to the piazza in front of St. Peter's. There she and other witches would anoint themselves with herbal unguents and imagine that they transformed into cats, but in fact this was only a demonic illusion.

Other sources from roughly this time, although situated geographically north of the Alps and representing a somewhat different stereotype of witchcraft, were also coming to describe accused witches as slathering either themselves or household implements such as brooms and staves with unguents, and then imagining that they flew to diabolical assemblies.⁶² Such references to imagined flight in the service of a demon drew on the famous canon *Episcopi*, first recorded in the early tenth century, which figured centrally in debates about the reality of the witches' sabbath in the 1400s and thereafter.⁶³ Bernardino mentioned the canon in his Sienese sermon, but only to support his assertion that the Roman witches' transformation into cats was nothing but an illusion. Otherwise he did not draw upon any of its imagery in his accounts.⁶⁴ Still, he was at least gesturing toward a notion of witches gathering at diabolical assemblies that was developing more broadly at this time. Only his description of the Roman witches sucking

baby's blood was particularly Italian, reflecting ancient Mediterranean folklore regarding vampiric *striges* (which subsequently became a term for witches), although in Bernardino's exposition the witches were again deceived when they confessed that they had performed such atrocities directly. It was actually the devil, also in the assumed form of a cat, who really drained the blood from sleeping children in these cases.⁶⁵

Bernardino did not describe these monstrous horrors for their own sake, however, nor was he really concerned with witchcraft *per se* within the context of this sermon. He wanted instead to extend guilt by association, cautioning the unwary citizens of Siena that the seemingly helpful healers and diviners whom they blithely patronized were in reality foul *streghe* in the service of Satan. Beyond even this, he implied that the good citizens brushed up against these sort of depravities themselves whenever they uttered a simple incantation or carried an amulet or observed superstitious signs and omens, for all of these practices operated by means of demonic power and deception. His underlying intention was not just to root out a few sworn agents of the devil (although if anyone made an accusation as a result of his sermon and the "incense" of burnt flesh could be offered up to the Lord, that would be a happy result⁶⁶), but to call for personal reform among all who packed the Campo to hear him speak. When he finished decrying the witches of Rome, Bernardino then denounced two other forms of civic corruption associated with pride that he felt plagued Siena: arrogance and the fracturing of the city into partisan groups. From the sin of pride he then turned to lust and luxury (*lussuria*), which he saw manifesting in such vices as the excessively elegant clothing worn by Siena's women and sodomy practiced by some of its men, and to avarice, which above all led to usury and a terrible reliance on Jewish money-lending.⁶⁷

Just as with their fine clothes and quick money available on credit, however, the Siense appear very much to have liked their spells and divinations. These practices were validated by long tradition, and they were believed to serve useful functions. Here we may see a major conceptual congruence between efforts to promote observant reform and those to quash reliance on simple spells and superstitions. In both areas, reform-minded authorities had to struggle against the powerful justifying force of longstanding practice. This struggle is evident in texts focusing on observant reform, because the observants' conventual opponents could articulate in clear and legalistic terms how they believed their practices were sanctioned by approved customs (*consuetudines*).⁶⁸ The common laity had no recourse to such arguments or terminology when they resorted to some traditional method of healing or mode of divination, but literate clerical critics frequently noted the difficulty of uprooting deeply ingrained practices. Ironically, these critics themselves accepted the supposedly ancient and immutable nature of such practices (which in some cases may in fact have changed significantly over time or been of relatively recent provenance) because they believed all such superstitions to be inventions of the church's eternal foe, Satan.⁶⁹ They often found it difficult to convince the general laity, however, that rites on which they had long relied and which could seem both pious and beneficial were actually tinged with terrible demonic dangers. Certainly they felt compelled to restate that point perpetually when writing on this subject.⁷⁰

The fact that religious authorities themselves often had difficulty clearly differentiating practices that they felt were superstitious from those that they regarded as appropriate or even laudable only complicated matters.⁷¹ They sometimes actively promoted devotional practices that could appear quite similar, in terms of their operations or effects, to other rites that they condemned as superstitious. For example, Bernardino recommended in many of his sermons that

people should use holy water or read verses of scripture to protect themselves from demons, even as he blasted other means of protection that relied on consecrated sacramental items or the use of written charms as dangerously superstitious.⁷² In particular, he promoted the new devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus, often emblemized by an IHS inscription or tablet. Given the broad powers that he ascribed to the holy name, such tablets undoubtedly seemed like magical talismans to many people. Bernardino preached that devotion to Christ's name would not only confer spiritual benefits but would also protect one from demons, from thieves and highwaymen, from poisons and the plague, from shipwreck, or from harm in warfare.⁷³ Many within the church worried that this new devotion and its promised benefits were excessive, and hence superstitious. In fact, Bernardino had been in Rome the year before he delivered his sermons in Siena not primarily to ferret out witches there but to defend himself from an official inquiry into the validity of the practices he promoted.

