INTRODUCTION

Heresy lies in the eye of the beholder.[1]

The early Humiliati stood at a crossroads between tradition and novelty, orthodoxy and heresy. Latin Europe in the last decades of the twelfth century saw an outpouring of new forms of religious life which Marie-Dominique Chenu has described as an 'Evangelical Awakening': a renewed search for a more intense religious experience focused on the life of Christ and the apostles, as described in the Gospel: the *vita apostolica* and the model of the early Church, the *ecclesiae primitivae forma*.[2] The most successful of these new movements in the twelfth century, both numerically and historiographically, were the Cathars and Waldensians. The dualist faith of the Cathars took fast hold in the Languedoc and northern Italy and the Cathar Church was acquiring a clear organisational structure separate from that of the Church of Rome. The Waldensians came together in the 1170s as followers of Valdes of Lyons, a charismatic figure who attracted attention by his dramatic conversion to a life of poverty and preaching. When the English churchman and raconteur Walter Map encountered him and his followers at the papal Curia in 1179 he ridiculed their ignorance, but was sufficiently alarmed to observe 'they are making their first moves in the humblest manner because they cannot launch an attack. If we admit them, we shall be driven out.'[3] Both Cathars and Waldensians were considered heretics by men of the Church and were

[1] See Moore, 'New sects and secret meetings: association and authority in the eleventh and twelfth centuries', pp. 47–68 on the idea that anxiety (about new forms of religious life) lay in the eye of the clerical beholder.

[2] Chenu, *Nature, Man and Society in the Twelfth Century*, ch. 7; see also by the same author 'Moines, clercs, laïcs, au carrefour de la vie évangélique (xii^{e} siècle)'.

[3] Walter Map, *De nugis curialium: Courtiers' Trifles*, ed. and trans. M. R. James, rev. C. N. L. Brooke and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1983), distinction 1, chapter 31, p. 127; trans. from *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, Wakefield and Evans, p. 204.

caught in the broad net of the anathema declared in November 1184 by pope Lucius III sitting in council with Frederick I Barbarossa at Verona. Within a generation, the Waldensians had acquired a substantial body of members and, like the Cathars, were becoming doctrinally more remote from the orthodox Church.[4] The most successful movements in the early thirteenth century, by contrast, enjoyed the support of prelates and popes from the beginning. Francis and Dominic, charismatic preachers who took the meaning of the *vita apostolica* and the *ecclesiae primitivae forma* to new extremes, attracted vast followings and founded orders which were to dominate the pastoral and intellectual life of the thirteenth-century Church.

In this religious drama the Humiliati or 'humble ones' had only a walk-on part, limited first by geography and then by chronology. They first emerged in the 1170s on the north Italian plain between the foothills of the Alps and the Appennines, along the valley of the Po from modern-day Piemonte in the west to the edges of the Veneto in the east. The first references describe both groups of clerics living in community and lay men and women devoted to the religious life in small *ad hoc* associations promoting the catholic faith. In 1184 the Humiliati too, like the Cathars and Waldensians, were listed as heretics by Lucius III and Barbarossa, but by the turn of the century they were sufficiently established to approach the pope in search of approval. By this date, three distinct elements were recognisable: married or single lay men and women living a religious life while remaining in their own homes (later known as the Third order), male and female regulars living in common (the Second order), and clerics based in more formal communities (the First order). In 1201 these groups achieved recognition as three separate orders under one framework of authority.

By the mid-thirteenth century the *ordo Humiliatorum* had seen spectacular expansion. In 1278 Bonvesin da la Riva, himself a Humiliati Tertiary, recorded that there were over 200 houses of the regular 'Second' order and seven *canoniche* of the 'First', in the city and region of Milan alone.[5] His figures are not without problems, but the measure of success which they convey is undeniable. By the middle of the thirteenth century, the Humiliati had become a major presence in the religious, economic and administrative life of northern Italy.

In the following centuries, the order shrank in both size and prestige and in the 1500s the Humiliati were swept aside by the winds of change

[4] K. V. Selge, *Die ersten Waldenser, mit Edition der 'Liber Antiheresis' des Durandus von Osca*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1967).

[5] Bonvesin da la Riva, *De magnalibus mediolani. Meraviglie di Milano*, pp. 81, 83. On Bonvesin, see A. S. Avalle, 'Bonvesin della Riva', *DBI*, XII (Rome, 1970), pp. 465–9.

in the Counter Reformation. The male orders were suppressed by Charles Borromeo and Pius V in 1571 with the bull *Quemadmodum solicitus pater*, the women (by this date Benedictine) left to fade out in a more dignified manner in the following centuries.