The future Franciscan saint obviously found himself vindicated in that investigation, and he then preached in Rome against superstition and sorcery, quite successfully as he later told the crowds in Siena. Bernardino had success with this message elsewhere in Italy as well. For example, he had also preached in the town of Todi in 1426, where he convinced the civic government to revise their law code in order to introduce harsher penalties against sorcerers and magicians.⁷⁴ No records exist of any sorcery trials in Todi when he was there, but two years later a woman was tried, and records of her case explicitly referenced Bernardino.⁷⁵ In Siena, however, he encountered a curious indifference to the most vitriolic part of his message. No witch trials erupted in the wake of his sermons, even though there is evidence that the populace took to heart other aspects of his reformist regimen. Bernadette Paton, who has analyzed the sermon cycle of 1427, makes a convincing argument that the people of Siena, including leading

religious authorities in the city, were simply not yet ready to accept the essence of Bernardino's message that traditional charms and methods of divination encoded terrible demonic danger. They certainly did not yet accept the various stereotypes, only just developing, of fully diabolic, conspiratorial witchcraft with which Bernardino sought to cudgel them into rejecting their long-held superstitions. He, on the other hand, was only too ready to accept those new notions because of his zeal for reform. That is, he saw in the horrors of witchcraft a rhetorical tool with which to combat moral laxity and promote stronger devotion and devotional practices among all Christians.⁷⁶

Bernardino certainly believed that the devil and his demons were active forces in the world, attempting to corrupt Christian society and lead it to perdition. Moreover, he may well have feared that such dark forces were gaining strength in his own corrupted time. In another of his sermons delivered in Siena in 1427, he declared explicitly that demons had never been more potent at any point in Christian history than at present.⁷⁷ Admittedly, such hyperbole made for dramatic and effective sermonizing, and similar indictments of the woeful present state of things can be found in almost any age. They figure prominently, however, in the rhetoric of late-medieval critics of superstition.⁷⁸ Putting a particularly Italian spin on his message of societal reform, Bernardino frequently warned against the political factionalism that he felt was degrading the communal good in Siena and other cities, just as tolerance of superstition and sorcery was degrading the moral quality of citizens, and he blamed this factionalism on demons as well.⁷⁹ His despair over the current state of Christendom could border on the apocalyptic. In 1423, for example, he had delivered a sermon in Padua in which he depicted Satan as the secret impetus behind all the recent crises faced by Western Europe, including the papal schism and the ongoing war between the English and the French. Sin and moral degradation were rampant, and

such signs all pointed to the looming Endtime.⁸⁰ In 1427, too, he had briefly warned the Sieneese that pride, lust, and avarice had brought down upon Europe the punishments of war, pestilence, and famine.⁸¹ Clearly, however, he did not accept that the struggle had been irrevocably lost. As a reformer, he believed that individual souls and perhaps all of Christian society could still be saved. People needed, however, to be warned against demonic corruption in the harshest terms possible. To that end, horrific accounts of witchcraft served the reformer's purposes.

The Struggle Against Demons: Johannes Nider

The Dominican theologian Johannes Nider developed more systematically the same points about sorcery, superstition, and witchcraft that Bernardino presented emphatically in his sermons. Born in the Swabian town of Isny, Nider entered the observant branch of the Order of Preachers at Colmar in 1402. Educated in Cologne and Vienna, he served as prior of reformed houses in Nuremberg and then Basel before returning to Vienna as a member of the university's theological faculty in 1434.⁸² He wrote all his major works on religious reform as well as on superstition and witchcraft in the 1430s. Like Bernardino, he used accounts of witchcraft to highlight the maleficent activity of demons in the world and to stress the need for personal reform among all Christians. Moreover, his writings afford particular insight into how a general conviction that demons operated as agents of corruption in the wider world intertwined with a commitment to promoting strict observance within religious orders.

According to Nider, while demons sought to degrade and deform all of Christian society, they were the particular enemies of observant religion. In his treatise *On the Reformation of the Cenobitic Estate* (*De reformatione status cenobitici*), likely written in 1431 or early 1432, he

stated explicitly that demons tempting religious clergy and leading them astray were the main cause of the current, notable decline within the religious orders.⁸³ A few years later he returned to this theme when he presented several graphic tales of demonic opposition to religious reform in his great moralizing treatise the *Anthill*, which also contained his most influential descriptions of witchcraft. In the Dominican priory in Nuremberg, he recounted in one example, a demon had viciously afflicted a young novice, seeking to prevent him from taking up the observant life.⁸⁴ Likewise a demon had run riot through a reformed house in the Dominican province of France, breaking windows, smashing jars of wine, and ringing the chapel bells all night long in order to disrupt the devotion and discipline of the friars. Here too, the wicked spirit focused special attention on a novice, tormenting the boy in various ways and finally threatening to kill him if he did not abandon his plan to enter the observant order. When the boy refused, the demon possessed him, and ultimately the youth was only freed through the miraculous intervention of Saint Dominic himself.⁸⁵

Nider claimed direct experience of yet another instance of demonic opposition to reform. When he worked, along with the Dominican master general Barthélemy Texier, to impose strict observance on the women's convent of St. Catherine's in Nuremberg, demons again mounted strong resistance, but here their efforts backfired. Many of the sisters at St. Catherine's were none too eager for reform, Nider acknowledged. Satan, however, must either have been unaware of this, or he wanted to ensure the strongest possible resistance to reform, so he dispatched a demon to haunt the convent, making strange noises and otherwise terrifying the sisters until they turned to Nider for help. At first he did not believe them, thinking that they were merely hearing things, or perhaps that the convent was infested with particularly noisy mice, but eventually their palpable fear convinced him of the reality of a powerful demonic presence. Ultimately, however,

“the devil lost more by this game than he won,” because the sisters eventually became so terrified of this invisible menace that they fully embraced reform, repenting their sinful ways and converting whole-heartedly to the “new life” of the observance.⁸⁶

The call to conversion, to turn from corrupted ways and embrace a stricter piety, was the essence of reform. This call obviously resonated within religious orders, but, as we have already seen with Bernardino, it also motivated efforts to reform the laity as well. In terms of reformers’ opposition to sorcery and superstition, it became a call for all Christians to reject illicit rites and practices, even purportedly beneficial ones, and trust instead in God’s mercy. Jean Gerson had expressed this idea succinctly in his tract *On Errors Concerning the Magic Art* when he wrote that divine mercy would be found “not in superstitious observances but in pious supplications, not in demonic invocations but in the emendation of life.”⁸⁷ As Nider would have learned from his experience in Nuremberg (at least as he later described it), exposure to demonic terrors could be a powerful inducement for people to amend their lives. Like Bernardino, therefore, he was among the earliest churchmen to deploy tales of the demonic horrors of witchcraft in order to motivate laypeople to reject superstition and embrace what he regarded as proper forms of religiosity and deeply rooted faith.

Although the *Anthill* presents several lurid descriptions of witches’ sabbaths, Nider expressed the connection he saw between the threat of witchcraft and moral reform most directly in a relatively non-graphic account. A captured male witch confessed that he had a grudge against one of his neighbors, whom he sought to afflict by means of harmful magic (*maleficium*). To do so, the witch called upon a demon whom he termed the “little master” (*magisterulus*). Nider had already established that this was what witches called the demon who presided over the detestable rites that they performed at their conventicles (cannibalism, sexual orgies, desecration

of the eucharist, and so forth), so those horrific elements of witchcraft hovered in the background of this account. The message Nider sought to convey here, however, was quite straightforward, almost mundane in its practicality. The witch sought to harm his neighbor, but found that he could not. When he asked the little master why this was so, the demon responded that it was virtually powerless in this case because the other man had strong faith and diligently protected himself with the sign of the cross.⁸⁸ The point of the story could not be more direct: amend your life, remain faithful, perform simple devotions diligently, and you will have nothing to fear from demons or witches. The selfsame message that applied within observant cloisters resonated in the wider world as well.

When we pull back from Nider's specific accounts of witchcraft, we find that the overall context in which he presented them was mainly one of societal reform. His treatise the *Anthill*, in which discussion of witches forms the basis of the entire fifth book, was a work intended to promote personal moral reform broadly within Christendom.⁸⁹ Composed as a dialogue between a theologian (who is Nider) and a lazy pupil who seeks instruction on spiritual matters mainly through edifying stories, the treatise is best understood as a collection of *exempla* that could be used in sermons. Although he wrote in Latin, Nider clearly intended the messages contained in the *Anthill* to reach a wide audience. Like Bernardino, he was less concerned with witches *per se* than with how ordinary Christians responded to the widely accepted threat of harmful sorcery. Above all, he admonished, one should never turn to further witchcraft or to superstitious remedies of any sort when one believed oneself to have been bewitched. Good Christians should suffer even to the point of death rather than imperil their souls through any involvement, however inadvertent, in such nefarious practices.⁹⁰

Not that the faithful had to bear the assaults of witches with stoic passivity. The church offered a variety of methods by which they could protect themselves and their households from witches and demons, or counteract any evil spells that had been cast against them. They could guard themselves with the sign of the cross, or bless themselves or their homes with holy water. They could also pray, go to confession, attend Mass regularly, visit the shrines of local saints, or simply ruminate devoutly on the passion of Christ. All these rites and practices would help protect against or serve to undo the demonic power of witches. What mattered, however, was not so much the actions themselves as the strong faith that undergirded them and that they in turn helped to promote.⁹¹ These proper “observances” and enactments of faith were the mechanisms by which reformers within the late medieval church sought to move people to greater piety and to the emendation of their otherwise sinful lives. Again we can see how fear of maleficent sorcery and particularly revulsion at the ghastly horrors of diabolical witchcraft – once people began to accept the reality of that newly propounded stereotype – could serve as powerful weapons in a reformer’s rhetorical arsenal. We can also see how a reformer might identify a single demonic enemy both spreading corruption within Christian society generally and also working particularly to subvert observant religious reform within the church.

Conclusion: Varieties of Reform

As noted at the outset of this chapter, calls for reform and spiritual renewal can seem ubiquitous in late medieval Europe, evident within religious orders, within the church more generally, and within secular society as well.⁹² So prevalent do they appear, in fact, that John Van Engen has rightly cautioned against the temptation to “reduce everything to ‘reform’” when

studying this period, for that might blur important differences or misconstrue unrelated developments.⁹³ Certainly churchmen who engaged in some variety of religious reform were not the only individuals in the late medieval period to express concern about the power of the devil or his demonic minions in the world. They were not the only ones to condemn sorcery or to help propagate the dark and terrible stereotype of diabolical witchcraft that took shape in these years. There were of course critics of sorcery and superstition who were not reformers in any other sense, just as there were many important ecclesiastical leaders working for reform within the church who did not address sorcery and superstition in any way. But in certain cases there was undoubtedly a powerful interaction between these areas of concern. The challenge for scholars is to remain alert to the specificities (and also the vagaries) of how that interaction played out.