The experience of the Humiliati is unique. There are certainly points of comparison with the early experience of the Waldensians: both groups advocated a more active pastoral role for their members, both were condemned in 1184 at least in part because of their insistence on preaching without authority. Like the Humiliati, two groups of former Waldensians, led by Durand of Huesca and Bernard Prim, returned to orthodox obedience during the pontificate of Innocent III (1198–1216). Since the early sources for the Humiliati are sporadic and fragmentary and we are so much better informed about the actions and teachings of the early Waldensians, historians have found it logical to assimilate the two groups. But the parallels, although beguiling, are also restrictive. The reason why we do not have the same type and quality of early sources for the Humiliati is symptomatic. In part this is the result of the fate of the movement centuries later and the dispersal and loss of documentary sources, but it is also because they attracted less attention, fitting relatively smoothly into the religious and ecclesiastical life of northern Italy.

This book sets out to explore the reasons for the unique experience of the Humiliati, tracing their history from the earliest records in the 1170s to the height of their success in the mid-thirteenth century. When we look beyond, though never forgetting, the heretic label, to explore the evidence for the development of the *ordo Humiliatorum* and the relations of this group of religious enthusiasts with the local communities with whom they lived, both ecclesiastical and lay, we find a very different experience from that of even the reconciled Waldensians. In this process the Humiliati can be seen to have as much in common with confraternal groups and with the new and exciting orthodoxies of the thirteenth century, the Franciscans and Dominicans above all, as they do with heretics such as the Waldensians.

The book opens with a preliminary historiographical survey intended to illustrate the issues and debates of present and past research on the Humiliati and clarify the starting point for this study. This is followed by a case-by-case examination of the twelfth-century evidence for the Humiliati, both before and after 1184. Those concerned with the general framework rather than specific local examples may wish to limit their reading of this chapter to the opening pages and the conclusions which explore the impact of the condemnation and the nature of relations between the new movement and prelates in these years.

Chapter 3 then focuses on the process of approval at the turn of the century, examining the careers of the individuals involved on both sides of the negotiations, so as to establish a context for the actions of Innocent III and assess the contribution of both the Humiliati themselves and the prelates of the north Italian Church. Chapter 4 outlines the norms established for the order in 1201 and then illustrates the development of observance in the following years by consideration of dispensations on oath-taking, fasting and diet.

The next three chapters (5, 6 and 7) examine the evidence from the first decades of the thirteenth century for the development of the *ordo Humiliatorum*, defined in organisational terms as a network of houses bound by observance of a common rule and centralised administration. Chapter 5 analyses the nature, size and geographical catchment areas of houses, the presence of women, evidence for institutional security, the structural framework and the roles of superiors, both male and female. A pre-condition for the existence of an order was a common sense of identity or participation in a community and, although it is often elusive of illustration, examination of ties between different houses and communities helps to throw some light on this area. Local, city-wide or regional links between houses are therefore examined in some detail.

Chapter 6 uses professions of faith to consider the development of the vows and ritual for entry into the First and Second orders of the Humiliati. These records provide a unique insight into variations in practice, the evolution of uniform, regular observance, and once more, the emergence of a common identity as an order. They also furnish invaluable information about methods of recruitment and the experience of individuals entering the communities.

Chapter 7 returns to the evidence of papal letters to trace uniform observance, papal visitation and the impact of changes introduced in 1246 on the development of an *ordo Humiliatorum*. In particular it explores the activities of the first Master General, Beltramus of Brescia, using the settlement of disputes as a guide to the exercise of authority in the order. Finally, chapter 8 is a first attempt to place the Humiliati of the First and Second orders into a wider pastoral and ecclesiastical context, analysing the development of their pastoral rights, and their involvement in the business of death as well as their relations with other ecclesiastics in the region, both secular and regular.

This book is not intended as a general history of the early Humiliati. Research is still continuing in too many areas to make that as yet a realistic project. It is first necessary to understand the Humiliati as a movement outside and then as an order within the Church. That is the aim of this book. Only once this has been established can the question

of their involvement in industry and communal government or their relations with the 'ordinary' people of northern Italy be appraised.