In this essay I have suggested how reformist concerns might overlap with opposition to sorcery and superstition by surveying some of the churchmen who were engaged in reforming religious orders or promoting more general reform among the clergy or the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and who also commented on and in most cases severely castigated what they perceived to be dangerous superstitious practices in Christian society. In the particular cases of Bernardino of Siena and Johannes Nider, I have shown how these different areas of concern not only overlapped but in fact influenced and reinforced one another. For these men, at least, they were not really separate concerns at all but different aspects of a single reforming agenda. Lessons learned in the course of promoting religious observance within the orders could suggest strategies for reinforcing devotional observances and instigating spiritual renewal among the laity. Certainly a profound anxiety about diabolical corruption and the active malevolence of demons in the world existed within and in many ways motivated both varieties of reform.

That connections between varieties of reform, and so between reform and the fierce condemnation of superstition, sorcery, and witchcraft, were contingent rather than categorical, and that even when clearly present such connections were never explicitly articulated in any sources uncovered so far only means that scholars must approach them with appropriate care and nuance. Their ramifications, however, are not to be ignored. Multifaceted impulses for reform and equally complex and variegated concerns over sorcery and superstition powerfully shaped the religious climate of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Europe, and these dynamics grew even stronger in subsequent centuries. There is no denying that Europe's greatest age of religious reform corresponded almost exactly to the age of its worst witch hunts. Precisely how reformist concerns may have fed the anxieties of witch-hunting, however, remains far from clear. Only careful attention to the many varieties of reform that operated in these centuries can begin to answer such questions.

¹ Gerald Strauss, "Ideas of *Reformatio* and *Renovatio* from the Middle Ages to the Reformation," in *Handbook of European History, 1400-1600: Late Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Reformation*, ed. Thomas A. Brady, Jr., Heiko A. Oberman, and James D. Tracy, 2 vols. (Leiden: 1995), 2:1-30, at 1.

² As cataloged in Kaspar Elm (ed.), *Reformbemühungen und Observanzbestrebungen im spätmittelalterlichen Ordenswesen*, Berliner Historische Studien 14, Ordensstudien 6 (Berlin: 1989).

³ The classic study is Gerhart B. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1959); see also his later articles, "Reformatio" and "Reform: Innovation and Tradition in Medieval Christendom," in Ladner, *Images and Ideas in the Middle Ages: Selected Studies in History and Art*, 3 vols. (Rome: 1983),

2:519-31 and 2:533-58; Giles Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1996).

⁴ James D. Mixson, *Poverty's Proprietors: Ownership and Mortal Sin at the Origins of the Observant Movement*, SHCT 143 (Leiden: 2009).

⁵ For an overview see Edward Peters, "The Medieval Church and State on Superstition, Magic, and Witchcraft: From Augustine to the Sixteenth Century," in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Middle Ages*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark (Philadelphia: 2002), 173-245, at 218-45; Michael D. Bailey, *Magic and Superstition in Europe: A Concise History from Antiquity to the Present* (Lanham, Md.: 2007), 119-40.

⁶ Regarding observant reform, see Kaspar Elm, "Reform- und Observanzbestrebungen im spätmittelalterlichen Ordenswesen," in *Reformbemühungen*, 3-19, at 3.

⁷ See Krzysztof Bracha, "Kritik an den Glaubens- und Verhaltensformen und an der Aberglaubenpraxis im kirchlichen reformatorischen Schrifttum des Spätmittelalters," in *Christianity in East Central Europe: Late Middle Ages*, ed. Paweł Kras and Wojciech Polak (Lublin: 1999), 271-82; Krzysztof Bracha, *Des Teufels Lug und Trug: Nikolaus Magni von Jauer, ein Reformtheologe des 15. Jahrhunderts gegen Aberglaube und Götzendienst*, Quellen und Forschungen zur Europäischen Ethnologie 25 (Dettelbach: 2013), 47-74.

⁸ See e.g. the comparison of three early demonologists in Martine Ostorero, *Le diable au sabbat: Littérature démonologique et sorcellerie (1440-1460)*, ML 38 (Florence: 2011).

⁹ E.g. Mixson, *Poverty's Proprietors*, esp. 67-96.

¹⁰ On Heinrich in Vienna, see Michael H. Shank, "*Unless You Believe, You Shall Not Understand*": *Logic, University, and Society in Late Medieval Vienna* (Princeton, N.J.: 1988); in relation to the papal schism, see Georg Kreuzer, *Heinrich von Langenstein: Studien zur*

Biographie und zu den Schismatraktaten unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Epistola pacis und der Epistola concilii pacis (Paderborn: 1987).

¹¹ Mixson, *Poverty's Proprietors*, 67-80.

¹² Michael D. Bailey, *Fearful Spirits, Reasoned Follies: The Boundaries of Superstition in Late Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, N.Y.: 2013), 105-11.

¹³ Laura Ackerman Smoller, *History, Prophecy, and the Stars: The Christian Astrology of Pierre d'Ailly, 1350-1420* (Princeton, N.J.: 1994).

¹⁴ On d'Ailly's efforts to reform the ecclesiastical hierarchy, see Louis B. Pascoe, *Church and Reform: Bishops, Theologians, and Canon Lawyers in the Thought of Pierre d'Ailly (1351-1420)*, SMRT 105 (Leiden: 2005). On the reformist work of the council, see Phillip H. Stump, *The Reforms of the Council of Constance (1414-1418)*, SHCT 53 (Leiden: 1994).

¹⁵ Bailey, *Fearful Spirits*, 117-23.

¹⁶ Louis B. Pascoe, *Jean Gerson: Principles of Church Reform*, SMRT 7 (Leiden: 1973); Brian Patrick McGuire, *Jean Gerson and the Last Medieval Reformation* (University Park, Pa.: 2005), esp. 240-83.

¹⁷ Sermon *Regnum celorum* in Gerson, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. P. Glorieux, 10 vols. (Paris: 1960-73), 7.2:992-1005, quote at 1001; *De erroribus* at *ibid.*, 10:77-90.

¹⁸ All are edited in vol. 10 of Gerson, *Œuvres complètes*. Further discussion in Bailey, *Fearful Spirits*, 127-44.

¹⁹ D'Ailly, *Apologia astrologie defensiva*, in Gerson, *Œuvres complètes*, 2:218-21: "Nam sicut illos dico superstitiosos astronomos qui contra theologiam veritatem astrologiam ultra id quod potest nimis extollunt, sic et illos superstitiosos theologos qui contra philosophicam rationem astronomiae potestatem nimis deprimunt vel penitus tollunt" (p. 219).

²⁰ See Bailey, *Fearful Spirits*, 142-44; Dyan Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell: Metaphor and Embodiment in the Lives of Pious Women, 200-1500* (Philadelphia: 2012), 245-56.

²¹ *Œuvres complètes*, 7.2:1001 (sermon *Regnum celorum*), 10:77 (*De erroribus*).

²² Gerson, *Contra superstitiosam dierum observantiam*, in *Œuvres complètes*, 10:120. On Gerson's pastoral efforts, see D. Catherine Brown, *Pastor and Laity in the Theology of Jean Gerson* (Cambridge, Eng.: 1987), discussion of superstition and sorcery at 159-60.

²³ Adolph Franz, *Der Magister Nikolaus Magni de Jawor: Ein Beitrag zur Literatur- und Gelehrten-geschichte des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts* (Freiburg im/Br: 1898), 122-30, 140-43; Bracha, *Des Teufels Lug und Trug*, 20-30.

²⁴ On this work, see Bailey, *Fearful Spirits*, chap. 4; and Bracha, *Des Teufels Lug und Trug*. Bracha lists all known manuscripts in an appendix, pp. 205-13.

²⁵ Franz, *Magister Nikolaus Magni*, 160-61; Bracha, *Des Teufels Lug und Trug*, 69-70. For their work on superstition, see Bailey, *Fearful Spirits*, chap. 4.

²⁶ Balthasar Reber, *Felix Hemmerlin von Zürich, neu nach den Quellen bearbeitet* (Zurich: 1846), 147-48.

²⁷ See Wolfgang Behringer, "How Waldensians Became Witches: Heretics and their Journey to the Other World," in *Communicating with Spirits*, ed. Gábor Klaniczay and Éva Pócs (Budapest: 2005), 155-92; also Kathrin Utz Tremp, *Von der Häresie zur Hexerei: "Wirkliche" und imaginäre Sekten im Spätmittelalter*, MGH Schriften 59 (Hannover: 2008), esp. in regard to important transitional trials in Fribourg.

²⁸ Georg Modestin, "Georges de Saluces, évêque réformateur et chasseur de sorciers (1440-1461)," *Revue historique vaudoise* 119 (2011): 21-34; Modestin, *Le diable chez l'évêque: Chasse aux sorciers dans le diocèse de Lausanne (vers 1460)*, CLHM 25 (Lausanne: 1999).

²⁹ Martine Ostorero, “Itinéraire d’un inquisiteur gâté: Ponce Feugeyron, les juifs et le sabbat des sorciers,” *Médiévales* 43 (2002), 103-17; Martine Ostorero, Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, and Kathrin Utz Tremp, with Catherine Chène (eds.), *L’imaginaire du sabbat: Edition critique des textes les plus anciens (1430 c.-1440 c.)*, CLHM 26 (Lausanne: 1999), 269-353.

³⁰ See Johannes Helmrath, “Reform als Thema der Konzilien des Spätmittelalters,” in *Christian Unity: The Council of Ferrara-Florence, 1438/39-1989*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo (Leuven: 1991), 75-152; Jürgen Miethke, “Kirchenreform auf den Konzilien des 15. Jahrhunderts: Motive – Methoden – Wirkungen,” in *Studien zum 15. Jahrhundert: Festschrift für Erich Meuthen*, ed. Johannes Helmrath and Heribert Müller, 2 vols. (Munich: 1994), 1:13-42. On Basel in particular, see Johannes Helmrath, *Das Basler Konzil: Forschungsstand und Probleme* (Cologne: 1987), 331-52.