The geographical boundaries of this study are as far as possible those of the early Humiliati themselves in northern and later in central Italy. A conscious attempt has been made to use a variety of sources from across this area in order to complement rather than duplicate the spate of local studies being produced in northern Italy. Evidence for the area of Verona is, however, particularly prolific and has provided the opportunity for greater consideration of some aspects of practice (in particular professions of faith) than elsewhere. This also serves to counter a previous tendency to focus on Milan, certainly the Humiliati city *par excellence*, but not by any means the only one.

The chronological limitations of this study are dictated first by the surviving documents (the earliest date to the 1170s) and second by the nature of my approach. It is intended to explore the transition of a movement into an order. Consideration of a relatively long time span is therefore necessary; however, I have not generally gone beyond the 1270s. In those years a new and different epoch in the history of the Humiliati begins, marked by a protracted dispute with the bishops of Milan, Como and Brescia which led to the negotiation of a new status for the order, entirely free from episcopal intervention.

Heresy lies in the eye of the beholder. Whether the Humiliati should be seen as heretics or not was decided in two ways in this period: condemnation in 1184, reconciliation in 1201. In the 1990s, the Humiliati form a standard part of the undergraduate syllabus for the study of heresy, not religious orders. It is the intention of this book to make a plea for a reversal of that picture; to see the Humiliati as they saw themselves, fighting to defend the religious life in the bustle and tension of the north.

Chapter 1

TRADITION AND HISTORY

. . . una discreta fioritura di studi . . .

Volpe

POINTS OF DEPARTURE

Two weighty works are essential in the hand baggage of any student of the early Humiliati. The first, and still irreplaceable, is the three-volume *Vetera Humiliatorum Monumenta*, published in the 1760s by a young Jesuit scholar, Girolamo Tiraboschi (1731–94), better known to posterity as the author of a monumental history of Italian literature.[1] Tiraboschi taught rhetoric at the Brera Academy in Milan, which had acquired the site, name and archives of a prominent house of the Humiliati.[2] This gave him easy access to a mass of documentation, including the *Bullarium Humiliatorum*, a substantial collection of papal letters and privileges addressed to the order.[3] Many of these he published in the *Monumenta*, together with material unearthed in other archives in Milan and through correspondence with archivists and scholars all over northern Italy in a manner reminiscent of the working practices of the Bollandists and Maurists.[4] The resulting volumes include an extensive collection of documentation concerning the history of the order down to the sixteenth century, to which Tiraboschi added a careful critique in the form of seven lengthy dissertations.[5]

The second study, and one cast in a very different style, is a volume published in 1911 by Luigi Zanoni: *Gli umiliati nei loro rapporti con l'eresia, l'industria della lana ed i comuni nei secoli xii e xiii sulla scorta di*

[1] G. Tiraboschi, *Storia della letteratura italiana*, 11 vols. (Modena, 1772–95).
[2] A. Scotti, *Brera 1776–1815. Nascita e sviluppo di una istituzione culturale milanese* (Milan, 1979).
[3] Brera AD XVII.
[4] See, for example, his correspondence with canon Bartoli of Novara in Balosso, 'Gli Umiliati nel Novarese', 86–90.
[5] See below, p. 21.

documenti inediti.[6] Zanoni was a star student of the Milanese historian Gioacchino Volpe who later wrote a brief but revealing description of the work being undertaken by this group in the early decades of the twentieth century, relating it to the distinctive political and ecclesiastical climate of the times. The atmosphere, he wrote, had been dominated by christian socialism and opposition to the establishment, characteristics which evoked parallels with Valdes and Francis. He saw it as a time when many people lived between orthodoxy and heresy, with the threat of spiritual sanctions hanging over them. The controversy engendered had influenced the writing of history: 'There was at that time a notable flowering of studies dedicated to the religious or socio-ecclesiastical life, within which there were currents stirred by the tumultuous air beating from outside.'[7] Such studies were particularly being undertaken by young priests and Volpe praised, among others, the excellent work on the Humiliati by Luigi Zanoni, many of whose conclusions he shared.[8]

Zanoni was one of the scholars appointed to the Ambrosiana library in Milan, which holds in its archives manuscripts of the early chronicles of the order and seventeenth-century studies, as well as notarial documentation.[9] Like Tiraboschi, Zanoni thus had direct access to some of the sources for his work, but he too extended his research beyond the immediate confines of his own institution to other archives in Milan and elsewhere. In the extensive appendices to his volume he published documents which Tiraboschi either had not found or had not considered worthy of inclusion. These included transcripts of the rule of the First and Second orders, fifteenth-century chronicles of the order and extensive notarial material, illustrating in particular his interest in the communities of Tertiaries and Humiliati involvement in the wool trade and city administration.[10]