³¹ Michael D. Bailey and Edward Peters, “A Sabbath of Demonologists: Basel, 1431-1440,” *The Historian* 65 (2003): 1375-95; Stefan Sudmann, “Hexen – Ketzer – Kirchenreform: Drei Debatten des Basler Konzils im Vergleich,” in *Chasses aux sorcières et démonologie: Entre discours et pratiques (XIVe-XVIIe siècles)*, ed. Martine Ostorero, Georg Modestin, and Kathrin Utz Tremp, ML 36 (Florence: 2010), 169-97.

³² Mixson, *Poverty’s Proprietors*, 137-41; Alois Madre, *Nikolaus von Dinkelsbühl Leben und Schriften: Ein Beitrag zur theologischen Literaturgeschichte* (Münster: 1965), 29-35, 269-77.

³³ Bailey, *Fearful Spirits*, 155-56; Karin Baumann, *Aberglaube für Laien: Zur Programmatik und Überlieferung spätmittelalterlicher Superstitionenkritik*, 2 vols. (Würzburg: 1989), 1:203-7.

³⁴ On Carthusian reform, see Heinrich Rühig, “Die Kartäuser und die spätmittelalterlichen Ordensreformen,” in *Reformbemühungen*, 35-58; Denis D. Martin, *Fifteenth-Century Carthusian Reform: The World of Nicholas Kempf*, SHCT 49 (Leiden: 1992).

³⁵ Dieter Mertens, *Iacobus Carthusiensis: Untersuchungen zur Rezeption der Werke des Kartäusers Jakob von Paradies (1381-1465)* (Göttingen: 1976), 16, 96-115; Paul W. Knoll, “Iacobus Carthusiensis (James of Paradise) and Ecclesiastical Reform in Fifteenth-Century Cracow and Erfurt,” in *Procession, Performance, Liturgy, and Ritual: Essays in Honor of Bryon R. Gillingham*, ed. Nancy Van Deusen (Ottawa: 2007), 191-201. On Jakob’s critique of superstition, see Bailey, *Fearful Spirits*, chap. 4; also Krzysztof Bracha, “Die Kritik des Aberglaubens, der Irrtümer und Mißbräuche im Kult bei Jacobus Cartusiensis,” in *Bücher, Bibliotheken und Schriftkultur der Kartäuser: Festgabe zum 65. Geburtstag von Edward Potkowski*, ed. Sönke Lorenz (Stuttgart: 2002), 151-63.

³⁶ Kent Emery, *Dionysii Cartusiensis Opera Selecta*, CCCM 121-121a (Turnhout: 1991), 129. On *Contra vitia superstitionum*, see Bailey, *Fearful Spirits*, chap. 4.

³⁷ Dirk Wasserman, *Dionysius der Kartäuser: Einführung in Werk und Gedankenwelt*, *Analecta Cartusiana* 133 (Salzburg: 1996), esp. 228-36.

³⁸ On the Franciscan observance, see Duncan Nimmo, *Reform and Division in the Medieval Franciscan Order: From Saint Francis to the Foundation of the Capuchins* (Rome: 1987).

³⁹ Franco Mormando, *The Preacher’s Demons: Bernardino of Siena and the Social Underworld of Early Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: 1999); also Bernadette Paton, “‘To the Fire, to the Fire! Let Us Burn a Little Incense to God’: Bernardino, Preaching Friars, and *Maleficio* in Late Medieval Siena,” in *No Gods Except Me: Orthodoxy and Religious Practice in Europe, 1200-1600*, ed. Charles Zika (Melbourne: 1991), 7-36.

⁴⁰ Marina Montesano, “*Supra aqua et supra ad vento*”: “*Superstizioni*,” *maleficia e incantamenta nei predicatori francescani osservanti (Italia, sec. XV.)* (Rome: 1999).

⁴¹ Fabrizio Conti, “Preachers and Confessors Against ‘Superstitions’: Bernardino Busti and Sermon 16 of his *Rosarium Sermonum*,” *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 6 (2011): 62-91.

⁴² Michael D. Bailey, *Battling Demons: Witchcraft, Heresy, and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (University Park, Pa.: 2003), esp. 75-89; James Mixson, “The Setting and Resonance of John Nider’s *De reformatione religiosorum*,” in *Kirchenbild und Spiritualität: Dominikanische Beiträge zur Ekklesiologie und zum kirchlichen Leben im Mittelalter: Festschrift für Ulrich Horst OP zum 75. Geburtstag*, ed. Thomas Prügl and Marianne Schlosser (Paderborn: 2007), 319-38; Michael D. Bailey, “Abstinence and Reform at the Council of Basel: Johannes Nider’s *De abstinentia esus carniū*,” *Mediaeval Studies* 59 (1997): 225-60.

⁴³ See Bailey, *Fearful Spirits*, chaps. 4-5; Bailey, *Battling Demons*; Werner Tschacher, *Der Formicarius des Johannes Nider von 1437/38: Studien zu den Anfängen der europäischen Hexenverfolgungen im Spätmittelalter* (Aachen: 2000); Ostorero et al., *L’imaginaire du sabbat*, 101-265.

⁴⁴ Utz Tresp, *Von der Häresie zur Hexerei*, 474; Ostorero, *Diable au sabbat*, 122.

⁴⁵ On Jacquier as a witchcraft theorist, see Ostorero, *Diable au sabbat*; on Dominican reform in the Low Countries, see Servatius Petrus Wolfs, “Dominikanische Observanzbestrebungen: Die Congregatio Hollandiae (1464-1517),” in *Reformbemühungen*, 273-92.

⁴⁶ Ostorero, et al., *L’imaginaire du sabbat*, 441-508.

⁴⁷ Jan R. Veenstra, *Magic and Divination at the Courts of Burgundy and France: Text and Context of Laurens Pignon’s “Contra les devineurs” (1411)*, Brill’s Studies in Intellectual History 83 (Leiden: 1998).

⁴⁸ See the brief discussion in Tamar Herzig’s contribution to this volume, and more fully in her “Holy Women, Male Promoters, and Savonarolan Piety in Northern Italy, c. 1498-1545” (Ph.D.

dissertation, Hebrew University of Jerusalem: 2005), chap. 5. I thank her for bringing to my attention Savonarola's opposition to other forms of superstition.

⁴⁹ On Pico and Savonarola, see Paola Zambelli, *L'ambigua natura della magia: Folosofi, streghe, riti nel Rinascimento*, 2nd ed. (Venice: 1996), esp. 110-11, 267-68.

⁵⁰ Amos Edelheit, *Ficino, Pico and Savonarola: The Evolution of Humanist Theology 1461/62-1498*, *The Medieval Mediterranean* 78 (Leiden: 2008), 447-49.

⁵¹ Hans Peter Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum and the Construction of Witchcraft: Theology and Popular Belief* (Manchester: 2003), 18; Christopher S. Mackay, "General Introduction" to *Malleus Maleficarum*, ed. and trans. Mackay, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Eng.: 2006), 1:80-83.

⁵² Peter Segl, "Heinrich Institoris: Persönlichkeit und literarisches Werk," in *Der Hexenhammer: Entstehung und Umfeld des Malleus maleficarum von 1487*, ed. Peter Segl (Cologne: 1988), 103-26; André Schnyder, *Malleus Maleficarum von Heinrich Institoris (alias Kramer) unter Mithilfe Jakob Sprengers aufgrund der dämonologischen Tradition zusammengestellt: Kommentar zur Wiedergabe des Erstdrucks von 1487 (Hain 9238)* (Göppingen: 1993), 419-25; Wolfgang Behringer and Günter Jerouschek, "'Das unheilvollste Buch der Weltliteratur'? Zur Entstehung- und Wirkungsgeschichte des Malleus Maleficarum und zu den Anfängen der Hexenverfolgung," in *Der Hexenhammer*, ed. and trans. Behringer, Jerouschek, and Werner Tschacher (Munich: 2000), 31-37; Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 18-19; Mackay, "General Introduction," 103-21.

⁵³ The bull was printed with the first edition of the *Malleus* and is generally included in modern editions and translations. A translation can also be found in Alan Charles Kors and Edward Peters (eds.), *Witchcraft in Europe 400-1700: A Documentary History*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: 2001), 177-80, quote at 178.

⁵⁴ Mackay, “General Introduction,” 82-83.

⁵⁵ See the conclusions of Michael Tavuzzi, *Renaissance Inquisitors: Dominican Inquisitors and Inquisitorial Districts in Northern Italy, 1474-1527*, SHCT 134 (Leiden: 2007), 200-202.

⁵⁶ Sermon 35 in Bernardino da Siena, *Prediche volgari sul Campo di Siena, 1427*, ed. Carlo Delcorno, 2 vols. (Milan: 1989), 2:992-42. Thanks to my colleague David Hollander for help with some of the Italian.

⁵⁷ Paton, “To the Fire”; Montesano, *Supra acqua*; and Mormando, *Preacher’s Demons*, all deal extensively with this sermon, recognizing it as the centerpiece of Bernardino’s declarations against superstition and witchcraft. On Bernardino’s preaching as a “vehicle for religious transformation,” see Caroline Muessig’s contribution to this volume.

⁵⁸ Bernardino, *Prediche volgari*, 2:1003-4.

⁵⁹ Mormando, *Preacher’s Demons*, 95-97.

⁶⁰ Famously addressed in Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: 1971), esp. 177-252; for Italy, see David Gentilcore, *From Bishop to Witch: The System of the Sacred in Early Modern Terra d’Otranto* (Manchester: 1992), esp. 128-61.

⁶¹ On the Roman trials, see Mormando, *Preacher’s Demons*; or Mormando, “Bernardino of Siena, Popular Preacher and Witch-Hunter: A 1426 Witch Trial in Rome,” *Fifteenth Century Studies* 24 (1998): 84-118.

⁶² Collected in Ostorero et al., *L’imaginaire du sabbat*; see also Michael D. Bailey, “The Medieval Concept of the Witches’ Sabbath,” *Exemplaria* 8 (1996): 419-39.

⁶³ C. 26 q. 5 c. 12, in Emil Friedberg (ed.), *Corpus iuris canonici*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: 1879-81), 1:1030-31; or Joseph Hansen (ed.), *Quellen und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Hexenwahns und der Hexenverfolgung im Mittelalter* (1901; reprint Hildesheim: 1963), 38-39.

On its later history, see Werner Tschacher, “Der Flug durch die Luft zwischen Illusionstheorie und Realitätsbeweis: Studien zum sog. Kanon *Episcopi* und zum Hexenflug,” *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte* 116, Kan. Abt. 85 (1999): 225-76; Ostorero, *Diable au sabbat*, 574-617.