The approaches of Tiraboschi and Zanoni, separated by 145 years, were naturally very different, reflecting changes in historical writing and in the north Italian Church. Tiraboschi was a young Jesuit, writing in Latin and producing astute and systematic statements on the growth and extent of the Humiliati order in a work crowded with cautious detail, but also with telling insights. Zanoni was another young priest, but, perhaps prompted by the climate of opposition to the establishment

[6] Zanoni [The Humiliati and their relations with heresy, the wool industry and the communes in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, on the basis of unpublished documents]; L. Zanoni, 'Gli origini degli Umiliati', *Civiltà Cattolica*, 62 (1911), 433–43, 670–80, summarises his arguments concerning their origins.

[7] Volpe, *Movimenti religiosi*, pp. xiii–xiv.

[8] *Ibid*., and p. 55; below, p. 29.

[9] A. Paredi, 'Storia dell'Ambrosiana', *L'Ambrosiana* (Milan, 1967), part I.

[10] Zanoni, pp. 267–370.

bubbling around him, sought parallel themes in the lives of the people he studied. In the process he and another young contemporary, Antonino De Stefano, swept away some of the fabulous accretions to the history of the Humiliati which Tiraboschi's caution had made him reluctant to remove. These fables are nonetheless instructive, reflecting as they do the concerns of the Humiliati and those around them. They also furnish a context for the works of Tiraboschi and his successors and a background to the historiography of the Humiliati in the twentieth century from which the present study derives.

THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

The first surviving attempts at a retrospective account of the origins of the Humiliati are the early fourteenth-century writings of two Dominicans, a circumstance not without significance in view of the association between the two orders during the thirteenth century, though neither author devoted substantial space to the theme. The Bolognese Francesco Pipino (died after 1328) made little more than passing reference to the beginnings of the Humiliati in a general chronicle, while the Milanese Galvano Fiamma (1283–c. 1344) inserted short but differing passages concerning the Humiliati or the actions of Guy *de Porta Orientale*, an early figure linked with them, in three related works.[11] Of these accounts the earliest is probably that of Pipino, a writer deservedly better known for a translation of Marco Polo's account of his travels in the East. Pipino's chronicle covers the years 754–1314 and is highly derivative, employing a wide range of sources, but none is given for the brief entry on the Humiliati and there is no need to assume anything more than common knowledge, perhaps acquired through association with members of the order. He records that Innocent gave the Third order their rule in the last year of the reign of Henry VI (which he identifies as 1199, thereby misdating emperor and approval), but projects the history of the order further back, correctly asserting that they had assumed the habit long before this date and remarking that this was before the Friars Minor or Preacher had appeared.[12] There is nothing contentious here, but he goes on to describe the Tertiaries as the founders of the First and Second orders, a point which may have

[11] *Chronicon fratris Francisci Pipini*, ed. Muratori, cited Zanoni, pp. 11–12 and n. 1; Galvano Fiamma, *Chronicon extravagans et chronicon maius (ad an. 1216)*, pp. 506–773; *Manipulus florum*, col. 632. There is no full edition of Galvano's third history, the *Galvagnana*, Brera AE x 10, fo. 70v, but see now Alberzoni, 'San Bernardo e gli Umiliati', pp. 96–124, who includes the text of the relevant passage, p. 103 n. 22; on Pipino and Fiamma, see Kaeppeli, *Scriptores ordinis praedicatorum medii aevii*, I, pp. 392–5; II, pp. 6–10.

[12] *Chronicon fratris Francisci Pipini*, col. 633.

been of particular concern to the Tertiaries in the fourteenth century, as will become clear.

Fiamma, by contrast, was a prolific and much more imaginative writer, and in his discussion of the Humiliati he made some surprising claims.[13] In all three accounts he associated Guy *de Porta Orientale* with Bernard of Clairvaux in the foundation of the Cistercian house of Chiaravalle Milanese in 1135. In the earliest (the *Galvagnana*, written between 1329 and 1340), he then described the 'building' of the *convenio sancti Bernardi* of the Third order of the brethren in the Porta Orientale of Milan by this same Guy and its confirmation by Innocent III, from whose title its name derived.[14] These brethren subsequently founded the order of the Humiliati and carried out visitation of them.