⁶⁴ On Bernardino’s other discussions of sabbath-like events, see Mormando, *Preacher’s Demons*, 66-69.

⁶⁵ Richard Kieckhefer, “Mythologies of Witchcraft in the Fifteenth Century,” *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 1 (2006): 79-108, usefully differentiates between an Italian and an Alpine model of witchcraft.

⁶⁶ A famous line from the sermon reads “al fuoco, al fuoco, al fuoco...Doh, facciamo un poco d’oncenso a Domenedio”: Bernardino, *Prediche volgari*, 2:1006-7.

⁶⁷ While the three overall sections on pride (Bernadino, *Prediche volgari*, 2:1000-15), on lust (ibid., 1015-27), and on avarice (ibid., 1027-40) are roughly the same length, of the twelve sub-categories (four within each overall sin), the section on spells, divination, and witchcraft is the longest in the sermon.

⁶⁸ Mixson, *Poverty’s Proprietors*, 109-19; also Mixson’s contribution to this volume, “Observant Reform’s Conceptual Frameworks between Principle and Practice.” Johannes Nider identified the place of such customs among the main arguments against observant reform in his *De reformatione status cenobitici* 1.4, even as he decried them as “not custom but corruption” (“nec consuetudo sed corruptela dicenda est”) in *De reformatione* 1.5 (MS Basel, Öffentliche Bibliothek der Universität, B III 15, fol. 194r).

⁶⁹ See Bailey, *Magic and Superstition in Europe* (as n. 5 above), 79-91, for a discussion of change and continuity in common magical practices.

⁷⁰ Michael D. Bailey, “Concern Over Superstition in Late Medieval Europe,” in *The Religion of Fools? Superstition Past and Present*, ed. S. A. Smith and Alan Knight, Past and Present Supplement 3 (Oxford: 2008), 115-33, esp. 122-27.

⁷¹ On this “dilemma of discernment,” see Bailey, *Fearful Spirits*, esp. 179-88.

⁷² Mormando, *Preacher’s Demons*, 103-4.

⁷³ Mormando, *Preacher’s Demons*, 104.

⁷⁴ Mormando, *Preacher’s Demons*, 72-73.

⁷⁵ Mormando, *Preacher’s Demons*, 72; on this trial see also Domenico Mammoli, *The Record of the Trial and Condemnation of a Witch, Matteuccia di Francesco, at Todi, 20 March 1428*, Res Tuderniae 14 (Rome: 1972).

⁷⁶ Paton, “To the Fire.” Mormando, *Preacher’s Demons*, 72, agrees with her, although he cautions that other aspects of Bernardino’s psyche were probably also at work.

⁷⁷ Bernardino, *Prediche volgari*, 1:657.

⁷⁸ E.g. Jean Gerson, *De erroribus circa artem magicam*, 77; Nikolaus Magni of Jauer, *De superstitionibus*, MS Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, Codex 78, fol. 44r.

⁷⁹ Esp. in Bernardino, *Prediche volgari*, sermons 10-12, 23 (1:323-87, 650-81); also briefly in sermon 35 (2:1014-15).

⁸⁰ Mormando, *Preacher’s Demons*, 22-23.

⁸¹ Bernardino, *Prediche volgari*, 2:998-1000.

⁸² For biography, see Bailey, *Battling Demons*, 11-28.

⁸³ Nider, *De reformatione status cenobitici* 2.34, fol. 210r.

⁸⁴ Nider, *Formicarius* 1.9, ed. G. Colvener (Douai: 1602), pp. 68-70.

⁸⁵ Nider, *Formicarius* 1.10, pp. 74-76.

⁸⁶ Nider, *Formicarius* 5.2, p. 345: “Sed tamen, per dei gratiam, diabolus plus perdidit hoc in ludo, quam acquisierit, quia quaedam ceruicosae feminae quas ad plenum pietas reformatorum non valebat trahere, hoc phantasma adeo terruit, ut totius vitae suae facinora confiterentur sacramentaliter, vestes veteres deponerent, et nouas secundum ordinis formam induerent, et in aliam vitam nouam se transformarent.”

⁸⁷ Gerson, *De erroribus circa artem magicam*, p. 85: “Haec autem misericordia non superstitiosis observationibus sed piis obsecrationibus, non daemonum invocationibus sed vitae emendatione...”

⁸⁸ Nider, *Formicarius* 5.4, p. 356. On a demonic *magisterulus* presiding at a sabbath, see *Formicarius* 5.3, p. 352.

⁸⁹ Bailey, *Battling Demons*, 91-117; Catherine Chène, “Démon et réforme dans la predication observante du XVe siècle: L’exemple de la *Fourmilière* de Jean Nider,” in *Chasses aux sorcières* (as n. 31 above), 155-67.

⁹⁰ Nider, *Formicarius* 5.3, p. 352.

⁹¹ For a fuller account, see Bailey, *Battling Demons*, 123-30.

⁹² For a sense of the scope, see the essays collected in Ivan Hlaváček and Alexander Patschovsky (eds.), *Reform von Kirche und Reich zur Zeit der Konzilien von Konstanz (1414-1418) und Basel (1431-1449)* (Constance, Ger.: 1996).

⁹³ John Van Engen, “The Church in the Fifteenth Century,” in *Handbook of European History* (as n. 1 above), 1: 305-30, at 307.