In his second account, the *Manipulus florum*, Fiamma maintained that on his way back through Milan, Bernard himself organised the 'order of St Bernard', now known as the *fratres de Conegio* and whose first house had been built by Guy in the Porta Orientale (a community of Humiliati Tertiaries when Fiamma was writing). He claimed that Guy, who assisted Bernard on that occasion, also went to Rome to receive confirmation of this order from Innocent III and he repeated the association of the name with the pope's title and the role of the Tertiaries as founders and visitors of the First and Second orders. In this version he added that they were exempt from communal taxes in Milan, a detail which enhances the impression that Fiamma was particularly concerned with the fate of the Tertiaries.

As Tiraboschi and Zanoni were well aware, there are some serious problems with Fiamma's account. Acknowledging that the work included fables, Tiraboschi threw doubt on the double role of Guy, pointing out that had he assisted Bernard in 1135 he would have been rather too old to visit Innocent III in 1201.[15] However, he did not reject Fiamma's testimony entirely, arguing instead that 'he mixed truth with the falsehood'.[16] Zanoni was less cautious, dismissing Fiamma as a 'credulous compiler', as many later historians have done (J. K. Hyde described Fiamma as a 'nasty plagiarist').[17] The energy of this dismissal is attractive and it is obvious that Fiamma's history of the origins of the Tertiaries is not entirely trustworthy. However, nor is it simply

[13] See also Andrews, '*Principium et origo ordinis*: the Humiliati and their origins', pp. 149–61.

[14] *Galvagnana*, Brera AE X 10, fo. 70v: 'ab Innocentio tertio dictus est ordo tertius'. For the dates see V. Hunecke, 'Die kirchenpolitischen Exkurse in den Chroniken des Galvaneus Flamma OP (1283–ca. 1344)', *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*, 25 (1969), 111–208, 119–28; see also Alberzoni, 'San Bernardo e gli Umiliati', p. 116 n. 44.

[15] *VHM* I, p. 45.

[16] *VHM* II, p. 36. Also below, p. 22.

[17] Zanoni, pp. 11, 14; J. K. Hyde, 'Medieval descriptions of cities', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 48:2 (1966), 308–40, 336.

gratuitous fabrication. His explanation of the name Tertiary as a reflection of the numerical designation of the pope who approved their rule is undoubtedly fabulous. Yet it may also reflect a partisan purpose, since it would forestall any argument that the name depended on their being third in a descending succession, thereby defending the status of the Tertiaries against other Humiliati, particularly clerics, who might claim precedence or special privilege. The claim to early visitation rights over the First and Second orders points to a similar propaganda purpose, while mention of their tax-exempt status renews a theme running through papal correspondence from the time of Innocent III onwards.

The fabulous elements in Fiamma's writing should make us wary, but should not lead us to reject the whole account out of hand. As he perhaps intended, it makes sometimes entertaining reading and yet allows an insight into the preoccupations of the fourteenth-century Tertiaries. Tiraboschi's conclusion that Fiamma 'mixed truth with the falsehood' is almost certainly the right one. This point is perhaps confirmed by recent studies illustrating something of a cult of Bernard among the later Humiliati and the possibilities of a link at one remove between Bernard and Guy *de Porta Orientale*.

The evidence for each point is circumstantial. Bernard was by no means the only saint venerated by the later members of the order and indeed was not listed by a fifteenth-century Humiliati chronicler, John of Brera. Nor can a Bernardine tradition be traced back to the twelfth century. Yet there is sufficient evidence in the form of altar, house and church dedications and artistic patronage to argue that by the fourteenth century members of the order may have cherished particular devotion to Bernard[18] and may have found it easy to believe in an early association of their order with this great monastic leader. This may in turn be linked with notarial evidence showing that Guy *de Porta Orientale*, who was summoned by Innocent III in 1201, was the son of a man bearing the same name who had died in June 1174 and who would have been of the appropriate age to assist Bernard in 1135.[19] Whether or not this did indeed happen, the association with Bernard fits well with contemporary descriptions of the saint's encounter with penitents when he visited Milan, and his attempts to regulate groups of faithful lay people suspected of heresy by encouraging them to come together in fraternities.[20] Fiamma, or those from whom he got the tale, conflated

[18] Spinelli, 'La diffusione del culto di San Bernardo', pp. 193–215, pp. 203–4 and n. 29, p. 207 n. 36.
[19] Alberzoni, 'San Bernardo e gli Umiliati', p. 110 n. 27.
[20] Landulf of St Paul, 'Historia mediolanensis', pp. 46–7; *VHM* I, p. 37; Spinelli, 'La diffusione del culto di San Bernardo', pp. 114–15.